

[Worship](#)

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Worship

Every faith seeks communion with the Divine, and Hinduism enjoys one of the most elaborate and profound systems of worship to effect the remarkable encounter of man and God.

Visitors to temples in India, or to Hindu temples anywhere, are often overwhelmed by a devotional power not easily found in other parts of the world. For millennia, worship in the home and at the temple has been the spiritual heartbeat of the Hindu. On the next three pages, we explore home puja and temple rites, protocol and prayer, revealing how these, in concert, sustain the richly reverential culture of the Hindu religion.

Is Temple Worship Only for Beginners?

Temple worship is for all men and women at every level of spiritual development. Its meaning and experience deepen as we unfold spiritually through the stages of service, devotion, yoga and enlightened wisdom. Aum.

We never outgrow temple worship. It simply becomes more profound and meaningful as we progress through four spiritual levels. In the charya pada, the stage of selfless service, we attend the temple because we have to, because it is expected of us. In the kriya pada, the stage of worshipful sadhanas, we attend because we want to; our love of God is the motivation. In the yoga pada, we worship God internally, in the sanctum of the heart; yet even the yogi immersed in the superconscious depths of mind has not outgrown the temple. It is there-God's home on the earth plane-when the yogi returns to normal consciousness. So perfect is the temple worship of those who have traversed the jnana pada that they themselves become worship's object-living, moving temples. Yea, temple worship is never outgrown. The Vedas give praise, "Homage to Him who presides over all things, that which was and that which shall be; to whom alone belongs the heaven,

to that all-powerful Brahman be homage! From Fullness He pours forth the full; the full spreads, merging with the full. We eagerly would know from whence He thus replenishes Himself." Aum.

How Do Devotees Prepare for Worship?

We visit a Siva temple after bathing, dressing in clean clothes and preparing an offering, which can be as simple as a few flowers or fruits. We bring the mind to the holy feet of the Deity even as preparations begin. Aum.

Visiting the home of God Siva or of a God, the temple, is not without its trepidation, protocol and proper conduct, preceded by preparation that we administrate ourselves. Our worship is only as meaningful and effective as we make it. Before we attend or conduct a puja, we should carefully bathe the body, rinse the mouth and dress in fresh clothing-sarls for women and dhotis or veshtis and shawls for men where this is the custom. Throughout these preparations we may sing hymns or chant mantras or God's holy names silently or aloud, taking care to keep the mind free from worldly matters. We then gather offerings for the Deity. If mealtime is near, we eat only after puja has been concluded. Although the outer details of our worship are important, it is our inner feelings and thoughts, our love and devotion, which are the truest offering we can make. The Vedas testify, "The Gods, led by the spirit, honor faith in their worship. Faith is composed of the heart's intention. Light comes through faith. Through faith men come to prayer, faith in the morning, faith at noon and at the setting of the sun. O faith, give us faith!" Aum.

How Do Our Prayers Reach the Gods?

Through temple worship, the three worlds become open to one another, and the beings within them are able to communicate. By means of the mystical arts of puja, the worlds act in concert, and prayers are received. Aum.

The three worlds are connected when puja is performed and worship is begun. There are certain rites that can be performed to enable individuals to communicate directly with beings in the inner worlds. Prayers are given and received in many

ways. Among the most intimate, personal forms of communication is the written prayer to the devas or to God. Burned in Agni's sacred fire, it disintegrates in the physical world and quickly re-forms in the astral world. When a prayer is burned in a temple wherein this practice is consecrated, its astral image is received and read by the devas, and properly dispatched and answered, within the confines of our karmic pattern. Prayers may also be conveyed by slowly, mentally enunciating the words, visualizing them rising up the spine, through the top of the head, reaching beyond to the feet of God. The devas will not intervene unless asked. This is the inner law. The Vedas avow, "He shines forth at dawn like the sunlight, deploying the sacrifice in the manner of priests unfolding their prayerful thoughts. Agni, the God who knows well all the generations, visits the Gods as a messenger, most efficacious." Aum.

Do Hindus Worship Only in Temples?

One can worship God anywhere and be in contact with the inner worlds-in the temple, in the home shrine and in the yogi's contemplation. However, in the holy temple the three worlds most perfectly commune. Aum.

In the shrine room gather messengers of the Mahadeva being worshiped to hear the prayers of the devotee and carry them to their Master. The Gods can be worshiped anywhere when the proper sankalpa, preparation, has been performed. God's presence is everywhere, through everything, in everything, for Siva is the creator of all things, the manifester of time, form and the space between forms. Siva is worshiped in the mind, in the heart, through the throat, in the head of the yogi locked in yoga. So great is the power of worship, communion and communication with the centillion devas, that when a little bell is rung, a flame appears in the lamp, the vermilion spot is placed, the flower appears and is offered, God Siva and the Gods are invoked. Contemplating the aftermath of puja or abhisheka, we feel the sannidhya or divine presence of Parashakti, tender motherly love, permeating to the outer walls around the temple. The Vedas proclaim, "Assemble all, with prayer to the Lord of Heaven, He is the One, the all-pervading, the guest of men. He, the ancient of days, abides in the present. Him, the One, the many follow on their path." Aum.

What Is the Home Shrine's Significance?

Every Hindu maintains a home shrine. It is the most beautiful room in the house, an extension of the temple, the abode for Deities and devas, and a holy refuge for daily worship and meditation. Aum.

Every Hindu home centers around the home shrine, a special room set aside and maintained to create a temple-like atmosphere in which we conduct puja, read scripture, perform sadhana, meditate, sing bhajana and do japa. Here the presence of the Gods is always felt, and we remember them especially morning and evening and before meals, which we offer to them before we partake. Worship traditionally begins before dawn, with the simple act of dedication for the coming day. After a bath, morning puja is performed which includes the repetition of the Gayatri or other mantras and is followed by sadhanas given by one's guru. The form of home worship, atmartha puja, is simple: the Deities are invoked and offerings are made. After the final arati, or offering of the light, we supplicate them to bestow their grace on us, our family and all devotees. Evening devotionals include a simple arati, bhajana, meditation and reading of scripture, which carries one to lofty celestial realms during sleep. The Agamas affirm, "Worship of one's chosen Linga by anyone in their own home for divine protection is called atmartha puja." Aum.