

[Siva Temples](#)

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Siva Temples

In the mightiest of monuments or the simplest of sheds, our Lord has been worshiped with love and devotion for thousands of years.

Three holy pillars sustain the Sanatana Dharma-temples, gurus and scriptures. In the temple we honor God and the Gods through devotion, austerity, art and culture. Below we explore knowledge of the Siva temple which applies to all sects and traditions. Inside we define and elaborate the "Three Worlds" of Gods, devas and men.

What Is the Nature of the Siva Temple?

The Siva temple is the abode of God Siva and Gods and the precinct in which the three worlds consciously commune. It is specially sanctified, possessing a ray of spiritual energy connecting it to the celestial worlds. Aum.

The three pillars of Saivism are the temples, the scriptures and the satgurus. These we revere, for they sustain and preserve the ancient wisdom. Siva temples, whether they be small village sanctuaries or towering citadels, are esteemed as God's home and consecrated abode. In the Siva temple we draw close to God Siva and find a refuge from the world. His grace, permeating everywhere, is most easily known within the precincts of the Siva temple. It is in the purified milieu of the temple that the three worlds commune most perfectly, that devotees can establish harmony with inner-plane spiritual beings. When the spiritual energy, shakti, invoked by the puja permeates the sanctum sanctorum and floods out to the world, Saivites know they are in a most holy place where God and the Gods commune with them. Within most Siva temples are private rooms, sanctums, for Lord Ganesha and Lord Karttikeya, and shrines for the many Gods and saints. The Vedas explain, "Even as the radiance of the sun enlightens all regions, above, below, and slantwise, so that only God, glorious and worthy of worship, rules over all His

creation." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Are Temples Founded and Built?

Siva temples are founded by God Himself, often designated in a vision or dream of a devout Saivite, then erected by temple craftsmen usually following agamic law. In such a holy place, holiness itself can reside. Aum.

Because of its holiness, a Siva temple is most often and properly established by God Siva through His devotees and not founded by men. Once the site is known, hereditary temple architects, known as sthapatis, are commissioned to design and construct the temple. By tradition, every stone is set in place according to the sacred architecture found in the agamic scriptures. When properly consecrated, the temple becomes a place upon the earth in which the three worlds can communicate for the upliftment of mankind and the fulfillment of Siva's dharmic law. Siva has deliberately established many temples to communicate His love to His children throughout the world, who live in every country of the world and long for their Lord's ever-present love. They build temples in His name and install His image, chant His praises and thus invoke His presence. Lord Siva accepts all these temples as His own and sends a divine ray to vivify and vitalize them. Siva's Vedas announce, "Brahman is the priest, Brahman the sacrifice; by Brahman the posts are erected. From Brahman the officiating priest was born; in Brahman is concealed the oblation." Aum Namah Sivaya.

When Should One Attend the Temple?

We attend the temple to commune with God Siva, Karttikeya or Ganesha at least once each week and additionally on auspicious days of the month, yearly festival days and on the holiest day of the year, Mahashivaratri. Aum.

Saivites consider it most important to live near a Siva temple, and we build one wherever we find ourselves in the world. This is a most meritorious act, earning blessings in this life and the next. Religious life centers around the temple. It is here in God's home that we nurture our relationship with the Divine. Not wanting to stay

away too long, we visit the temple weekly, though women never go during their monthly period. We strive to attend each major festival, when the shakti of the Deity is most powerful, and pilgrimage to a far-off temple annually. Devout Siva bhaktas attend daily puja in the temple. All Saivites visit the temple on Siva's most sacred day of the year, Mahashivaratri. Saivite temples are the most ancient of all. Being the homes of the Gods and God, they are approached with great reverence and humility. Draw near the temple as you would approach a king, a governor, a president of a great realm, anticipating with a little trepidation your audience with him. The Vedas say, "May the Lord find pleasure in our song of praise! Priest among men, may he offer due homage to the heavenly beings! Great, O Lord, is your renown." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Does One Attend a Siva Temple?

Approaching with deep reverence, we begin our worship with Ganesha, circumambulate the temple and proceed to the main sanctum for puja. After receiving the sacraments, we sit quietly before taking our leave. Aum.

With offerings in hand, leaving our shoes outside, we enter through the gopura, or temple tower, wash hands, feet and mouth, and seek blessings at Lord Ganesha's shrine. Next we follow the outer prakara, or hallway, clockwise around the mahamandapa, central chambers. Inside we leave our worldly thoughts at the balipitha, or offering place, then prostrate before the dhvajastambha, temple flagpole, and worship Nandi, the sacred bull. Next we circumambulate the central sanctum, garbhagriha, usually three times, returning to its entrance for worship. During puja, we stand with hands folded or in anjali mudra, though according to temple custom, it may be proper to sit quietly or sing devotional hymns. After the arati, or waving of the camphor light before the Deity, we prostrate (ashtanga pranama for men, and panchanga pranama for women) and rise to receive the prasada, accepting them in the right hand. We walk around the garbhagriha one final time before taking our leave. The Vedas affirm, "If a man first takes firm hold on faith and then offers his sacrifice, then in that man's sacrifice both Gods and men place confidence." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Occurs Within the Siva Temple?

Activities within a Siva temple vary from the daily round of pujas to the elaborate celebrations on annual festival days. Even amid large crowds, our worship is personal and individual, not congregational. Aum Namah Sivaya.

Besides the daily round of pujas, many other events take place within the temple: pilgrims offering vows, priests chanting the Vedas, processions, elephants giving blessings, garlands being woven, weddings or philosophical discourses in pillared halls, devotional singing, feedings for the impoverished, dance and cultural performances, ritual bath in the stone tank, meditation, religious instruction, and many festival-related events. Generally, there are seven times when pujas are held: at five, six and nine in the morning, at noon, and at six, eight and ten in the evening. The outer worship is approaching God properly, presenting ourselves acceptably. It is to offer our love, our adoration and then to speak out our prayer, our petition. The inner worship is to enjoy God's presence and not rush away, to stay, to sit, to meditate awhile and bask in the shakti, endeavoring to realize the Self within. The Vedas say, " `Come, come!' these radiant offerings invite the worshipper, conveying him thither on the rays of the sun, addressing him pleasantly with words of praise, `This world of Brahman is yours in its purity, gained by your own good works.' " Aum Namah Sivaya.