Puja: With Honor, Offer Everything
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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Puja: With Honor, Offer Everything

worship rites awaken

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Honoring is a sign of divine love. That honoring is called puja. The ceremony of puja imitates what nature is already doing for you. The Divine worships you in so many forms. In puja, you offer everything back to the Divine.

Flowers are offered in puja. The flower is a symbol of love. The Divine has come to you in love through so many forms: mother, father, wife, husband, children, friends. The same love comes to you in the form of the Master to elevate you to the level of divine love, which is also your own nature. Recognizing this flowering of love from all sides of life, we offer flowers.

Fruits are offered, because the Divine offers you fruits in due season. You offer grain, because nature provides you food. A candle light and a cool camphor light are offered; in the same way nature continually revolves the sun and moon around you. Incense is offered for fragrance. All the five senses are used in puja, and it is performed with deep feeling. Through puja, we

say to God, "Oh, whatever you give to me, I give back to you." Puja is honor and gratefulness.

Have you seen children? They have small little pots and dishes. They sometimes pretend that they make toast or tea. They come to the mom and say, "Now, please have some tea." They serve you. There will be nothing in the cup; it is all in their imagination. They play with you. Whatever you do to them, they also do. They put the doll to sleep. They feed it and bathe it. In the same way, puja is an expression of what the Divine is doing for you. Puja is a mixture of imitation, honor, playfulness and love. It is all these things together, made into a soup.

When you are in deep love, you naturally want to offer something. Somebody from California sent a big parcel to me. It was filled with candies and candles. Now, the person who sent it knows that candies and candles can be got here, too. And the cost of the airmail is much more than the candles and candies. But in love, you want to offer something anyway.

Usually when you love something, you want to possess it. And in the process of possessing, you make the beautiful thing ugly. Puja is contrary to that. Puja means honor and worship, offering one's self. You appreciate, you adore, you recognize beauty. Worship is just the opposite of wanting to possess. Usually our relationships do not flower to this extent. Instead we start demanding. Husband and wife, master and servant, there is a demand. "I have done so much for you. Now you must do this thing for me." Demanding is contrary to honoring. The way to preserve a relationship is to honor.

Honor the creation. Look at a tree with honor. Feel grateful for its being here. It purifies the poison that we breathe out. It makes the air fresh. Have you ever thought, "These trees are mine. The sun, the moon, the air, the water--everything belongs to me. All these stars are mine. The people are mine."? When you honor the creation, you will feel this.

Honor your own body. Remember that when you eat, you are offering food to the Divine that resides inside this body. When people are agitated, they eat more. Take your food, not in a hurry, not with violence, but with a sense of offering. This also is puja.

Have you ever looked at your breath with honor? Have you ever thought, "This breath is so beautiful, moving in and out; without it, my body would be thrown away." With honor, look into your breath. With this depth of worship, all your feverishness will be transformed into love.

Honoring leads to devotion. Surrender happens. Surrender to the Divine brings total rest from all anxieties, from all wantings. Life has burned down with so many various wants. In every direction, life is found to be weary. Devotion brings that total rest--a healing touch to the life which has been moving in so many directions.

The mind always looks for charms, miracles, events, excitements. Yet once it goes there, the charm ceases to exist. The charm of the mind is a continuous mirage; it is always farther, it is always somewhere else. When the flame of

devotion is lit, the craving mind melts away like wax. As the mind melts, the flame of devotion becomes more alive and intense.

Charm is always an outside influence. Devotion is an inner flowering. Devotion starts from where you are, whereas a charm is something that pulls you away from your Self. The charm never lasts for long. Unless you are lit in devotion to the Divine, your life will remain restless. In devotion, in that process of burning, longing will arise in you. With love, there is bound to be longing. If there is longing, know that there is also love. They are two sides of the same coin; they cannot be separated. Usually when longing arises, we are in a hurry to finish it off. But this longing is fortunate and very beautiful. It will transform your mind so totally.

Devotion is your nature. When you rest in your own nature, there is no conflict. But usually we feel a conflict. We feel bad about a negative quality we have or something that we did. A Master is one who lifts these burdens from you that you yourself cannot carry--and kindles in you devotional love. Offer everything to the Master: your anger, your frustration, all your bad feelings and good feelings. Your negativity pulls you down. Your positive qualities bring pride and arrogance in you. Your whole life becomes a big weight. When you offer it all, you become free. You become light like a flower. You can again smile and rejoice in the moment. What remains in you is pure love.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, 41, founded the WorldWide Art of Living Foundation, Healing Breath Workshops, and Sahaj Samadhi

meditation programs. He shows people how to regain their smile.