Dressing With Respect For God and Temple
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Dressing With Respect For God and Temple

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It is disturbing to see how our Hindu devotees sometimes dress to go into a temple. The temples are usually very lax where dress codes are concerned. In the summer months, men devotees will go into the temple with their shorts. Sometimes female devotees will enter the sanctum of the temple with shorts or jeans. In the winter months, the women generally dress well, but it is not unusual to see some in jogging suits, which I think is a little bit informal to come for darshan. It is my thought that when a lady or gentleman comes to the temple the or she should be dressed formally in the sight of God. The dress doesn't have to be rich clothing; a simple kurta, pajama or clean trousers will do. But when someone comes in a sweatsuit which hasn't been washed...None of these devotees would ever go to a formal ceremony in a church, mosque or synagogue dressed in this manner. And people of other religions who come to our temple are very careful as to how they dress.

We began a dress code one year ago at our Vishnu Temple in Toronto, Canada. Some people were annoyed and said, "It is a house of God. Does it matter how you present yourself to God?" My answer was, "No, it doesn't matter. But if we don't start with some sort of dress code, how far will people take it? One day people might walk in bathing suits." The decision to start the code was made by officers in the temple, with a general consensus among the members. In the next election those officers could be thrown out and the dress code changed.

A few people were upset-less than 20 people during the year. Two or three quit coming to the temple and stopped supporting it because they were turned away for wearing shorts. The core members were quite happy about it, but then they weren't coming in shorts and jeans. The code is informal. We say, "Please do not wear shorts or jeans," but we don't say, "You must wear this." Among the men, quite a few wear kurta shirts, the rest long or short sleeve western shirts. Women

devotees wear saris or salwar kameez (punjabi outfit), a few from the West wear dresses. Girls wear salwar, saris or dresses. Younger boys wear kurta with trousers or pajamas.

During temple worship one is taken aback by informal types of attires. It distracts people when some come improperly dressed. Now that all are properly dressed, there is a more harmonious environment and more homogeneous atmosphere in temple. After all, our Lord resides in the temple. If we can't dress properly to go and meet with Him, for whom should we dress properly? Many people treat our temple like a tourist attraction. We encourage people to come, but we want people to respect the sanctity of the place.

We discourage male or female devotees from entering the Vishnu temple with shorts. Our temple has a big lobby entrance. The mandapam doors are closed, so if we don't think you are properly dressed, you can't go in. We try to accommodate people from out of town, but for those from nearby who are aware of our dress code, we have them go home, change and come back. We now use a method where we will provide dhotis for men to put around their waist so they can be properly dressed when going to worship. For ladies, we will provide suitable clothing for them.

People who don't dress well aren't less religious. That is very haughty to say. I don't consider that a devotee who comes to the temple not properly dressed is a worse devotee than one who comes properly dressed. But we feel that if we don't put a limit on how far the dress can go, then people might go further than just shorts.

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