

Temple Worship - Part I

by H.H. Jagadguru Śrī Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Sankaracharya Swamigal of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam

God exists everywhere. So, a question may be asked why there should be any temples built for Him. We know that God exists everywhere, but still the idea does not get firmly established in our mind. It does not get reflected in our daily actions. If one remembers God all the time, how can one utter any falsehood or commit evil acts?



If God is merely omnipresent, how can He help us? We all long for His grace somehow. So, we have to worship Him and get His grace. But the agamas shastras tell us how this should be done. The sun's rays contain a lot of heat energy. If we keep a piece of cloth in the sun, it does not catch fire by itself. But if we place a lens and focus the sun's heat rays on that piece of cloth, after some time, we find that the cloth catches fire.

Similarly, electrical energy is everywhere, but in order to bring it to our daily use, we need to have generators to channel that energy and transmission systems to distribute it at the places where we need it. In the same way, in order to get the grace of the Omnipresent Lord, we have to build temples, where we can focus the power of the Lord in a consecrated idol for our benefit in an easy way.

So, in our country, we find that there are many temples; of course, in other countries also, there are many places of worship, but there is no question of installation of any idols, as in the case of our temples. They have just a big prayer hall where people assemble and offer some prayers or do some silent meditation and then disperse after getting some peace of mind. But in our temples, the idols are installed and they have divinity infused into them and, as such, they have a certain sanctity about them.

Until a particular day, the sculptor goes on chiseling that piece of stone, but after a certain day, it becomes invested with divinity, and we start performing abhisheka, archana, deepaharati etc. for that deity; it acquires divine power and it



obtains chaitanya. We see divinity in our idols and, therefore, we do abhisheka, alankara or decoration, naivedyam, haarati and many other upacharas.

Some people say that the places of worship, which belong to other religions, are quiet, but our Hindu temples are full of noise. Of course, this is true. Actually, there are two types of noises in our temples. One is the desirable type of noise such as ringing of bells, the sounding of musical instruments like nadaswaram and the shahnai; the recitation of namavalli archana, recitation of mantras and so on.

Of course, there is also the undesirable type of noise in the form of people indulging in idle gossip and purposeless talk. It is our duty to see that this idle talk, which results in undesirable noise, is totally eliminated from our temples. In other places of worship, this type of fanfare that we have in our temples, is not there, because they do not recognize idol worship or worship of God in the saguna form and they believe in worship of God in his attributeless and shapeless form only.

In our temple, a huge temple bell is rung at the time of puja. This is done so that the evil spirits may go away from temple premises, and all abuses or other bad sounds may be stifled from being heard. In our houses, we do not have such a huge bell, but we ring only a small bell at the time of puja. But we do not offer musical instruments and other upacharas to the deity, but only akshata or unbroken rice.



The puja that we do in our houses is for our own welfare. We do it according to our convenience and, according to our mental frame of mind. But the puja done in the temples is for the whole of society and therefore, there is so much of fanfare, and sounding of musical instruments and singing of auspicious tunes; the deity is taken out in a procession during festival days and there is display of fireworks.

The reason for quietness and silence in the temples of other religions is this. In other religions, they just have a big prayer hall. People assemble at appointed times, and they offer prayers. They sing some hymns, mentally or in chorus. After that, everything is over, and people disperse. They just close their eyes for a few minutes, pray for some time, get some peace of mind and then disperse. There is no such thing as abhisheka of the idol, alankara or decoration of the idol, karpuraharati, dhupa, deepaharati, naivedyam, distribution of prasadam, etc. in other temples. There are various upacharas, which are also offerings to the deity.

There is also scope for singing of prayers, hymns, silent meditation and so on.

We consider God as Rajadiraja or the king of all kings and so we offer him many upacharas such as umbrella, chamara, musical instruments, vahana and so on, which are all due to a king. The divine presence in our idols, when we worship them, helps us to banish poverty as well as evil. Thus, the idol with divinity which we see in our temples is an object of beauty for us, and worthy of meditation.



If our thoughts are of a high order, then we worship the deity in the above manner, so that we may get supreme happiness. It is with this idea that we perform abhisheka and decorate the idol with ornaments etc. Thus we worship God in these various ways by doing so many upacharas. This kind of worship is possible only in the Hindu religion.

Idol worship is very important in our religion, for the ordinary people. When we bow before an idol or pray before the deity consecrated in the idol, we never think that it is only a piece of stone, but we think that the deity in the idol is the protector and the root cause of the whole world. Thus, temples help to increase the devotion of a person to God and this devotion helps him to overcome or reduce his sufferings.

Ordinary people may not have the capacity, and strength of mind to bear their sufferings. But with bhakti or devotion to Ishwara, they can face them, and get also the mental strength to bear them. It is for this purpose that an ordinary person goes to the temple. He goes there, offers some prayers and then he feels all right. If one person talks about his sufferings to another, the other man will listen to him for some time, but after some time he will start narrating his own sufferings and say that he is having more sufferings than other individuals. So, sharing one's sufferings with another person, who is also suffering, will not result in the removal of the sufferings.



- Part II in December Edition

Temple Worship - Part II

by H.H. Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Sankaracharya Swamigal of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam

Therefore, we go to temple and pray to Him, and we pour out before Him our tale of woe and sufferings. If we go and narrate our sufferings to another man for a long time he will start abusing us after some time, and he may even slap us if we persist with the narration of our tale of woe and suffering. But when we go to a temple, we can tell God whatever we like, Have you not ears to listen to my prayers? Have you no eyes to see my



suffering? And we may ask Him why He is not giving His grace immediately to us. After this prayer, when we come out, we shall have some peace of mind. The more we address God, the more is the peace that we get in our mind.

Saguna worship has got this capacity to give peace of mind because there is chaitanya in the idol installed in the temple and after pouring out our suffering before God in the temple, we get some peace of mind. That is why we have the habit of going to the temples.

Of course, some people do not go to a temple at all, but they go to a river or a lonely place and weep there for some time and they then come back with peace of mind. People get peace of mind wherever there is no reaction to what they say. So, a suffering man goes only to those places where there is no reaction to what he says.

When one prays to Ishwara, one gets mental peace, because Ishwara does not talk at all. If Ishwara starts replying, then we shall start talking something more, After all, Ishwara knows everything and He will give us whatever we want. Of course, this does not mean that God will give us exactly what we ask for. He will give us only that much which will give us peace of mind, though He has the capacity to give everything that we want.

God knows everything that we want to tell Him. Yet why is it that we go and narrate our sufferings before Him? It is just to get peace of mind by emptying our mind before Him. As Nilakanta Dikshita says:

"What is it that you do not know? You know everything. And yet I feel like speaking out things before you, because my mind is restless; it is only when I empty the contents of my mind that I can secure peace. That is why I am narrating all this before you."

There is another thing that we notice in the case of our temples, as compared with the places of

worship or prayer halls of other religions. In other religions, the prayer hall is built according to the size of the audience. After they collect the statistics of the audience, they build the prayer hall to accommodate the audience, and all the people can assemble in that prayer hall, at appointed hours.

But in our temples, we have to go one by one near the sanctum sanctorum. Whatever be the size of the crowd, each one has to go in a disciplined manner and offer worship. Our temples have all been built with some sanctity. In fact, each temple has got a history behind it. Our temples are places where there are idols with shakti or power and divinity.

The puja that we do in our houses is for the welfare of ourselves and our families. But the puja done in the temples is for the welfare of the whole society, and therefore there is no scope for the puja being done in the temple according to one's personal likes. There is thus no scope for importing our individual methods of worship in the temples.



The deity in the temple has to be installed and worshipped according to the religious texts on the basis of which the idol has been installed. Further, the puja has to be done by the priests appointed for the purpose. These rules hold good right from the village deities to the big deities like Vinayaka, Subrahmanya, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Since a temple is a place of divine presence, we do many things as our expression of devotion to God. We have abhisheka on a grand scale, decorate the idol with ornaments and so on. We also have paintings and sculptures in temple mandapams to enhance the beauty of the place. We also take out processions during festivals, and have fireworks etc.

These temples are the great heritage of our country. Our country being a poor country, the needs of our people were very small, and therefore, they had built great structures like temples and temple gopurams to help people in their spiritual development.

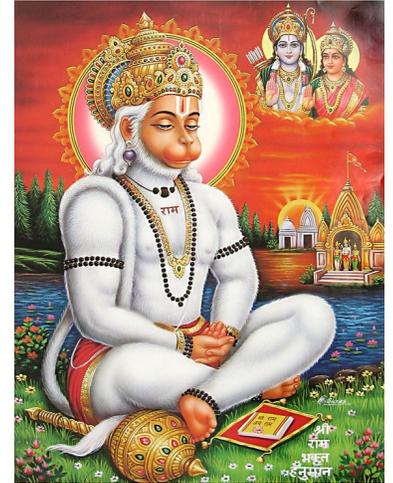


But nowadays, things have taken a different shape. Instead, we have social service institutions, schools, and hospitals. But the benefits are not being realized to the fullest extent. On the other hand,

these have led to corruption. At least the tribal people have been unaffected by all this and they are still preserving their good traits and habits. Instead of solving the main problem, the banks etc., have only increased our wants; when a bank goes into liquidation, we know what an amount of poverty it causes, among the depositors. By increasing our wants, we get into trouble. Happiness can be had only by leading a simple life. Our temples were the centres for social welfare in the olden days. At the time of festivals, food used to be distributed at concessional rates to the needy people.



Mass feeding of people was also done on those occasions. Of course, the State is doing certain things to the people through their social welfare agencies. In fact, the tax that we are paying to Government is just a token of our acknowledgement of the service done to the people by the State. But it is a fact that in spite of the existence of banks, hospitals and social welfare agencies, their objectives are not being fulfilled to the extent required.

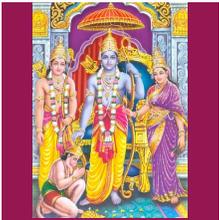


The best medicine for removing human misery and suffering and sorrow is to have unshakable faith in the grace of God. Bhakti alone is capable of giving that strength of mind which is needed to overcome and reduce our sufferings. Temples are just the agencies to nurture and develop this bhakti towards God. This is why temples have to be constructed at every place.

- Part III in January Edition

In Memory of
Dr. Surendra Nath Dwivedi
1945-2014

Sita Ram



Ganesh



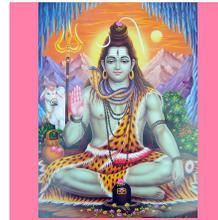
Krishna



Durga



Shiva



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Temple Worship - Part III

by H.H. Jagadguru Śrī Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Sankaracharya Swamigal of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam

In the olden days, they used to build the temple first and then the township grew around them. But nowadays, we build the township first and then only start thinking of constructing the temple. The offering of naivedyam to God and the offering of money into the hundis kept at the temples are all but a token of our gratitude to God for what he has done to us.

We cannot create even a blade of grass. Therefore, if we offer anything to God, it is just for our own peace of mind and satisfaction. It is God who has given everything to us. So, if we eat food without offering it to Him, it is the greatest sign of ingratitude. We have to offer the best to God and then take it. All may not be able to do puja and other things in their houses and offer all upacharas to God. Therefore, temples have been constructed for this purpose.

Some people have a doubt whether they should go to temples daily, or not. Of course, it is absolutely necessary to do so. In the olden days, people never used to have their food in their houses unless they heard the temple bell ringing at the time of the morning, noon, evening and night pujas to the Lord.

It is up to us therefore to nurture the divinity in the temples by ensuring that the pujas are performed properly and that the temple rituals are observed with diligence. We should see that the temple premises are kept clean and the deepa is lit every day. We should also see that the cloth that we offer to Lord is washed daily. If only we could ensure these things, automatically we shall be able to derive as much benefit, if not more, than what we get by the establishment of hospitals and other social welfare institutions.

Since a temple is a place of divinity, of course we have to observe certain rules while we are in the precincts of the temple. For instance, we should not use anything meant for God for ourselves.

We should not go to the temple in a purposeless manner. One should not pass urine or spit or excrete fecal matter within the temple premises and within the vicinity of the temples. Nor should one blow his nose or sneeze or chew pan in the temple, or eat fruits or food, or sleep or sit with stretched legs, or comb the hair or tie the hair after combing, wear cloth over the head and over the shoulders, tread over nirmalya or tread over the shadows of the flag staff, idols etc, nor should one touch the idols or those who do puja to the idols. No one should gossip, laugh loudly, or play games or go between the idol and the bali peetha.

As for pradakshina or going round the temple, one should not stop with just one or two rounds only but should go round at least thrice. One should not have darshan of the Lord at odd hours or at the time of abhisheka or naivedyam. One should not enter into the temple and worship when the deity is not in the straight position. One should not enter a temple by a passage other than the main gate.

One should not go empty-handed to a temple merely for seeing the karpura-harati. One should offer what one has brought to the priest, have darshan and return without showing his back to the Lord. With folded hands, and reciting stotras, one should perform pradakshinas ranging between 3 and 21 times, preferably in odd numbers. As for namaskarams, one should do it an odd number of times for Ishwara, ranging from 3 to 21, and for Devi four times. After namaskara, one should do pradakshina and then return home.

All these rules have been prescribed only for our welfare and to preserve the sanctity of the temples. It is up to us all to observe these rules, protect and nurture the sanctity of our temples, which have been the greatest heritage.

Jan 15 & Feb 15 Dates

Based on Lafayette, Louisiana, US Time

14 Wednesday	Pongal, Makar Sankranti
16 Friday	Shattila Ekadashi
20 Tuesday	Mauni Amavas
24 Saturday	Vasant Panchami
26 Monday	Ratha Saptami, Bhishma Ashtami
30 Friday	Jaya Ekadashi
03 Tuesday	Magha Purina
12 Thursday	Kumbha Sankranti
14 Saturday	Vijaya Ekadashi
15 Sunday	Vijaya Ekadashi

For more details please refer DrikPanchang.com

Makar Sankranti/Pongal Celebrations

January 17, 2015

Time: 10.30 am to 1.30 pm

Location: 110, Hapsburg Lane, Lafayette

Event Schedule:

Gayatri Havan, Sankranti Pooja

Mahaprasad, Kite Festival

Pooja Sponsor - \$101 per Family

Please RSVP to Srinivasan Ambatipati

@ 518-867-6645 or

email to shskendra@gmail.com