

The Meaning of Puja Instruments

excerpted from The Philosophy and Significance of Idol Worship
by Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj

Bells are rung in temples and while performing a puja to shut out the external sounds, to make the mind inward and concentrated, and to drive away evil spirits while at the same time attracting good ones.

Dhoopam or scented sticks are burnt before the Deity. The smoke spreads in the whole room. It acts as a disinfectant. Burning of dhoop denotes that the Lord is all-pervading, that He fills the whole universe by His living presence.

Lights are waved before the Deity. This denotes that the Lord is Jyothi Swarupa (of the form of Light). He is all-light. The devotees say, “O Lord! Thou art the light in the sun, moon and fire. Remove the darkness in me by bestowing your Divine Light. May my intellect be illumined.” This is the significance of waving lights.

Burning of camphor denotes that the individual ego melts like the camphor and the Jivaatman (individual soul) becomes one with the supreme Light of lights.

The pasting of sandal reminds the devotee that seek, in his difficulties, to be as patient as the sandal. Sandal emanates a sweet odor when it is pasted. So also, the devotee refrains from murmuring when difficulties arise, but on the other hand, remain cheerful and happy, emanating sweetness and gentleness like the sandal. He does not hate even his enemy, nor wish evil upon them. This is another precept we learn from this. Though the sandalwood is crushed and pasted, it silently wears out, emanating only a very sweet odor. One should not wish evil even to his enemy.