

The Meaning of *Puja*

By Sri Swami Satchidananda

Puja is a Sanskrit word meaning, “worship service.” *Puja* is offering your devotion, showing your love to God in a form— either through an image, or a light, or whatever you choose.

It’s almost like you receive a very dear friend at your home. You have wanted them to come to your home for a long time. All of a sudden one day you get the news, “Hey, I’m coming on such and such day.” What would you do? Immediately you go clean up the house, buy flowers, decorate, have a special seat and some nice treats for your friend.

It’s nothing other than this. You feel that the Divine is coming to your home. You make a nice altar, invite God to come and sit there. You offer everything—all that you like— a nice bath, some nice dress and decorations, offer drink and food. And then when God is enjoying all your hospitality you can, if you like, make some request or petition.

However, if you feel, *God, I’m not interested in begging you. You created me. You know what to do with me. That’s your business. If you give, if you don’t give, doesn’t matter.* Sometimes you may just want to be thankful: *Thank you for all the nice things that you have done.* Then, you can make it a thanksgiving service. This is the *bhakti*, or devotional, approach for *puja*. But you may also take this ceremony as a kind of meditation. You must focus the mind so that each step is carefully done, with full attention, full concentration. In this way the mind gets well focused.

There are also esoteric mystical meanings for the objects used in *puja*—such as for the five elements—earth, water, air, fire, ether—represented by food, water, incense, ghee lamp and camphor. The camphor also represents burning up of the ego leaving no trace behind. This is the highest level of *puja*. It is offering yourself, your ego to the Divine.”

OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti

Puja Participation and Etiquette

By Swami Murugananda

All are welcome to participate in the *puja*. First, come with the proper attitude. When you enter the temple or *puja* room, come with love and respect. In this way you will receive the greatest benefit.

You may actively participate by repeating the prayers and the sacred mantra that are chanted. The mantra is the central power or vibration of the *puja*.

At the end of the *puja* you will be invited to make an offering of flower petals. When you come up the procedure is as follows: take the petals with your right hand, bow your head and offer the flowers with all your heart. Then you may bow or *Namaskar*, and you may receive some holy ash applied by the *pujari* (person who performed *puja*) and holy water.

To receive the water just extend the cupped right hand, placed over the left, and sip it. Someone may also offer you *prasad*, or blessed food. A few minutes are then allowed for silent meditation.

Please do not point your feet at the altar. In the Eastern tradition pointing feet is considered very impolite. One should also wear modest clothing.