

# Hindu Society of Central Florida

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 [orlandohindutemple.org/temple-services/worship-information/](http://orlandohindutemple.org/temple-services/worship-information/)

## Worship Information

There are certainly several rituals for religious worship. But these rituals vary in detail from region to region, from tradition to tradition and from time to time. This variety itself is because of the inherent flexibilities in the practice of Hinduism. It is further accentuated by the largeness of the subcontinent with different roots in culture that goes back to several centuries. But always the concept of worship is to first invoke the god of worship in some kind of a picture or idol or a lump of sandal paste or even some specific types of stones identified for the purpose.

The *pooja* (ritual worship) begins with such an invocation. The *pooja* itself consists of sixteen formalities. These include, besides the invocation, the offering of a seat, offering water for various purposes, offering water honey and milk for bath, offering cloth for dressing, offering flowers as obeisance, offering eatables, waving flaming camphor, and finally doing prostrations. The ceremonial waving of lighted camphor is called *Arti*. The prostration indicates a total surrender to the deity of the *pooja*. The very invocation, which is the first formality, contains the essence of the Hindu teaching. It says:

Oh God! I know you are omnipresent.

But, for the purpose of my concentration and worship

Please condescend to make your presence felt here

In this idol (image, picture or stone or whatever)

For the period of the *pooja*.

Maybe I am insulting your omnipresence

by requesting you to confine yourself to this form

But please pardon me, I know no other way.

All this is contained in the *mantra* (vedic chant) that is used for the invocation. In every formality of the *pooja*, the *mantra* that is recited carries such high philosophical thinking within itself. Throughout, it is the attitude that matters rather than the real thing you offer. You may just offer some flowers and say that instead of the silken clothes you would like to offer to the Lord, you are offering these flowers. Similarly instead of pouring water over the image or the picture for bath you may just sprinkle some drops of water on it and say this may be taken as bath. Incidentally, *mantras* are everything in Hinduism. They can do and undo.s For more on *mantra* [click here](#)

The five elements being the ultimate purifier of all things in the universe, Hindu tradition uses them effectively for such purposes in all their rituals. It is mostly either water or fire. So every time something has to be purified, the relevant quotation from the scriptures is

recited and water sprinkled on the deity before you. In where the images of gods have been built in stone or metal for this very purpose, the daily *pooja* will have elaborate procedures for ritually and physically bathing the deity and is called *abhisheka*.

A *pooja* at home may take as small a time as five minutes or as long a time as four to six hours. The eatable that you finally offer to the deity is technically called *naivedya* – the word simply meaning, that which is shown to God. It could be any sweet dish, fruits, coconuts or any other specially prepared dish and after thus being offered to God – which the deity does not eat, of course – is then shared by those who have attended the *pooja* and their friends and well-wishers. In fact Hindu scriptures are very clear on the injunction that nothing should be eaten without first being formally offered to God, and therefore nothing should be eaten which are not offer-able to God.

Flowers are one offering to God which we do not take back in full. Flowers come from nature, that is *prakRti*, and go back to the Lord of that *prakRti*, namely God. Since flowers are the only thing which we can leave wholly with the deity of worship, Hindu deity worship always emphasizes a massive use of flowers. Even the water which is used for bathing the idol is taken back in little drops as lustral water, in the hollow of the right hand and swallowed immediately. When anything is offered to God and then taken back for our use like this, it becomes *prasAd*, meaning Grace (of God). This takes us to the next topic, bhakti and grace.

Bhakti means devotion, but it actually connotes an attitude of intense devotion. In practice it gets exhibited in several ways. One of the most common and most recommended by the scriptures is that of reciting God's names. There are several purposes in such a recitation: to purify oneself; to give expression to one's bhakti; to progress on the upward path of spiritual evolution; to obtain the Grace of God for a specific material purpose; to obtain God's Grace for the ultimate Salvation.

For such purposes of recitation of God's names and glories there are innumerable poems of praise (*stotras*) in the secondary scriptural literature. The Vedas are the primary . All the others like the Ramayana, written by Valmiki, the Mahabharata, written by Vyasa and the 18 *purANas* and their associates all written by Vyasa are among the secondary scriptures. These poems of praise and their recitations constitute one more of the distinguishing features of Hinduism.

The practice of recitation of these stotras can be recognized to be the one vibrant chord that runs through the cultural milieu of Hindu India throughout the length and breadth of the country. Particularly after the bleak middle ages when Hinduism had to undergo several shocks from the intolerance of some of the invaders it had to face, there was a renaissance. This is the period generally from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a large number of intense devotees of God appeared on the scene in different parts of India.

They preached and practised the *nAma-sankIrtana* (= reciting of God's names) method of obtaining God's Grace, in preference to the much misused and misinterpreted ritualistic tradition handed down by the Vedic age. The enormous amount of devotional literature that exists in India, both in Sanskrit and in Tamil — which are the two most ancient languages –, but also in the other major languages of the country, has been inspired by hundreds of and great poets all over India, almost without a break through this period.

Some of these poems of praise in the scriptural literature are or one thousand names of God. These are full of flowing poetry, alliteration, rhythm and rich philosophical content. The names listed are those of God, extolling His majesty and splendour, omnipresence

and omniscience, transcendence and immanence and His exploits in His different manifestations. To repeat these names is to enjoy the ecstasy of divine communion. In addition to these recitations, for those who are not educated in these, there are innumerable *bhajans* – streamlined repetitions of God’s names, which can be sung in chorus to set beats. These again were popularised by those great devotees of the renaissance period. The very popular *hare krishna bhajan* sung by those involved in the International Krishna Conscious Movement is an example of this tradition. These *bhajans* and recitations are intended to tune you to the frequency of the divine in you and rouse your divine instinct.

The fundamental belief of Hinduism being the divinity of man,

the divine instincts that are latent in oneself are touched by these *bhajans* and recitations

and in due time will conquer the baser instincts

which are themselves only the consequences of one’s *vAsanAs*

acquired in this and all previous lives.

The obtaining of God’s Grace is the much-sought-after goal of bhakti. There are two views in Hinduism regarding the methodology for obtaining the Grace of God.

One view which is called the monkey theory (*markaTa nyAya*) says that the devotee has to make enough efforts by himself for God to descend to him, just as the baby monkey has to cling to its mother of its own for being carried along.

On the other hand, the other viewpoint, which is called the cat theory (*mArjAra nyAya*) says that the devotee does not have to make any effort because God Himself will take care of him and do the needful. This is like the Presbyterian viewpoint in Christianity. The cat theory implies a total surrender. The weight of scriptural authority leans towards this theory. This is in fact a surrender wherein the devotee surrenders even his mind to the Lord. He has no mind of his own thereafter. One is reminded a nineteenth century Christian hymn:

Oh Lord, take my will and make it thine;

It shall no longer be mine.

Take my heart, it is thine own;

It shall be thy royal throne.

This is the Bhakti Yoga of Hinduism.