

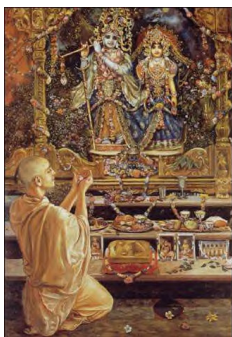
Nine Forms of Devotion

Archanam Worship of the Lord

Archanam is worship of the Lord, which affords the devotee immense inner satisfaction and inspiration. When one loves, it is the most natural thing to 'offer' something beautiful to the beloved. To the one we love best we will offer our very best gifts. Behind the gift, and what makes it really precious, is of course, the love of one's own heart. It is sure that God never sees the size of the gift, but the purity of the love with which it is offered. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna says: "He who offers me with devotion only a leaf, or a flower, or a fruit, or even a little water, this I accept from the yearning soul, because with a pure heart it was offered with love." (9.26)

The purpose of worship is to please the Lord, to purify the heart through surrender of the ego and love of God. During worship the mind of the devotee should be concentrated on the form of the Lord. It should think of His Attributes, His infinite Nature, Bliss, Immortality, etc.

Traditionally Hindus bathe and wash the images of God, light the lamp, burn incense, offer *naivedhya* (offerings of flowers, fruits etc.), break a coconut and do *aarathi*. The spiritual



equivalent is that we light the lamp of love and wisdom in our heart and mind, and fill the air with the fragrance of pure divine thoughts and words. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna elaborates on the practice of Archanam, saying that what a devotee should truly offer to God is the *Patram* (leaf) of the body, *Pushpam* (flower of the mind), *Phalam* (fruit of the heart), and *Toyam* (sacred water) of the tears of Bliss. Bhagawan goes one step further and says, "Give me all your bad qualities and I shall give you good qualities in return."

Before breaking the coconut, we remove the fibres. Symbolically, this represents the removal of our desires and ego and surrender to the Lord. We conclude the worship with *aarathi*, by waving lighted camphor around the idol. Camphor is itself a fragrant substance and when it burns it gives warmth and illumination to those around. Likewise, we should let the true fragrance of our spirit manifest itself (by burning away desires) and shed the light of comfort and inspiration on those around us.

Many Hindus perform *abhishekam* to the idol by bathing it with ingredients like milk, butter, honey etc. The most important of them all is *panchamritam* (the five nectars) which is a mixture of milk, curds, butter, ghee and honey. The five nectars symbolise the five *kosas* or the five sheaths of the body- *panchakosas*. Milk denotes the Food Sheath, curd stands for the Vital Air Sheath, butter is equated to the Mind Sheath, ghee signifies the Intellectual Sheath, and honey symbolises the Bliss Sheath. The light of divinity lies hidden beneath these five sheaths. So, we remove them by offering them up to the Lord. By surrendering the five sheaths, we will be able to awaken our consciousness and illumine our inner self.

Swami says, "Emperor Prithu stands out as the exemplar of this type of devotion. By offering sixteen kinds of service to the image of Lord with deep devotion, he earned the grace of the Lord. In this form of worship Prithu demonstrated the unique significance of Anga Archana, using every sense organ in worshipping the Lord. Prithu regarded every organ as the lotus to be offered to the Lord in worship. Today, unfortunately when this type of worship is performed, there is no genuine feeling of dedication of the organs to the Lord. When you offer your lotus eyes to the Lord, the real meaning is that the eyes are dedicated to having visions of the Lord. Likewise, when you offer your lotus ears to the Lord, they will not listen to anything bad or evil. This was the spirit in which Emperor Prithu performed Anga Puja and attained God-realisation."

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There are wide varieties of rituals and rites by which people of the world worship God. The Christian Eucharist represents in the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ. Eucharist, often called Holy Communion reminds Christians of the last meal Jesus ate with his friends. Sharing the bread and wine in the Holy Communion service means Christians can join with Jesus in a special way.



Many rituals are concerned with purity and purification. Ritual bathing, baptism, hand-washing and other forms of cleansing are symbolic of purification of the mind. Vedas teach the merit of bathing in the Ganges and the Bible prescribes the Christian rite of baptism. Before praying Muslims do a ritual washing called *Wudu*. They believe that *Wudu* makes a person more fit to talk to Allah. It also gives Muslims a time when they can forget what they have been doing and get ready to think only about Allah. During prayers Muslims do ritual movements of standing, bowing, kneeling and touching the ground with their forehead. In the last movement they turn their head from side to side. This is to remember the two invisible angels that Muslims believe are always with every person.

During worship Buddhists may burn incense and offer gifts of flowers and incense to an image of the Buddha. Buddhist worship usually includes lighting candles. Candles are used as a symbol of the Buddha's teaching. Just as a candle brings light to a dark room, so Buddhists believe that what the Buddha taught can show them the way to live.

Bhagawan has said, "*Floral offerings are commendable, but flowers fade and rot soon. What God loves most are the flower blossoming on the tree of man's own life, fed and fostered by his own skill and sincerity. They are the flowers of his virtues grown in the garden of his heart.*" Baba has described these flowers: "*Ahimsa (the Flower of non-violence), Indriya Nigrah (the Flower of sense-control), Daya (the Flower of compassion towards all beings), Kshma (the Flower of forbearance), Shanthi (the Flower of peace), Tapas (the Flower of penance), Dhyana (the Flower of Meditation) and Sathya (the Flower of Truth)*" Cultivate these Flowers of virtue. These Flowers reward with eternal fragrance.

