

# Puja

Puja – “Pu” means merit. “Ja” means to give birth. Therefore, “Puja” means, that which gives birth to the highest merit; which is ultimately the privilege to sit in the presence of the Divine.

Though puja stems from Hindu spirituality, one can incorporate this form of worship into any spiritual or religious sadhana (practice). Puja is typically done in the morning, but it can be done in the evening (or both) as well. A **pujari** is a Hindu temple priest. The word comes from the Sanskrit word meaning worship. Hindu priests are responsible for performing temple rituals, including (pūjā) and aarti. Both men and women can be pujari.

Puja arises from the magnanimous spirit of hospitality that Hindu people are known for. When a guest visits a Hindu home, they are received and treated as God. The traditional steps to welcome the guest are similar to the steps of puja. Puja is also done in the home as a daily morning rite. Family members will come together in their shrine room to honor their Ishta devata (family or chosen Deity) as their royal guest.

One performs Puja to their Ishta devata of choice. This can be any God, Goddess, Deity, or Guru.

Puja is your own intimate and personal interaction with your Ishta devata. Throughout the puja, one welcomes, makes offerings and chants sweetly to the Deity while humbly beseeching their blessings.

In more mystical terms, puja helps to open the channels to the superconscious, as well as to the inner Divine worlds. Performing puja can bring health, prosperity, peace and happiness to the officiant, family members, and entire world. From an emotional perspective it cultivates and strengthens one’s love for God, which is also known as bhakti.

The forms of Hindu puja vary widely and variances among the spiritual lineages are vast. But all have in common some or all of these 16 offerings.

The following also can vary somewhat, depending on the scriptural source that is followed. In general, these offerings are most common.

1. Āvāhanam, invoking
2. Āsanam, offering a seat
3. Snānam, ceremonial bath
4. Prokshnarte Vastram, offering a towel to dry with
5. Sugandam, offering scented oil

6. Yagopavitam, offering sacred thread
7. Vastram, offering vestments
8. Abushanam, offering ornaments
9. Malam, offering mala
10. Chandanam, Kum Kumam, Akshatan, offering sandalwood paste, kum kum and rice
11. Pushpam, offering flowers
12. Dhūpam, burning incense
13. Dīpam, waving lighted lamp
14. Naivedyam, offering food
15. Āchamanīyam, sipping water
16. Pradakshinā, circumambulation
17. Udvasanam, farewell

Anyone can perform a simple basic puja. A statue or murti or picture of one's Ishta Devata can be used to help center one's energies and bhakti during the puja. An example of a simple puja might include:

1. **Welcoming** – this can be done in a simple manner or even by reading an appropriate Hindu (or other religious) scripture, or singing a Bhajan (chant)
2. **Bathing**
3. **Offering incense**
4. **Offering flowers\food**
5. **Offering water to drink**
6. **Thanking and farewell**