

Science of Worship

Honoring is a sign of divine love. That honoring is called worship or pooja. In the Indian tradition worship is a spiritual discipline which follows a highly scientific procedure. It is logical at every step and follows a well-planned sequence of its various steps.

There are two kinds of pooja: Vedic and tantric pooja.

In vedic pooja, it is believed that the Agni Devata is the go-between God and Man. So everything is offered to the Agni or the Priest doing the ceremony. Man could not approach the gods with offerings. What was needed was a divine assurance that God accepted offerings directly from His devotees. Sri Krishna in the Gita gives this assurance “When a pure-hearted devotee offers with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I accept that lovingly.” This divine promise made the fire ritual unnecessary. Every man became a priest of God. This led to worship of an image of the God and is called the tantric pooja.

| Vedic Pooja (called Yajna) | Tantric Pooja |
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| Requires a priest | No priest required |
| Man cannot make offerings directly | Man can offer directly |
| Is done around an altar of fire | Is done in front of an image of God |
| Invitation is extended for their presence of gods. | Invocation of the presence of God in the image or made |
| Main idea is sacrifice | Main idea is service and self surrender to God. Worship becomes all of life and all the actions. |

Pooja literally means “Jo Poornata se Janam leta hai woh” (that which is born out of the fullness of the heart). When you sit and thank the Divine for all the Blessings that have been bestowed on you.

The ceremony of pooja indicates what the nature is already doing for us. The divine worships us in so many forms. In pooja we offer everything back to Divine. A person is in dynamic contact with the cosmos at different levels and the abundance of life is flowing into him in the form of food, material comforts, knowledge etc. If he tries to retain all these and allow his mind to cling to them, it becomes impure, but by offering all that in excess he purifies his mind.

We offer a seat of honor. We offer water to wash the feet, and then we offer a cloth to dry. We offer sandal wood paste to cool the atmosphere. We offer full rice which symbolizes the fullness of eternal life. We offer flower which symbolizes full blossom of life. We offer incense which symbolizes sweet fragrance of purity. We offer light which brings the light of wisdom and dispels ignorance. We offer fruit which symbolizes the state of fulfillment.

The number items that are offered may vary according to the means. The offerings symbolizes the 5 elements – sandalwood symbolizes of the earth, flowers of ether, incense of air, light of fire and naivedya of water.

Preparation:

Clean the worship platform which is little higher than ground level. Clean all the vessels. Arrange all the offerings and articles of worship on the platform. Light the candle and incense.

Main stages of pooja

1. Intention: Set an intention for the worship. One can also write names of people on a note who may receive the benefit of the worship.
2. Purification: Purify everything using water, all the articles outside, inside, above and below
3. Divinization or make the connection: Honor the divine by singing praises, make the connection and feel one with the divine
4. Service or offering: Make the offerings out of your fullness
5. Aarti or wave the lamp: Wave the cool light of a camphor lamp clockwise in circles at least 3 times.
6. Salutation with special offering of flowers. The conclusion of pooja is marked by a special offering of flowers called puspanjali, after which the worshipper surrenders himself and the fruit of his worship at the feet of the Lord.
7. Prasad or sharing the offered blessed food: No pooja can conclude without the joyous sharing of the Prasad by the devotees. Also if not shared with others, it is held that the Prasad becomes ineffectual. Prasad is considered sacred and must be treated with respect.