

The Avanti PRE Curriculum (Year 7)

Student Text B (7.5.3b)

'Ten Types of Worship in Hinduism'

In Hinduism, worship is a very broad term and may include diverse forms such as dance and music. In relation to the Vedic period and the more recent 'four main paths' ('margas' or 'yogas'), worship can be divided into five corresponding groups:

1. the Homa or Havana – the sacred fire ceremony (*from the Vedic period*).
2. Sewa - active service to the sacred image (*linked to karma-yoga*)
3. Scriptural study and teaching (*most closely linked to jnana-yoga*)
4. Meditational practices, such as chanting mantras (*linked to astanga-yoga*)
5. Puja, ritualistic worship of the sacred image (*as central to bhakti-yoga*)

There are five other activities that usually are usually a part of 'Puja':

6. Darshana – 'taking audience'
7. Pradakshina - circumambulation
8. Arati - the main Hindu ceremony
9. Bhajana or Kirtana - musical glorification
10. Prasada - sacred food offered to the deity

Details of Main Practices

The following are details of the ten major acts of worship:

1. Havana

Havana yajna is translated as "fire sacrifice". This Vedic ceremony, also called 'homa' or 'agnihotra' is still performed during rites of passage, such as marriage. Grains and ghee are offered to the Divine through the fire and to the chanting of *mantras*.

2. Sewa

Active service to the deity is considered a form of worship. Lay members serve the murti by cutting vegetables, cleaning the temple and so on. Many traditions also praise the merits of serving sadhus through hospitality, and holy places by sweeping the land and assisting pilgrims.

3. Scriptural study

Pravachan refers to a philosophical lecture, based on the holy texts and delivered by a guru, priest or scholar. The speaker often sits on an elevated seat out of respect for the authority of scripture. Scriptural study is likewise an act of worship.

4. Meditation and Prayer

Traditional meditation includes focusing attention on the self and God within. Popular today is mantra meditation, which includes the quiet recitation of a mantra (japa) and the thrice-daily chanting of the Gayatri mantra

5. Puja

Puja refers to the ritualistic worship offered to the deity, in which the images are bathed, dressed and treated as dignitaries. It embraces other practices, often related to welcoming and entertainment, as listed below:

6. Darshana

Darshana means "seeing", though it is better translated as "audience". With palms folded in prayer, devotees present themselves before the temple deity or a holy person to request guidance and blessings.

7. Pradakshina

Circumambulation is a form of offering respect, and is generally performed in a clockwise direction. Within or around many temples are walkways for circumambulation of the deity and pilgrims often circumambulate holy spots and sacred towns.

8. Arati

Arati is the most popular Hindu ceremony today and involves the offering of lamps, flowers and other auspicious items. It often begins and concludes with blowing a conch-shell.

9. Bhajana and kirtana

Bhajana means adoration and refers to devotional hymns. Kirtana means glorification and often indicates the repetition of mantras to the accompaniment of musical instruments.

10. Prasada

Offering regular food to the deities is integral to puja. Visitors to the temple often conclude their *darshana* by accepting morsels of prasada (sacred food) offered to the deity. It is believed to purify body, mind and soul, and to bestow considerable spiritual merit.