

AARTI

Aarti is a religious ceremony that enables a congregational form of worship that ultimately intensifies our prayers and asks that we be illuminated with knowledge in the same way the beautiful Lord is illuminated by light.

- Aarti is the most popular ceremony performed regularly in most Hindu households and often several times a day in temples. It may be a solitary or congregational event performed in front of a deity or an image of God.
- A lamp or *deep* is offered accompanied by singing, clapping, and music. Worshippers stand for the entire ceremony to show respect. It is often performed at the end of a *Puja* (ceremony) as one of the 16 steps (*shodasha upachara*). It is often also done to welcome a special guest.
- The ceremony is often commenced and concluded by the blowing of a conch shell. As well as a lamp, the priest or devotee offers various auspicious articles e.g. incense, flowers, water, a five wick lamp or a lamp with camphor. They are offered with the right hand and moved in clockwise circles before the deity. At the same time a bell is rung whilst meditating on the deity.
- Various prayers may be sung for the Aarti, depending on place and circumstance.
- Aarti serves to add intensity to our prayers; our minds are focussed on the deity and the Lord's presence and beauty. It is akin to silent open eyed meditation on His beauty. The singing, clapping, ringing of bell etc. denote the joy and auspiciousness which accompanies the vision of the Lord. Often we close our eyes during Aarti as if to look within, and so the divinity within each of us may be seen and felt.
- Aarti is often performed with camphor. The significance of this is that when camphor is lit, it burns out completely without leaving a trace behind. Camphor represents our inherent tendencies (*vaasanas*), which when lit by the fire of knowledge or truth, burn themselves out completely, not leaving a trace of the ego. Also while camphor burns to reveal the glory of the Lord, it also emits a pleasant perfume even while it sacrifices itself. In our spiritual progress, even as we serve god, Guru and society, we should willingly sacrifice ourselves and all we have to spread the scent of love to all.
- At the end of the ceremony, the offered lamp is passed around the congregation; members pass their hands over the flame and reverentially touch them to their eyes and over the top of the head.
- **When performing an aarti, we pray that may the light that illuminated the Lord light up my vision; may my vision be divine and my thoughts noble and beautiful.**