

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

What Is Aarti

Question: What is the significance of the *aarti* performed in temples?

Answer: The *aarti* is a profound act of selfless devotion. Let's understand its significance through four questions.



What is offered? Figuratively, *aarti* signifies the offering of creation (represented by the various items offered during the *aarti*) to the creator (represented by the Deity, the iconic representation of the Divine). The *Bhagavad-gita* (7.4-5) analyzes the material world to be made of eight elements: earth (representing all solids), water (representing all liquids), fire (representing all radiations and energies), air (representing all gases), ether (the substratum for the existence of space and the transmission of sound), mind (the subtle faculty for emotions), intelligence (the subtle faculty for rational thinking) and false ego (the invisible bond that causes the soul to misidentify with the body). During the *aarti*, the various items offered to the Deity represent these elements: the flower and the cloth represent earth, the water represents the element water, the ghee lamp represents fire, the yak-tail fan represents air, the sound of the conch and the bell represents ether, the emotional involvement in the songs sung and the mantras chanted represent the mind, the intellectual focus on the purpose of the *aarti* represents the intelligence, the obeisance represent the ego and the *pujari* represents the assembled worshipers.



How is it offered? All the items are offered by waving them in a circle around the Deity, to remind us to keep the Lord at the center of all our activities during the cyclic motions of time from the minutes to the decades.

When is it offered? Etymologically, the word *aarti* means "before night." This refers to the fact that the first of the *aartis* in traditional temples is performed before the night ends, that is, at early dawn. As the darkness of forgetfulness of God tends to envelope us repeatedly, the *aarti* is performed repeatedly to end the night of forgetfulness.



Why is it offered? Everything that we have belongs to the Lord and *aarti* is the method prescribed in the Vedic texts like the *Pancharatras* to humbly and gratefully acknowledge his divine proprietorship. When we prayerfully perform or reverentially observe the *aarti*, our head becomes illumined with God's glory and our heart enlivened with God's beauty. The items offered become transmuted into carriers of divine mercy or Prasad and thus we can receive divine energy from the lamp with cupped hands passed over its flames and touched to the forehead, from the sacred water by having it sprinkled on our bowed heads, from the sanctified flowers by reverentially smelling their fragrance. So next time we attend an *aarti*, let's tune in to the divine vibrations.

