

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

Why Keep Food On The Altar ?



Question: In temples when food is kept on the altar, obviously nothing happens to it for the few minutes that it is there. Then why is that food considered sacred?

Answer: Because with the eyes of wisdom, we can see beyond the obvious to the actual; we can understand how the food on the altar becomes sacred.

Our meals are the times when we can most easily recognize God's grace in our lives. Of course, in our high speed, hi-tech fast food lifestyle, it is not so easy to remember that God is the only food producer; all our technological wizardry can only make food-processing industries, not food-producing industries. It is by God's loving master-plan that mother nature transforms rains into grains. As most traditional cultures lived close to nature, they could clearly see the divine hand as the ultimate provider of their daily meals and so they incorporated rituals for thanking God before the daily meals. As our meals form an indispensable part of our daily schedules, no matter how busy we are, thanking God by offering mealtime prayers is a practical way to spiritualizing our daily lives. In the Vedic tradition, this universal principle of spiritualizing our eating finds the subtle and sophisticated expression of offering the meals to God before eating them oneself.



Let's understand the import of offering with an example. In cultured families when a person visits his relatives, he generally carries with him a box filled with delicious sweets as an expression of the love. When he returns home, the hosts never return the box empty; they fill it with delicious sweets as an expression of their love. To the uninformed eye, the guest just increased his luggage in carrying the box into the house and out of it. But the wise eye sees that the box was the essential medium for a sweet exchange of love. Similarly, when devotees visit the house of God – the altar in their homes or in the temples, they carry with them a plate filled with food. The devotee saturates the food with his devotion (*bhakti*) and the Lord saturates the same food with his mercy (*kripa*). This mercy-surcharged food is called *Prasad*. When they return from the altar, they apparently carry back the same plate with the same food. But the food has become the medium for a profound loving exchange between the devotee and the Lord.



Thus, when our heart will see beyond the apparent to the actual, beyond the mere food to the mercy that it embodies, then we will experience for ourselves how placing the food on the altar transforms it

