

CHAPTER ONE



Puja

Introduction to Puja Basics

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- Prānāyāmam
- Sankalpam
- Āsana Puja
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Main Puja

1. Dhyānam/Āvāhanam
2. Āsanam
3. Pādyam/Argghyam/Āchamaneeyam
4. Madhuparkam
5. Snānam
6. Vastram/Upaveetam/Ābharanam
7. Gandham/Kumkum
8. Pushpam
9. Dhoopam
10. Dheepam
11. Naivedyam/Tamboolam
12. Karpooram/Neeraajanam
13. Mantrapushpam
14. Pradakshina/Namaskaram
15. Seek Forgiveness
16. Release the deity to the altar

Samarpanam

1.1 What is Puja?



- Puja (*Pooja*) is a special way of worshipping God.
- It literally means reverence, honor, adoration or worship.
- It combines all three types of worship - mental, physical and verbal.
- It will enable one to perform the worship at home on a daily basis, as well as on any special occasion or festival.
- On special occasions one may invite a priest to perform puja on one's behalf, but for daily worship one can perform puja oneself.
- Puja is also done in temples by the priests.
- In puja,
 1. One invokes the Lord's presence in any form,
 2. Treats the Lord as an honored guest,
 3. Offers worship and,
 4. With reverence, seeks the Lord's blessings.
- The puja can be done in its more elaborate form like the sixty-four-step puja or in its simplest form like the sixteen-step puja.
- One of the most complete forms of worship is the sixteen-step puja called *Shodasopachara*. *Shodasa* means sixteen and *Upachara* means offerings given with love and devotion.
- One has to perform the puja with the clean mind, body and soul creating an environment into which one invites the Lord.

1.2 What does one need to do a puja?

The following items are needed to perform the sixteen-step pūjā:

- An altar with the vigraha, idol, of the deity to be worshipped. If an idol is not available, a picture of the deity may be used.
- An oil lamp, oil, and a wick. One lights the lamp at the beginning of the pūjā and makes sure that it remains lit until the pūjā is completed.
- Akṣata, uncooked rice to which turmeric powder is added, for offering.
- A vessel with water and spoon for offering. The water may be poured into another cup during the offering.
- Sandalpaste and kumkum.
- Incense sticks.
- Dīpa, a small oil lamp.
- Naivedyam, food offering.
- Fresh flowers on a plate.
- Camphor with a holder for burning it.
- For lighting dīpa and camphor, one may use spoons if holders are not available.
- The altar should be clean and can be decorated as one wishes. Metal vessels and utensils are preferable. If these are not available, paper plates and cups may be used. The utensils for the pūjā should be kept apart and not used for other purposes.



[If some of the items listed above are unavailable, one may use akṣata instead.]

1.3 What is involved in a puja?

Brief Explanation of the Steps

After lighting a lamp, one performs the saṅkalpa. The saṅkalpa identifies the person doing the pūjā (yajamānaḥ) and the purpose for which the pūjā is done. A common purpose in all pūjās is "durita kṣaya" – the removal of duritas, impurities of the mind. One may pray for other reasons, but an important element in all prayers is to seek a mind free from confusion and wrong thinking.

The initial step is invoking the presence of the Lord in the given symbol. Once invoked, the symbol becomes the Lord and is looked upon as such until the pūjā is completed.

The Lord is made welcome with one's attitude of devotion and is offered ācamana, vastra, and the other items described.

While offering flowers, one addresses the Lord by the various names that reveal the Lord's nature or describe His glories. One may chant sixteen, one hundred and eight, or one thousand and eight names of the Lord.

Naivedyam is then offered at the altar. For naivedyam, one may offer fruits (fresh or dried), nuts, or cooked prasāda. It is customary that we do not offer the Lord premade, store-bought foods or leftover foods.

Arati is performed by dimming or switching off the electric lights in the room and offering lighted camphor.

When visiting a temple, one may go around the deity clockwise three times as an act of salutation. Since the Lord also abides within, one can turn around oneself three times, in a clockwise direction, while standing in the same spot. Both these acts are known as pradakṣiṇa.



In performing the pūjā, there may have been errors of omission and commission. One asks for forgiveness of the Lord for these.

After the pūjā, the Lord is invited with a prayer to return to the original abode. The prasāda is then taken from the altar and distributed to all.

1.4 How to do a 16-step puja?

Set up, draw rangoli/kolam with rice flour and sit in front of the altar with all the puja articles in front of you.

Preparatory Steps to the Main Pūjā

1. Light a lamp. in front of the altar.

2. Offer flowers chanting:

दीपज्योतिः परंब्रह्म दीपज्योतिर्जनार्दन ।
दीपो मे हरतु पापं दीपज्योतिर्नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

dīpajyotiḥ param brahma dīpajyotirjanārdana
dipo me haratu pāpaṁ dīpajyotirnamo'stu te

I salute the Lord, the sustainer of the creation, who is in the form of this light.
I salute this light (the Lord). May he destroy any affliction resulting from my omissions and commissions.



3. a. Ācamanam

Take a sip of water after chanting each of the following mantras:

ॐ अच्युताय नमः । om acyutāya namaḥ
Salutations unto the Lord who is imperishable.

ॐ अनन्ताय नमः । om anantāya namaḥ
Salutations unto the Lord who is limitless.

ॐ गोविन्दाय नमः । om govindāya namaḥ
Salutations unto Lord Govinda.



b. Vighneśvara Dhyānam - Visualize Lord Gaṇeśa.

Lightly tap the temples with the knuckles, chanting the following mantra:

शुक्लाम्बरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ।
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

śuklāmaradharam viṣṇuṃ śaśivarnam caturbhujam
prasannavadanam dhyāyet sarvavighnopaśāntaye



Lord Vighneśvara, who wears the white garment, who is all pervasive, who has a bright complexion, (like the full moon), who has four hands (representing all power), who has an ever-smiling face, upon that deity I meditate, for the removal of all obstacles.

c. Prāṇāyāmaḥ - Breath control

While closing the right nostril with the thumb, inhale through left nostril chanting mentally:

ॐ भूः ॐ भुवः ॐ सुवः ॐ महः ॐ जनः ॐ तपः ॐ सत्यम् ।

om bhūḥ om bhuvah om suvah om mahah om janah om tapah om satyam

Hold the breath inside while chanting mentally:

ॐ तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

om tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahī
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt



- (Gayatri mantra)

Close the left nostril with the ring finger and exhale through the right nostril chanting mentally:

ओमापो ज्योती रसोऽमृतं ब्रह्म भूर्भुवस्सुवरोम् ।

omāpo jyotī raso'mṛtaṁ brahma bhūrbhuvassuvarom



The seven worlds are pervaded by the Lord. We meditate on the Lord in the form of light (awareness). May the Lord illumine our intellect with knowledge. The Lord is water, light, earth that provides food which is nourishment, and the all-pervasive space.

4. Saṅkalpaḥ - Statement of the purpose of the pūjā.

Clasp your right palm over the left palm holding a flower; place them on your right knee. Offer the flower at the altar, after chanting:

ममोपात्त-समस्त-दुरितक्षयद्वारा श्री-परमेश्वर-प्रीत्यर्थम् अहं महेश्वर-पूजां करिष्ये ।

mamopātta-samasta-durita-kṣayaadvārā śrī-parameśvara
prītyartham ahaṁ(māheśvara)pūjāṁ kariṣye
(mahaasarasvatee)



Subaabyaam Subedine Sobane muhoorte aadya brahmanaha. Dwithheeya parardhe sree sweta varaaha kalpe Vaivaswatha manvanthare ashtaavim-sathi thame Kaliyuge prathama paade jambo dweepe sridara kande paschime paarswe sakaabde asmin varthamaane vyaavahaarike praba vaa deenaam shashti samvath saraanaam madye..

[To indicate the day of puja being done: Paksham, tithi, yoga, vara, nakshatra, masa, ayana, ritu and varsh can be said referring the panchang.]

(Goddess Sarasvati)

I do the pūjā to (Lord Māheśvara*) to obtain the grace of the Lord for the removal of all afflictions resulting from my omissions and commissions.

[*Mahesvara = Lord Shiva and the altar should have the saligrama (sacred stone symbol) of Shiva or Lord Shiva picture and the puja is called Shiva puja and can be done on MahaShivratri.

*Mahesvara may be substituted by any other deity depending upon the puja and the God/Goddess one would like to invoke to perform it.

*For example, say Mahasarasvati instead of Mahesvara for Sarasvati puja and the altar should have Goddess Sarasvati picture nicely decorated.]

5. Āsana Pūjā - Worship of the Earth.

Sprinkle water on your seat while chanting:

पृथिवि त्वया धृता लोका देवि त्वं विष्णुना धृता ।
त्वं च धारय मां देवि पवित्रं कुरु चासनम् ॥

pr̥thivi tvayā dhṛtā lokā devi tvam viṣṇunā dhṛtā
tvam ca dhāraya māṁ devi pavitraṁ kuru cāsanam



O Mother Earth, all the worlds are held by you. You are held by Viṣṇu. May you hold me, O goddess, and purify my seat.

6. Ghaṇṭa Pūjā - Worship of the Bell.

Ring the bell while chanting:

आगमार्थं तु देवानां गमनार्थं तु रक्षसाम् ।
कुर्वे घण्टारवं तत्र देवताह्वानलाञ्छनम् ॥

āgamārthaṃ tu devānāṃ gamanārthaṃ tu rakṣasām
kurve ghaṇṭāravam tatra devatāhvānalāñchanam

For the arrival of the dieties and for the departure of destructive forces, I ring the bell, marking the invocation of the deity.



7. Kalaśa Pūjā - Worship of the pot of water.

Big pot -



Offer flowers in the pañcapātram, small pot, which has been filled with water and decorated with sandalpaste and kumkum. Cover the pañcapātram with the right palm and chant:

गङ्गे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वति ।
नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरि जलेऽस्मिन् सन्निधिं कुरु ॥

gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvari sarasvati
narmade sindhu kāveri jale'smin sannidhiṃ kuru

O Rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvari, Sarasvati,
Narmadā, Sindhu, Kāveri, may you all be present in this water!

Small pot -



Panchapatram

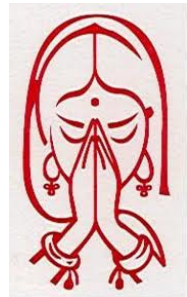
Sprinkle the water from the pañcapātram on all the pūjā materials and on oneself.

8. Ātma Pūjā - Worship of the Self.

Fold hands and chant:

देहो देवालयः प्रोक्तः जीवो देवस्सनातनः ।
त्यजेदज्ञाननिर्माल्यं सोऽहं भावेन पूजयेत् ॥

deho devālayaḥ proktaḥ jīvo devas sanātanah
tyajedaññānanirmālyam so'haṃ bhāvena pūjayet



The body is the temple. The jiva is the deity of this temple since the beginningless time. May one remove the wilted flowers that are ignorance and worship the Lord with an understanding that He is nonseparate from oneself.

9. Guru Dhyānam - Visualize one's Guru.

And chant the following mantra:

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
 गुरुस्साक्षात्परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥
 gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevo maheśvaraḥ
 gurussākṣātparaṁ brahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ

The Guru is Brahmā, the Guru is Viṣṇu, the guru is Maheśvara.
 The guru is the ultimate truth. Unto that Guru my prostration.

Lord Dakshinamurti



The above preparatory steps to the Main Puja are meant to create sanctity in oneself and in the articles used for worship, including the bell and the water pot.

The Main Pūjā



MAHESVARA

Rangoli or
Kolam in
front of altar



OR



MAHASARASVATI

1. Visualize the form of the deity and chant a śloka addressed to the deity. Take flowers and akṣata, rice, in hand and after chanting, offer at the feet of the Lord.

श्री महेश्वरं (or the chosen deity) ध्यायामि ।

अस्मिन् बिम्बे श्री महेश्वरम् (or the chosen deity) आवाहयामि ।

(Mahaasarasvateem)

(śrī maheśvaram)(or the chosen deity) dhyāyāmi

asmin(bimbe)(śrī maheśvaram)(or the chosen deity) āvāhayāmi
 (chitrapade)(Mahaasarasvateem)

I visualize Lord Maheśvara. I invoke His form in this image.

(Goddess Sarasvati)

(Her form)



2. Offer flowers at the feet of the Lord, chanting:

आसनं समर्पयामि ।

āsanaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you a seat.

(Lord or Goddess in every step of puja)



From panchapatram-worshipped small pot to a different cup using the spoon -

3. Offer water in a cup, chanting:

पाद्यं समर्पयामि ।

pādyam samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you water for washing the feet.

Offer water in a cup, chanting:

अर्घ्यं समर्पयामि ।

arghyam samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you water for washing the hands.

Offer water in a cup, chanting:

आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

ācamanīyam samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you water for cleansing the mouth.



4. Offer water (or any offering such as ghee, curds, honey, or sugar) in a cup, chanting:

मधुपर्कं समर्पयामि ।

madhuparkam samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you the sweet.

5. Offer water in a cup, chanting:

स्नानं समर्पयामि ।

snānam samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you a bath.

Offer water in a cup chanting:

स्नानानन्तरम् आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

snānānantaram ācamanīyam samarpayāmi

After the bath, I offer you water for inner purification.



6. Offer flowers or akṣata, chanting:

वस्त्रं समर्पयामि ।

vastraṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you cloth.

Offer flowers or akṣata, chanting:

उपवीतं समर्पयामि ।

upavītaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you the sacred thread.

Offer flowers or akṣata, chanting:

आभरणं समर्पयामि ।

ābharṇaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you ornaments.

One can decorate the picture with one yard of cloth (preferably white color for Mahasarasvati) folded on top of the frame and with ornaments.



7. Offer flowers, akṣata, or sandal paste, chanting:

गन्धान् धारयामि ।

gandhān dhārayāmi

O Lord! I offer you sandal paste.

गन्धस्योपरि हरिद्राकुंकुमं समर्पयामि ।

gandhasyopari haridrākumkumaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you kumkum.

One can apply sandal paste (chandan) and kumkum on top of chandan using the right hand ring finger on the forehead, hands and feet of the Lord/Goddess picture.



8. One may chant " अष्टोत्तरशतनामावलिः " "*aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvaliḥ*, the offering of one hundred and eight names and with each name offer flower, or chant:

पुष्पाणि समर्पयामि ।

puṣpāṇi samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you flowers.



Or, say,

Naanaavida parimala patra pushpaani samarpayaaami.

9. Show the incense to the Lord with circular clockwise motion three times; simultaneously ring the bell with the left hand, and chant:



धूपमाघ्रापयामि ।

dhūpamāghrāpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you incense.



10. Show the lamp held in the right hand with a circular clockwise motion three times, simultaneously ring the bell in the left hand, and chant:



दीपं संदर्शयामि ।

dīpaṃ saṃdarśayāmi

O Lord! I offer you this light.



Offer a spoonful of water in the cup, chanting:

धूपदीपानन्तरम् आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

From



To



dhūpadīpānantaram ācamanīyaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! Thereafter I offer you water.

11. Offer food at the feet of the Lord while chanting:

नैवेद्यं निवेदयामि ।

naivedyaṃ nivedayāmi

O Lord! I offer you food.



- a) Sprinkle water on the food while chanting:

ayatri mantra

ओं भूर्भुवस्स्वः । ओं तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

*om bhūrbhuvassvaḥ. om tatsaviturvareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*



The three worlds are pervaded by the Lord, the Creator. We meditate on the Lord in the form of light (Awareness). May the Lord illumine our intellect with knowledge.

b) Ring the bell and offer the sanctified food with a flower in hand, with a sweeping motion from the food up toward the altar, for each of these six chants:



ओं प्राणाय स्वाहा । ओं अपानाय स्वाहा । ओं व्यानाय स्वाहा ।
ओं उदानाय स्वाहा । ओं समानाय स्वाहा । ओं ब्रह्मणे स्वाहा ।



*om prāṇāya svāhā. om apānāya svāhā om vyānāya svāhā.
om udānāya svāhā om samānāya svāhā. om brahmaṇe svāhā*

I offer this to prāṇa. I offer this to apāna. I offer this to vyānā. I offer this to udāna. I offer this to samāna. I offer this to the Lord.

{Prana governs the intake of substances; Samana their digestion; Vyana the circulation of nutrients; Udana the release of positive energy and Apana the elimination of waste-materials. They form the five vital currents or life airs in creatures. By offering food to God everyday and taking it as Prasad one thanks and prays for healthy life.}

c) Offer water while chanting:

नैवेद्यानन्तरम् आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

naivedyānantaram ācamanīyaṁ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you water after the food.



d) Offer betel leaves and nuts, chanting:

ताम्बूलं समर्पयामि ।

tāmbūlaṁ samarpayāmi

I offer you betel leaves and nuts.



*(If you don't have tāmbūlaṁ, you may chant tāmbūlārtham akṣatān samarpayāmi and offer akṣata instead).

12. Chant:

कर्पूर नीराजनं समर्पयामि ।

karpūra nīrājanaṁ samarpayāmi

I offer you lighted camphor.



a) Standing, show the camphor with circular clockwise motion three times; simultaneously ring the bell with the left hand and chant:



न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्र तारकं नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

*na tatra suryo bhāti na candra tāṛakaṃ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'ya magniḥ
tameva bhantamanubhāti sarvaṃ tasya bhāsā sarvamideva vibhāti*

There the sun does not shine, nor do the moon or stars. There this lightning does not shine; what to talk of this fire? That (Awareness) shining, everything shines after It; by the light of That Awareness, all this shines in various forms.

b) Offer a spoonful of water into the cup while chanting:

आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

ācamanīyaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you water for cleansing the mouth.



13. Continue standing and offer flowers, chanting:

मन्त्रपुष्पं समर्पयामि ।

mantrapuṣpaṃ samarpayāmi

O Lord! I offer you flowers with sacred chants.



Take the flame for oneself and offer it to everyone who is present for the puja.

Everyone can offer flowers to the deity and do step 14 below.

14. Chant:

प्रदक्षिणनमस्कारान् समर्पयामि ।

pradakṣiṇanamaskārān samarpayāmi

I offer you circumambulation and prostration.



In front of the altar

Turn around oneself three times clockwise while chanting and then prostrate:

यानि कानि च पापानि जन्मान्तरकृतानि च ।

तानि तानि विनश्यन्ति प्रदक्षिण पदे पदे ॥

yāni kāni ca pāpāni janmāntarakṛtāni ca

tāni tāni vinaśyanti pradakṣiṇa pade pade



In front of the altar

May those omissions and commissions done in previous births and the resulting afflictions perish again and again with the pradakṣiṇa.

Now one can say prayers like slokas or bhajans together on the respective deity.

15. To seek forgiveness, one may chant:

मन्त्रहीनं क्रियाहीनं भक्तिहीनं महेश्वर ।
यत्पूजितं मया ह्येव परिपूर्णं तदस्तु ते ॥

(mahaasarasvatee)

*mantrahīnaṁ kriyāhīnaṁ bhaktihīnaṁ (maheśvara)
yatpūjitaṁ mayā hyeva paripūrṇaṁ tadastute*

O Lord, may the pūjā done by me, even though devoid of proper mantras, wanting in the steps and in devotion, be received by you as complete.



16. Release the deity by offering flowers and akṣata at the altar and chant:

अस्मात् बिम्बात् आवाहितं श्री महेश्वरं (or the chosen deity)
यथास्थानं प्रतिष्ठापयामि ।

(chitrapade)

(mahaasarasvateem)

*asmāt (bimbāt) āvāhitaṁ (śrī maheśvaraṁ) (or the chosen deity)
yathāsthānaṁ pratiṣṭhāpayāmi*



The Lord Maheśvara invoked at this altar is placed again in his own glory.

(Goddess Sarasvati)

(her)

समर्पणम्

Samarpaṇam

DEDICATION TO THE LORD

Take water in the right hand and pour the water in front of the deity while chanting:

कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतेस्वभावात् ।
करोमि यद्यत् सकलं परस्मै नारायणायेति समर्पयामि ॥



*kāyena vācā manasendriyairvā buddhyātmanā vā prakṛteśsvabhāvāt
karomi yadyat sakalaṁ parasmai nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayāmi*

Anayaa poojayaa bhagavate srimaheśvara (bhagavatee mahasarasvatee) preeyatham.

Unto Lord Nārāyaṇa, I dedicate all the acts that I perform with my body, speech, mind, senses, and intellect which are born of deliberation and natural tendencies.

Complete the pūjā with a salutation.



In front of the altar

Take the water, flowers, and naivedyam as prasāda from the Lord.