

Group 3 – Temple Worship

God is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient - meaning He is ever-present, all-powerful and all-knowing. Therefore, some may ask, "Why must we pray at the temple? Can we not pray at home?" Well, let us take an example.... The air pervades everywhere, yet the intensity is felt most under a fan. Likewise - God's grace is felt, in its intensified form, in the temple – a place purely dedicated to the worship and glorification of the Almighty Lord.

So how can we best prepare ourselves to receive this Grace? Before visiting the temple, we should bathe and wear clean clothes – making ourselves physically clean, in readiness for the mental and spiritual cleansing to come. We should also take with us an offering such as flowers or fruit and chant the mantra "Om Nama Sivaaya" on the way to the Temple. In the Saiva tradition, temple worship is seen as a personal experience as well as congregational. So repetition of this sacred mantra will help us to purify our minds and think only of God.

When we enter the Temple, we should take off our shoes as a sign of respect and may even wash our hands and feet before entering the consecrated ground. Inside the temple, it is important to behave well and with discipline. Most importantly, we should not be a hindrance to other devotees. Therefore, making unnecessary noise, dropping food or litter, talking loudly or letting our children run around should all be avoided.

On entering the temple, we should worship the Kodimaram (which is a symbol of the Lord), the Palipeedam (where we sacrifice our bad thoughts and deeds) and the adjacent Vaahanam of the main deity, which represents the perfect devotee - constantly focused on the Lord.

Only then should we pray to the main deity – the Moolasthanam moorthy.

We should apply Thiruneeru to our foreheads, as a symbol of our faith and devotion to Lord Siva, acknowledging that our inner self is as pure as this sacred ash. We must then walk clockwise around the temple in a slow and devotional manner, offering our prayers to the other deities and gaining their grace.

Lastly, we should pray to Sandeswarer. Then we can finish with an archana to the Lord, which is a simple pooja, performed by the priest, to invoke special individual blessings by including the name and natchathram (birth star) of the devotee.

After we have finished praying, we should sit quietly at the back of the temple for a few minutes to gain the full benefit of our prayers to the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord.

Helping to clean the temple, serving the devotees, and making garlands and decorations for the deities is another powerful form of worship, provided it is done with dedication and humility. It is also the duty of all priests and devotees to keep the temple atmosphere clean, peaceful and in harmony.

As young Saivites, growing up here in the UK, with western influences and cultures on all sides, the temple provides us with a central focus, an anchor of faith that will keep us firm and strong in our Saivite beliefs, culture and traditions - a foundation that will ensure that Saivism will continue to grow and flourish here in the UK.