

Puja Ishta-Devata & Murti Worship by Swami Shivananda

Puja is the common term for *ritual worship*, of which there are numerous synonyms such as Archana, Vandana, Bhajana, etc., though some of these stress certain aspects of it. The object of worship is the Ishta Devata or guiding Deity or the particular form of the Deity whom the devotee worships—Narayana or Vishnu as such, or His forms as Rama and Krishna in the case of Vaishnavas, Siva in His eight forms in the case of Saivas and Devi in the case of Saktas.

The devotee selects sometimes his Kuladeva or Kuladevi, family Deva or Devi, for his worship. Sometimes, the Devata is chosen for him by his Guru or spiritual preceptor. Sometimes, he himself chooses that Devata which most appeals to him. This form is his Ishta Devata.

An object is used in the outer Puja such as an image (Pratima), a picture, or an emblem such as Saligrama in the case of Vishnu worship or Linga in the case of worship of Siva.

Whilst all things may be the objects of worship, choice is naturally made of those objects which, by reason of their effect on the mind, are more fitted for it. An image or one of the useful emblems, is likely to raise in the mind of the worshipper the thought of a Devata. Saligrama stone induces easily concentration of mind.

Everybody has got predilection for a symbol, emblem or image. Idol or Murti (Vigraha), sun, fire, water, Ganga, Saligrama and Linga are all symbols or Pratikas of God which help the aspirants to attain one-pointedness of mind and purity of heart. These are all personal inclinations in the worshipper due to his belief in their special efficacy for him. Psychologically, all this means that a particular mind finds that it works best in the direction desired by means of particular instruments or emblems or images.

The vast bulk of humanity are either of impure or of weak mind. Therefore, the object of worship must be pure for these people. The objects that are capable of exciting lust and dislike must be avoided. But, a higher, advanced Sadhaka who has a pure mind and who sees the divine presence everywhere and in everything, can worship any kind of object.

In Puja, an image or picture representing some divine form is used as the object of worship. The image is adored. All image, a Sila or Vigraha or Murti, represents the particular Lord who is invoked in it. A Linga represents Siva. It represents the secondless, formless Brahman. The Sruti says: “*Ekamevadvityam Brahma*—The Brahman is one alone, without a second.” There is no duality here. A Linga is shining and attractive to the eyes. It helps concentration. Ravana propitiated Siva and obtained boons by worshipping the Linga.

A Saligrama is an idol of Vishnu. Saligrama is the symbol of Vishnu. There are images of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Karttikeya, Ganesa, Hanuman, Dattatreya, Sita, Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Sarasvati, etc., according to the taste of the particular devotee.

The images of Vishnu and of His Avatars, and the images of Sakti and Siva, are the popular idols that are worshipped both in temples and in the houses. The idols in the temples of Tirupati, Pandarpur, Palani, Katirgama, etc., are powerful Deities. They are Pratyaksha Devatas. They grant boons to the devotees, cure their ailments and give Darsana. Wonderful Lilas are associated with these Deities. There is no polytheism in Hinduism. Siva, Vishnu, Brahma and Sakti are different aspects of one Lord.

God reveals Himself to His devotees in a variety of ways. He assumes the very form which the devotee has chosen for his worship. If you worship Him as Lord Hari with four hands, He will come to you as Hari. If you adore Him as Siva, He will give you Darsana as Siva. If you worship Him as Mother Durga or Kali, He will come to you as Durga or Kali. If you worship Him as Lord Rama, Lord Krishna or Lord Dattatreya, He will come to you as Rama, Krishna or Dattatreya.

You may worship Lord Siva or Lord Hari, Lord Ganesa or Lord Subrahmanya or Lord Dattatreya, or anyone of the Avatars, Lord Rama or Lord Krishna, Sarasvati or Lakshmi, Gayatri or Kali, Durga or Chandi. All are aspects of one Isvara or Lord. Under whatever name and form, it is Isvara who is adored. Worship goes to the Indweller, the Lord in the form. It is ignorance to think that one form is superior to another. All forms are one and the same. Siva, Vishnu, Gayatri, Rama, Krishna, Devi and Brahman are one. All are adoring the same Isvara. The differences are only differences of names due to differences in the worshippers, but not in the object of adoration. It is only out of ignorance that different religionists and different sects fight and quarrel amongst themselves.

The Philosophy And Significance Of Idol-Worship

The Idol—A Prop For The Spiritual Neophyte

Idol is a support for the neophyte. It is a prop of his spiritual childhood. A form or image is necessary for worship in the beginning. It is an external symbol of God for worship. It is a reminder of God. The material image calls up the mental idea. Steadiness of mind is obtained by image-worship. The worshipper will have to associate the ideas of infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, purity, perfection, freedom, holiness, truth and omnipresence. It is not possible for all to fix the mind on the Absolute or the Infinite. A concrete form is necessary for the vast majority for practising concentration. To behold God everywhere and to practise the presence of God is not possible for the ordinary man. Idol-worship is the easiest form of worship for the modern man.

A symbol is absolutely indispensable for fixing the mind. The mind wants a prop to lean upon. It cannot have a conception of the Absolute in the initial stages. Without the help of some external aid, in the initial stages, the mind cannot be centralised. In the beginning, concentration or meditation is not possible without a symbol.

Everyone An Idol-Worshipper

There is no reference to worship of idols in the Vedas. The Puranas and the Agamas give descriptions of idol-worship both in the houses and in the temples. Idol-worship

is not peculiar to Hinduism. Christians worship the Cross. They have the image of the Cross in their mind. The Mohammedans keep the image of the Kaba stone when they kneel and do prayers. The people of the whole world, save a few Yogis and Vedantins, are all worshippers of idols. They keep some image or the other in the mind.

The mental image also is a form of idol. The difference is not one of kind, but only one of degree. All worshippers, however intellectual they may be, generate a form in the mind and make the mind dwell on that image.

Everyone is an idol-worshipper. Pictures, drawings, etc., are only forms of Pratima or the idol. A gross mind needs a concrete symbol as a prop or Alambana and a subtle mind requires an abstract symbol. Even a Vedantin has the symbol OM for fixing the wandering mind. It is not only the pictures or images in stone and in wood, that are idols but dialectics and leaders also become idols. So, why condemn idolatry?

A Medium For Establishing Communion With God

Idols are not the idle fancies of sculptors, but shining channels through which the heart of the devotee is attracted to and flows towards God. Though the image is worshipped, the devotee feels the presence of the Lord in it and pours out his devotion unto it. It is the appalling ignorance of the modern sensual man that clouds his vision and prevents him from seeing Divinity in lovely and enchanting idols of His form. The very scientific advances of this century ought to convince you of the glory of idol-worship. How are the songsters and orators confined to a small box-like thing to be called a radio? It is a mere piece of a mechanical lifeless structure which breaks into a thousand pieces if you throw it away violently; and yet, if you know how to handle it, you can hear through it, the music that is being played several thousands of miles away and the discourse that is being delivered in the remotest part of the globe. Even as you can catch the sound-waves of people all over the world through the radio receiving set, it is possible to commune with the all-pervading Lord through the medium of an idol. The divinity of the all-pervading God is vibrant in every atom of creation. There is not a speck of space where He is not. Why do you then say that He is not in the idols?

There are others who would glibly say: "Oh, God is all-pervading formless Being. How can He be confined to this idol?" Are these people ever conscious of His omnipresence? Do they always see Him and Him alone in everything? No. It is their ego that prevents them from bowing to the idols of God and, with that motive, put this lame excuse forward!

Empty vessels only make much sound. A practical man who does meditation and worship, who is full of knowledge and real devotion, keeps always silence. He influences and teaches others through silence. He only knows whether a Murti is necessary in the beginning for concentration or not.

However intellectual one may be, he cannot concentrate without the help of some symbol in the beginning. An intellectual and learned person, on account of his pride

and vanity only says: “I do not like a Murti. I do not wish to concentrate on a form.” He cannot concentrate on the formless one. He thinks that people will laugh at him when they come to know that he is meditating on a form. He never does any meditation on the formless one. He simply talks and argues and poses. He wastes his life in unnecessary discussions only. An ounce of practice is better than tons of theories. Intellect is a hindrance in the vast majority of intellectual persons. They say that the existence of Brahman is a guess-work, Samadhi is a bluff of the mind and Self-realisation is an imagination of the Vedantins. Deluded souls! They are steeped in ignorance. They are carried away by their secular knowledge which is mere husk when compared to the Knowledge of the Self. There is no hope of salvation for such people. First, their wrong Samskaras should be flushed by good Samskaras through Satsanga. Then only they will realise their mistakes. May the Lord bestow on them clear understanding and thirsting for real knowledge!

A Symbol Of God

Pratima, the idol, is a substitute or symbol. The image in a temple, though it is made of stone, wood or metal, is precious for a devotee as it bears the mark of his Lord, as it stands for something which he holds holy and eternal. A flag is only a small piece of painted cloth, but it stands for a soldier for something that he holds very dear. He is prepared to give up his life in defending his flag. Similarly, the image is very dear to a devotee. It speaks to him in its own language of devotion. Just as the flag arouses martial valour in the soldier, so also the image arouses devotion in the devotee. The Lord is superimposed on the image and the image generates divine thoughts in the worshipper.

A piece of ordinary white paper or coloured paper has no value. You throw it away. But, if there is the stamp of the Government on the paper (currency note), you keep it safe in your money-purse or trunk. Even so, an ordinary piece of stone has no value for you. You throw it away. But, if you behold the stone Murti of Lord Krishna at Pandarpur or any other Murti in shrines, you bow your head with folded hands, because there is the stamp of the Lord on the stone. The devotee superimposes on the stone Murti his own Beloved Lord and all His attributes.

When you worship an image, you do not say: “This image has come from Jaipur. It was brought by Prabhu Singh. Its weight is 50 lbs. It is made of white marble. It has cost me Rs. 500/-.” You superimpose all the attributes of the Lord on the image and pray: “O Antaryamin (Inner Ruler)! You are all-pervading. You are omnipotent, omniscient, all-merciful. You are the source for everything. You are self-existent. You are Sat-Chit-Ananda. You are eternal, unchanging. You are the Life of my life, Soul of my soul! Give me light and knowledge! Let me dwell in Thee for ever.” When your devotion and meditation become intense and deep, you do not see the stone image. You behold the Lord only who is Chaitanya. Image-worship is very necessary for beginners.

An Integral Part Of Virat

For a beginner, Pratima is an absolute necessity. By worshipping an idol, Isvara is pleased. The Pratima is made up of five elements. Five elements constitute the body of the Lord. The idol remains an idol, but the worship goes to the Lord.

If you shake hands with a man, he is highly pleased. You have touched only a small part of his body and yet he is happy. He smiles and welcomes you. Even so, the Lord is highly pleased when a small portion of His Virat (cosmic) body is worshipped. An idol is a part of the body of the Lord. The whole world is His body, Virat form. The devotion goes to the Lord. The worshipper superimposes on the image the Lord and all His attributes. He does Shodasopachara for the idol, the sixteen kinds of paying respects or service to the Lord. The presence of the Deity is invoked (Avahana). Then a seat (Asana) is offered. Then the feet are washed (Padya). Then offering of water is given (Arghya). Arghya is offering hospitality. Then comes bathing (Snana). Then the image is dressed (Vastra). Then comes the investiture with the sacred thread (Yajnopavita). Then sandal paste (Chandana) is offered. Then comes offering of flowers (Pushpa). They are the symbols of the heart-flowers of devotion, love and reverence. Then incense is burnt (Dhupa). Then a lamp is lit and waved before the Deity (Dipa). Then food is offered (Naivedya). Then betel is offered (Tambula). Then camphor is burnt (Nirajana). Then Svarnapushpa (gift of gold) is offered. In the end, the Deity is bidden farewell to (Visarjana). In these external forms of worship, the inner love finds expression. The wandering mind is fixed now in this form of worship. The aspirant gradually feels the nearness of the Lord. He attains purity of heart and slowly annihilates his egoism.

To the worshipper who believes the symbol, any kind of image is the body of the Lord under the form of stone, clay, brass, picture, Saligrama, etc. Such worship can never be idolatry. All matter is a manifestation of God. God is present in everything which exists. Everything is an object of worship, for all is a manifestation of God who is therein worshipped. The very act of worship implies that the object of worship is superior and conscious. This way of looking at things must be attained by the devotee. The untutored mind must be trained to view things in the above manner.

Idol-Worship Develops Devotion

Idol-worship makes concentration of man simpler and easier. You can bring before your mind's eye the great Lilas the Lord has played in His particular Avatara in which you view Him. This is one of the easiest modes of Self-realisation.

Just as the picture of a famous warrior evokes heroism in your heart, so also a look at the picture of God will elevate your mind to divine heights. Just as the child develops the maternal Bhava (mother-feeling) of the future caressing, nursing, protecting mother by playing with its imaginary toy-child made up of rags and suckling the child in an imaginary manner, so also the devotee develops the feeling of devotion by worshipping the Pratima and concentrating on it.

Regular Worship Unveils The Divinity In The Idol

Regular worship (Puja) and other modes of demonstrating our inner feeling of recognition of Divinity in the idol unveil the Divinity latent in it. This is truly a wonder and a miracle. The picture comes to life. The idol speaks. It will answer your questions and solve your problems. The God in you has the power to awaken the latent Divinity in the idol. It is like a powerful lens that focuses the sun's rays on to a bundle of cotton. The lens is not fire and the cotton is not fire either nor can the sun's rays, by themselves, burn the cotton. When the three are brought together in a particular manner, fire is generated and the cotton is burnt. Similar is the case with the idol, the Sadhaka and the all-pervading Divinity. Puja makes the idol shine with the divine resplendence. God is then enshrined in the idol. From here, He will protect you in a special manner. The idol will perform miracles. The place where it is installed is at once transformed into a temple, nay, a Vaikuntha or Kailasa in reality. Those who live in such a place are freed from miseries, from diseases, from failures and from Samsara itself. The awakened Divinity in the idol acts as a guardian angel blessing all, conferring the highest good on those who bow to it.

The Image, A Mass Of Chaitanya

The idol is only a symbol of the Divine. A devotee does not behold therein a block of stone or a mass of metal. It is an emblem of God for him. He visualises the Indwelling Presence in the Murti or image. All the Saiva Nayanars, saints of South India, attained God-realisation through worship of the Linga, the image of Lord Siva. For a devotee, the image is a mass of Chaitanya or consciousness. He draws inspiration from the image. The image guides him. It talks to him. It assumes human form to help him in a variety of ways. The image of Lord Siva in the temple at Madurai in South India helped the fuel-cutter and the old woman. The image in the temple at Tirupati assumed human form and gave witness in the court to help His devotees. There are marvels and mysteries. Only the devotees understand these.

When Idols Became Alive

For a Bhakta or a sage, there is no such thing as *Jada* or insentient matter. Everything is Vasudeva or Chaitanya—*Vasudevah Sarvam Iti*. The devotee beholds actually the Lord in the idol. Narsi Mehta was put to the test by a king. The king said: "O Narsi, if you are a sincere devotee of Lord Krishna, if as you say the idol is Lord Krishna Himself, let this idol move." According to the prayer of Narsi Mehta, the idol moved. The sacred bull Nandi before Siva's idol took the food offered by Tulsidas. The Murti played with Mira Bai. It was full of life and Chaitanya for her.

When Appayya Dikshitar went to the Tirupati temple in South India, the Vaishnavas refused him admission. The next morning they found the Vishnu Murti in the temple changed into Siva Murti. The Mahant was much astonished and startled, asked pardon and prayed to Appayya Dikshitar to change the Murti again into Vishnu Murti.

Kanaka Dasa was a great devotee of Lord Krishna in Udipi, in the district of South Kanara, in South India. He was not allowed to enter the temple on account of his low birth. Kanaka Dasa went round the temple and saw a small window at the back of the

temple. He seated himself in front of the window. He was soon lost in singing songs in praise of Lord Krishna. Many people gathered round him. They were very much attracted by the sweet melody of his music and the depth of his devotion. Lord Krishna turned round to enable Kanaka Dasa to get His Darsana. The priests were struck with wonder. Even today, pilgrims are shown the window and the place where Kanaka Dasa sat and sang.

The Murti is the same as the Lord, for it is the vehicle of the expression of the Mantra-Chaitanya which is the Devata. The same attitude should the devotee have in regard to the Murti in the temple, which he would evince if the Lord would appear before him in person and speak to him in articulate sound.

Vedanta And Idol-Worship

A pseudo-Vedantin feels himself ashamed to bow or prostrate himself before an idol in the temple. He feels that his Advaita will evaporate if he prostrates himself. Study the lives of the reputed Tamil saints, Appar, Sundarar, Sambandhar, etc. They had the highest Advaitic realisation. They saw Lord Siva everywhere and yet they visited all temples of Siva, prostrated before the idol and sang hymns which are on record now. The sixty-three Nayanar saints practised *Charya* and *Kriya* only and attained God-realisation thereby. They swept the floor of the temple, collected flowers, made garlands for the Lord and put on lights in the temple. They were illiterate, but attained the highest realisation. They were practical Yogis and their hearts were saturated with pure devotion. They were embodiments of Karma Yoga. All practised the Yoga of Synthesis. The idol in the temple was all Chaitanya or Consciousness for them. It was not a mere block of stone.

Madhusudana Swami, who had Advaitic realisation, who beheld oneness of the Self and who had Advaitic Bhava, was intensely attached to the form of Lord Krishna with flute in His hands.

Tulasidas realised the all-pervading essence. He had cosmic consciousness. He communed with the all-pervading, formless Lord. And yet, his passion for Lord Rama with bow in His hand did not vanish. When he had been to Vrindavana and saw the Murti of Lord Krishna with flute in His hands, he said: "I will not bow my head to this form." At once Lord Krishna's form assumed the form of Lord Rama. Then only he bowed his head. Tukaram also had the same cosmic experience as that of Tulasidas. He sings in his Abhanga: "I see my Lord all-pervading, just as sweetness pervades the sugar-cane;" and yet, he always speaks of his Lord Vitthala of Pandarpur with His hands on the hips. Mira also realised her identity with the all-pervading Krishna, and yet she was not tired of repeating again and again: "My Giridhara Nagar."

From the above facts, we can clearly infer that one can realise God through worship of Murti or idol; that the worship of the Lord in Saguna form is a great aid for the realisation of the Lord in His all-pervading, formless aspect also; that the worship of the Murti is very essential for the purpose of concentration and meditation in the beginning and that such a worship is not in anyway a hindrance to the attainment of

God-consciousness. Those who vehemently attack Murti Puja are groping in extreme darkness and ignorance, and they have no real knowledge of Puja and worship. They enter into unnecessary vain debates and discussion against Murti Puja to show that they are learned persons. They have not done any real Sadhana at all. They are persons who have made idle talking and tall talk their habit and profession. They have ruined themselves. They have unsettled the minds of countless persons and ruined them also. The whole world worships symbols and Murtis only in some form or the other. The mind is disciplined in the beginning by fixing it on a concrete object or symbol. When it is rendered steady and subtle, it can be fixed later on, on an abstract idea such as '*Aham Brahma Asmi.*' When one advances in meditation, the form melts in the formless and he becomes one with the formless essence. Image worship is not contrary to the view of Vedanta. It is rather a help.

Those who have not understood the philosophy and significance of idol-worship will have, now at least, a clear understanding of them. Their eyes will be opened now. Ignorant persons only, who have not studied Sastras and who have not associated with Yogis, sages and Bhaktas, raise unnecessary arguments against idol-worship.

From Ritualistic Bhakti To Para-Bhakti

Bhakti is of two kinds, viz., higher Bhakti or Para-Bhakti, and lower Bhakti or ritualistic Bhakti. Ritualistic worship is Vaidhi or Gauni Bhakti. It is formal Bhakti. Vaidhi Bhakti is the lower type of devotion depending on external aids. The mind becomes purer and purer. The aspirant gradually develops love for God through ritualistic worship. He who does ritualistic worship rings bells, adores a Pratika (symbol) or Pratima (image), does Puja with flowers and sandal paste, burns incense, waves light before the image, offers Naivedya or food for God, etc.

Mukhya Bhakti or Para Bhakti is advanced type of devotion. It is higher Bhakti. It transcends all convention. A devotee of this type knows no rule. He does not perform any external worship. He beholds his Lord everywhere, in every object. His heart is saturated with love for God. The whole world is Vrindavana for him. His state is ineffable. He attains the acme of bliss. He radiates love, purity and joy wherever he goes and inspires all who come in contact with him.

The aspirant who worships the idol in the beginning beholds the Lord everywhere and develops Para Bhakti. From Vaidhi Bhakti, he passes on to Ragatmika Bhakti or Prema Bhakti. He beholds the whole world as the Lord. The ideas of good and bad, right and wrong, etc., vanish. He sees the Lord in a rogue, dacoit, cobra, scorpion, ant, dog, tree, log of wood, block of stone, sun, moon, stars, fire, water, earth, etc. His vision or experience baffles description. Glory to such exalted Bhaktas who are veritable Gods on earth, who live to lift others from the quagmire of Samsara and save them from the clutches of death!

Hinduism leads the aspirants gradually from material images to mental images, from the diverse mental-images to the one Personal God, and from the Personal God to the Impersonal Absolute or the Transcendental Nirguna Brahman.

The Glory Of Hindu Philosophy And Hindu Mode Of Worship

How sublime is Hindu philosophy and Hindu mode of worship! It does not stop or end with worship of idol alone. The Sadhaka is taken, step by step, to higher stages of devotion and Samadhi or communion, through the worship of the idol. Though he worships the idol, he has to keep before his mental eye the all-pervading Lord. He has to feel His presence in his heart and in all objects also. Even in worshipping a small idol, he has to repeat the Purusha-Sukta and to think of the Virat Purusha with countless heads, countless eyes, countless hands, etc., who extends beyond the universe, the Lord or the Atman who dwells in the hearts of all beings. The same man who burns incense, scented sticks and camphor before the idol says: "The sun does not shine there nor the moon nor the stars nor the lightning. How then could the little fire shine there? All shine after Him. His effulgence alone illumines the whole world." The ways and rules of worship—Puja Vidhi—and the secrets of worship that are described in the Hindu scriptures, are scientifically accurate and highly rational. It is only ignorant people who have not studied the scriptures and who have not associated with the devotees and great souls, who vilify worship of idols or Murtis.

Every other religion lays certain fixed dogmas and attempts to force people to follow them. It has only one kind of drug to treat several diseases. It gives only one kind of food for all and for all conditions. It places before the followers only one coat. It must fit Albert, Atkinson, Ahluwalia, Antony and Abdul Rehman. The Hindus know that the images, crosses and crescents are simply so many symbols to fix the mind in the beginning for developing concentration, so many concrete pegs to hang their spiritual ideas and convictions on. The symbol is not necessary for everyone. It is not compulsory in Hinduism. It is not needed for an advanced Yogi or sage. Symbol is like the slate which is useful for a boy of the first standard. Those who are not in need of it have no right to say that it is wrong. If they say that it is wrong, they only betray their ignorance.

Conclusion

There is nothing wrong in worshipping an idol in the beginning. You must superimpose God and His attributes on the idol. You must think of the Antar-Atman hidden in the idol. The aspirant gradually begins to feel that the Lord he worships is in the idol, in the hearts of all creatures and in all the names and forms of this universe. He begins to feel His presence everywhere.

Idol-worship is only the beginning of religion. Certainly it is not its end. The same Hindu scriptures, which prescribe idol-worship for beginners, speak of meditation on the Infinite or the Absolute and contemplation of the significance of *Tat Tvam Asi* Mahavakya, for advanced aspirants.

There are different stages of worship. The first is the worship of idols. The next is recitation of Mantras and offering of prayers. Mental worship is superior to worship with flowers. Meditation on the Absolute or the attributeless Nirguna Brahman is the best of all.

The supreme state is Self-realisation or Brahma-sakshatkara. The second in rank is meditation. The Yogi practises Sadhana or unceasing meditation on the Supreme Self. The third is the worship of symbols. The fourth is the performance of rituals and pilgrimages to holy places. The Sastras and Gurus are like kind mothers. They take hold of the hands of the aspirants, take them step by step, stage by stage, till they are established in Nirvikalpa Samadhi or superconscious state. They prescribe gross forms of Sadhana or spiritual practices for the neophytes or beginners with gross mind and give lessons on abstract meditation for the advanced aspirants who are endowed with pure, subtle and sharp intellect.

Each marks a stage of progress. The human soul makes different kinds of attempts to grasp and realise the Infinite or the Absolute according to his strength or degree of evolution. He soars higher and higher, gathers more and more strength, and eventually merges himself in the Supreme and attains oneness or identity.

Glory to the Hindu Rishis and the Hindu scriptures who take the aspirants from the lower to the higher form of worship, stage by stage, step by step, and ultimately help them to rest in the attributeless, all-pervading, formless, timeless, spaceless Brahman or the infinite and unconditioned Brahman of the Upanishads.

Beloved children of the Lord! Shed your ignorant disbelief this moment. Enshrine supreme, unshakable, living faith in your heart this very moment. Recall to your mind the glorious examples of Sri Mira, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the South Indian Alvars and Nayanars. They believed and they reaped the rich spiritual harvests. You too can enjoy great peace, happiness and prosperity here, and attain Him here and now, if you have this faith in idol-worship.

Though you may perform external worship at regular intervals, let the internal worship of the Lord in your heart be constant and unbroken. Here worship attains completeness. Life is divine worship. May you realise the significance of the universal worship of the *Virat* in daily life, and performing it, attain the *summum bonum* of life. May the Lord bless you all.