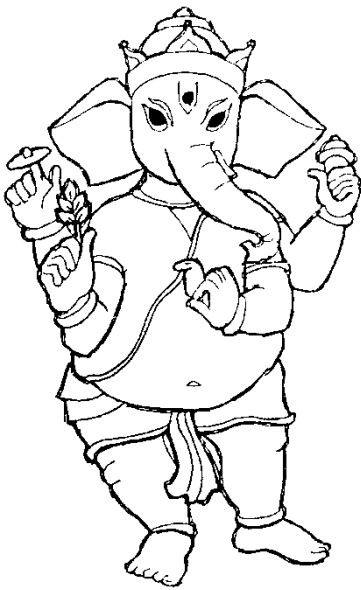# Hindu worship

Hindu worship, known as **puja,** involves all **five senses** of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing, and also what Hindus consider to be the **five basic elements**: **light, fire, earth, air** and **water**. It can be carried out in the home of Hindus before a **shrine,** or in the Hindu temple, which is known as a **mandir.**

Hindus wash thoroughly before prayers at home. When they enter a temple, they remove their shoes. They show respect to the gods by making **offerings** of money or food (rice, nuts or fruit) to the shrines of the gods.
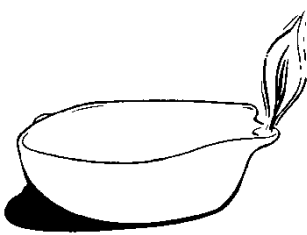


Puja begins with the **washing** of the images of the gods. They are washed with water, and sometimes with a milk based mixture called **panchamrit.**

Next the images of the gods are **anointed** with a perfumed, coloured marks made of **haldi** (turmeric) and **kumkum.** These marks are called **tilaka** and are also worn by Hindu priests and Hindu women.

**Offerings of food** and **flowers** are now made to the images. The offering of food is made because the gods provide people with all their needs. The offerings of flowers signify respect and worship.

**Incense** is burnt before the image and a **bell** is rung. Both of these show the respect of the worshipper and announce the presence of the god. In the temple the curtains would now be drawn before the gods, and the people spend some time in prayer.



The climax of the worship is the lighting of the **Arti** lamp. On the puja tray with the lamp are a bell, a flower, a pot of ghee (oil) and a pot of water. The lamp is circled 3 times in front of the image clockwise. The priest then scatters **holy water** over the worshippers, while they sing hymns to the gods.

The blessings of the Arti lamp are shared by the congregation. They make an offering on the tray. They pass their hands over the light, then over their eyes and hands, symbolically receiving the blessings of God. In Mandirs in Britain it is usual to share food at the end of worship and even for all the worshippers to join in a meal.