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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Living Our Traditions

How to make the most of a temple visit

By Usha Swarup, Mumbai

Ālaya is home and *Devālaya* is the home of Deva or *Bhagavān*. Thus a temple pulsates with the *prāṇa* and blessings of *Bhagavān*. We go to the temple to have darsana, vision and receive blessings. In the *darśana* we see that we are already at home in the magnificent creation that is this world and our life.

Guided by the *Āgama śāstra*, the Hindu temple is built in the image of Mount Meru, the sacred mountain that represents ultimate knowledge. The *Garbha-graha*, sanctum sanctorum is so named because it is literally the womb of the temple. The 'Bīja', seed of the temple is placed in a *kalaśa* (pitcher) with the chanting of mantras and sacred rituals which is buried. Directly above this the murti of the deity pulsating with *prāṇa-śakti* is established.



Badrinath

The deity is invoked in the temple *vimāna* (tall structure over the sanctum sanctorum) and hence even if people could not step into the temple because of the distance or it being on a mountain top, they would delight in seeing the temple *vimāna*. The symbolism of the temple, through its rituals, strengthens this resolve of the devotee to seek self-knowledge.

Some of the things you can do to make the most of your temple visit are as follows

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- Read about the temple beforehand. This helps prepare for the visit by familiarising with the deity, legends, etc
 - Wear fresh clean clothes in natural fabrics. These are recommended as they facilitate better absorption of the temple aura.
 - Plan to visit during temple hours, for puja, aarti or any event specific to the shrine.
 - From a distance, see the temple *vimāna* which is likened to the deity itself
 - Walk through the temple slowly paying attention to the symbolism and architecture all around. Symbolising the journey of walking through our every day life to the different devatas and finally to the main deity, the sculptures reflect the journey of external preoccupations to moving inward. The images are speaking to us, if only we listen.
 - Make an offering at the shrine. Following local recommendations leaves us more fulfilled.
 - Watch the puja with focus while chanting relevant prayers. The connection with *Bhagavān* becomes stronger.
 - Make sure to have *darśana* , a direct vision of the Lord.
 - Pray for whatever you wish – relief from suffering, peace, specific desires, *Cittaśuddhi*, *Mokṣa* or for *Lokakalyāṇa*. Prayer being a karma always rewards us with *punya*.
 - Reverentially, receive *prasāda* from the Purohit. Consciously, extend the cheerfulness and grace with which you receive the *prasāda* , to your whole life.
 - In places where a *pradakṣiṇa* is possible, please do that with the thought that ‘May I see all of *Īśvara*’. The Lord is the center, source and essence of our lives. When you go around clockwise, you are moving with certain natural forces. The consecrated space functions like a vortex that reverberates, and also draws us.

Finally, sit for some time in the premises doing additional prayers or meditate to soak in the blessings from the sacred place.