

If Hindus Can Worship Anywhere, Why Go to a Place of Worship?

Key Vocabulary

sacred	Something holy, religious or special.
deity	A god or goddess.
Brahman	The one ultimate reality in Hindu Dharma.
mandir	A special place for Hindu worship.
mantra	Special sets of words or sounds that are repeated.
puja	An act of worship in Hindu Dharma.
shrine	A holy place to pray.
pilgrimage	A sacred journey that people take for a reason, usually for spiritual or religious purposes.
worship	Showing a god or goddess how great you think they are through your words, actions and thoughts.
arti	A ritual performed in a mandir where a lamp or flame is waved.
Brahmin	A priest.

Hindu Dharma

Hindus have many gods and goddesses who represent different aspects of the ultimate reality, known as **Brahman**. This is why Hindus **worship** these many different gods and goddesses in the form of murtis (idols).

Hindus believe that **Brahman** is the supreme spirit which exists in every living thing and is beyond the universe. They believe **Brahman** is the foundation of all life.

Worship

Hindus can have a **shrine** at home or go to the **mandir** to **worship**. They pray for various reasons: asking for help, giving thanks, praise, **worship** or seeking forgiveness.

A **shrine** usually consists of idols or maybe pictures of the **deities**. There are no set rules. Hindus usually make offerings to the **deity** they are praying to. They might repeat the god or goddess's name, sing hymns, chant **mantras** or carry out a **puja** using:

- a bell – to show that you are ready to pray and to invite the god to the home;
- an incense burner – to feel the presence of the god or goddess;
- kumkum powder – red powder put on the forehead of worshippers and the murti to show respect;
- a murti – a statue of the **deity** being worshipped;
- a food offering – usually fruit is offered to the god or goddess during the **puja**.

Mandirs

Many Hindus believe going to the **mandir** helps them to focus on their prayers, making sure they are not distracted. Some also go to the **mandir** because there are so many different forms of **Brahman** so the **mandir** helps Hindus **worship** the different manifestations (forms).

Mandirs are also used for weddings, parties and death ceremonies. Some **mandirs** even have yoga and meditation sessions.

When Hindus go to the **mandir**, before they enter, they must remove their shoes as a way of showing respect to the **deities**. They would then ring the bell when they approach the **shrine** and give any offerings they have brought (fruit, flowers, nuts) to the **Brahmin**.

Prayers in a **mandir** are led by a **Brahmin**. The **Brahmin** will carry out an **arti** a few times a day and the offerings brought by worshippers are given back to them as prashad. **Puja**, just like in any home, also takes place in the **mandir**.

Features of a Mandir

Mandirs don't all look the same and that is what makes them unique. At a **mandir**, different parts of the building have a special meaning. The central **shrine** inside the **mandir** represents the heart of the Hindu worshipper. If the **mandir** has a tower, this symbolises a connection with heaven. Special thought goes into where a **mandir** is built and the ground always needs to be checked and blessed first.

The architecture of a **mandir** is an important reason why worshippers are drawn to praying there. It is believed that the architecture itself brings a positive energy.



Pilgrimage

Hindus travel to special places on **pilgrimages**. The most famous are in India. Some of these are:

- Ganges River – 40 million Hindus travel to the Ganges yearly. They believe that performing special rituals in the river will end the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
- Varanasi – Varanasi is on the Ganges. It is believed that bathing here cleans a person's sins.
- Kumbh Mela Festival – Every 12 years, millions of people bathe at the place where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers meet.