



# *Vedanta Letters*

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*Aarti*  
आरती  
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# What is आरती ?

**A**arti (आरती) is perhaps the most attended ritual in Hindu temples yet it is least understood. 'Aarti' Darshan is considered to be one of the most auspicious Darshans in Pushti Margiya and Maryada Purushottam temples. Aarti is one of the 16 offerings of the Pooja ritual. Aarti is also considered to be a stand-alone ritual in Hinduism. It was the masters of the school of Bhakti (devotion) who transformed the simple-fire ritual into an exalted spiritual method referred as 'aarti'.

In Maryada Purushottam temples, Aarti of God/Goddess is performed twice a day, in the morning at the sun rise and again in the evening at the sunset. While in Pushti Margiya temples, Aarti is performed during each Darshans, typically 6 to 8 times a day. If you want to experience the true mahima of Aarti darshan, then you must visit Nathdwara temple in Rajasthan, India.

Nowadays Aarti has become traditional Indian form of greeting, which has no more religious significance than a handshake in western culture or giving someone a wreath of flowers as a welcome in Hawaii. As an example, 'Aarti' is often performed to greet the principal celebrant in India such as Pope, a movie star or political leaders.

I have come across many explanations on Aarti but none of them conveyed a true meaning of aarti. Recently I found an explanation, which really makes sense and truly says what aarti is all about, which I want to share with you.

## **What we know about the Aarti**

The ritual of aarti is a kind of simple fire ritual. That is why is frequently translated as a ritual as of 'waving lamps'. In simplest term the Aarti consists of a small

flame, which burns on a wick, placed on a plate, which is rotated round the Deity. **Aarti** is a form of congregational worship, in which the devotees stand facing the image of a deity or a defied saint or, the personage ('living idol') of an exalted saint singing devotional songs in unison. Normally, musical instruments such as bells, gongs and cymbals accompany the singing. The object of worship is devoutly decorated with posy garlands and, aromatic incense and musk are kept smoldering (this is commonly referred as Shringar). While the devotees sing psalms, either an official or a devotee revolves clockwise, (usually) a fivefold oil lamp – consisting of five oil – traylets - round the object of adoration. By waving the lights in circular motion, we, in fact, symbolically perform 'Pradakshina' around our Deity.



A lamp with wicks burning clarified butter (ghee) is most preferred. After the devotional singing, the flame of the aarti-lamp is offered to the devotees, who pass their hands by turns over the sacred flame and quickly draw them to their faces

and heads as a gesture of drawing onto themselves the auspicious energy emanating from 'the receptacle grace' i.e. the flame.

A hymn is an expression of ardent devotion which in turn is capable of evoking emotions in the hearts of those who recite it. The most common hymn (ironically this is also called 'aarti') is 'Om Jaya Jagdish Hare'.

## **What we should know about the Aarti**

The Word. First let us understand the word. The word 'aarti' is an adjective form of the word 'aart' (आर्ति) which in Sanskrit/Gujarati means tiredness or Vedna.

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The Meaning. When we think of Aarti, we immediately have an image of ourselves waving a flamed lamp in front of an idol. This action really does not go well with the meaning of the word 'aarti' which we just learnt. You may think what tiredness or vedna got to do with waving a flamed lamp in front of an idol. Now let us understand this concept. This is little hard to understand moreover, it is hard to explain in English language because the lack of proper words to explain the meaning! However, I will try!

The vedic philosophy believes that Lord does everything for us. In fact the very existence of us is due to Lord's Kriya. This constant kriya makes Lord tired and experiences vedna. In order to alleviate him/her from this vedna or tiredness, we the devotees essentially tell Lord that give us your vedna and we will perform your work.

In aarti, the jyot or deep means aatma. Usually there are five jyots representing five pranas. The thali or a lamp holder represents the body. So basically when we wave a lighted lamp in front of an idol we are saying to the Lord that give us your vedna and I will do all the work. Based on this thought, we have 'dev podhi ekadashi' and 'dev uthi ekadashi'. The period between these two ekadashis's is a resting period for Lord.

The circular waving motion of the lamp represents the circle of life or Kriya chakra. In other words we are saying that we will keep this kriya chakra moving forward. Remember, without Kriya there is no progress!

The waving motion differs from sect to sect and region to region. This has to do with local customs, schools of thoughts and priest preferences. This is also a deep subject matter. We will discuss it later.

After aarti ritual we usually pass the lamp (aarti) to others. The philosophy behind this is that we essentially all have to distribute vedna and participate in Lord's kriya.

### **The correct phrase**

We often say that ham aarti karne ja rahe he (हम आरती करने जा रहे हैं). This phrase is philosophically incorrect,

instead we must say hum aarti utarne ja rahe he (हम आरती उतारने जा रहे हैं). In other words hame dukh utana hai, dukh karna nahi. Similarly we say 'aarti le lo' instead we must say 'aarti bat lo'. In other words dukh lena nahi, dukh ko bat lo.

### **The Philosophy behind 'Aarti'**

The Ritual of the Aarti makes the light of the flame dispel darkness, the incense that is burnt gives out fragrance, a bell is rung, hands are clapped while one sings the Aarti. If you ask a Feng-Shui expert, he will confirm that all the above is very good to ward of an evil eye!

When the five-wick lamp is lit, the devotee waves it symbolically, offering his five pranas (The entire being of five pranas, which are praan, apan, samaan, udaan and vyan. Praan has its seat in the lungs and is breath, Apan goes downwards and out at the anus. Samaan has its seat in the cavity of the navel and is essential to digestion. Udaan rises up in the throat and enters the head. Vyan is diffused through the whole body), to the Lord, totally surrendering himself and gaining, seeking the union of the devotee's soul with the Supreme Self.

### **Benefits of Aarti**

- Worship in a congregational setting is helpful in more than one way.
- In a communal prayer devotees can pray in a space charged with the homogeneous devotional fervors of a group can cut across the insulation of the ego and merge easily into a group rhythm.
- It induces a sense of expanded consciousness in which one tends to lose the individual 'voice' subtly, an awareness of being a part of a 'Whole' sense of separate identity melts into the mainstream of collective consciousness.

### **Worthy to note**

In Vishno Devi temple, the holy cave is closed for pilgrims during the period the Aarti is being performed. It usually takes around two hours for the Aarti to be completed. Only the Pujaris, Sahayaks and an officer

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are permitted in the cave when the Aarti is being performed.

Indian Catholics perform 'Aarti' when a child returns home after receiving First Holy Communion, and when newly married couples are received by their respective families. Hindus do the same at the marriage ceremony. Bride's Mother perform 'aarti' of her would be son-in-law when she welcomes him at the Lagna Mandap. The bhav behind this aarti is that the Bride's Mother essentially conveys to the son-in-law that give me all your worries and take good care of my daughter as your

wife. This tradition has been observed since Rama's wedding to Sitaji in Tretra Yuga.

In Badrinath temple, usually 'aarti' is performed with Chandan dhoop. Chandan dhoop gives coolness (sheetalta). Now Badrinath is a very cold place, then why Chandan dhoop aarti which will make the environment even colder. The bhav behind this is that Lord Badrinath is doing tap underneath a tree, and due to this ardent tap, Lord Bdirñtah experiences tapoagni. Therefore, in order to alleviate Lord from this tapogani, we the devotees offer Chandan dhoop aarti.



**Hymn of Creation from the Rigveda**  
**Mandala 10, Sutra 129, Sloka 7**

इयं विसृष्टियेत् आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न ।  
यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन् सो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद ॥

That from which this creation came into being,  
whether It had held it together or It had not,  
He who surveys it in the highest region,  
He truly, knows it, or maybe He does not know!

"Whatever you may fail to guard,  
guard well your tongue; for flawed  
speech unfailingly invokes  
anguish and affliction."

**Tirukural Verse 127**