



HINDU TEMPLE OF CENTRAL INDIANA VISITORS' GUIDE

Welcome to the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana.

The Temple was inaugurated in 2006, with a mission to serve the spiritual needs of Central Indiana's Hindu families and represent the diversity of Hindu faith and culture.

Our logo takes shape from a statement from the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, the Rg Veda,

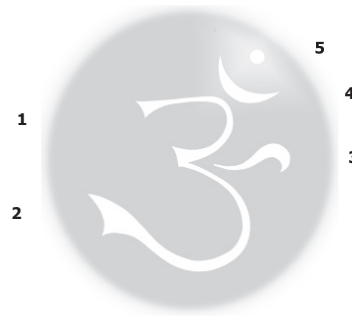
"Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti"
The Truth is One, though the wise
may call it by many names. (RV 1.164.46)

The sunrise OM symbol evokes the spiritual life of Hindus as an awakening into oneness, and living in constant awareness of God's omnipresence.

Visitors are welcome to observe or participate in the services. This brochure is designed to answer some of the questions our visitors have asked and to give you a context for understanding the symbols and services in the Temple.

If you would like to visit the Temple, a calendar of events and directions to the Temple can be found at www.htci.org. If you would like a guided tour or if you have further questions about your visit, please contact the Temple's Outreach and Education Committee at htcivasu@yahoo.com.

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The symbol, OM, is repeated throughout the Temple, both in sound and form.

The Sound of OM

- OM is the vibration set into motion at the moment when the primordial One separated itself from itself and creation began. This may be thought of as the Hindu concept of the Big Bang.

God's OMnipresence

- The vibration reverberates in every atom of matter, reminding us of the origin of the universe in God and our purpose and destiny to know our oneness in God.

Chanting OM

- Every prayer at the Temple begins with the chanting of OM to attune us to the divine presence within and around us.

The Form of OM

OM is usually represented, as above, by the Sanskrit vowel, pronounced AUM. The visual form of OM can be understood as a diagram of Hinduism. The top part of the symbol (labeled 1) represents the conscious mind. The bottom part of the symbol (2) represents the unconscious mind. The third part is a state of mind which shares the awareness of the conscious mind and the quiet of the unconscious mind, a state achieved in meditation or deep sleep, that leads us out into a different experience of reality. In this state, the inner eye (4) opens and what the inner eye perceives is the dot (5), representing oneness.

A Sanskrit Prayer

*Omkaaram bindu samyuktam
nityam dhyaayanti yoginah
Kaama-dam moksha-dam chaiva
Omkaaraaya namo namah*

We meditate, as the yogis constantly do,
upon the sound OM,
to realize our identity with the One.
May this meditation upon the sacred sound of OM
lead us to liberation.

What to expect when you visit the Temple

A visit to the Temple, for Hindus, is a journey inward, to discover the divinity present in every one of us. Every aspect of the Temple is symbolic of that journey of discovery.

Why remove shoes before entering the worship area?

- Practically, this helps keep the worship area clean
- Symbolically, this is a conscious stepping out of one's usual worldly concerns to focus on the divine presence within.

Why do you sit on the floor?

- The Padmasana pose of yoga (sitting cross-legged on the floor) promotes discipline and balance, quelling the restlessness of the mind and body, and allowing spiritual energy to flow upward unimpeded through the kundalini (the spinal column)

Why do people come in and out during the service?

- Hindus typically do not worship as a congregation. People may come to meditate or offer individual prayers during the service. Others, who come specifically for the service will stay throughout.

What language is the service in?

- Most rituals are accompanied by chanting from the Sanskrit scriptures and prayers and hymns in other Indian languages. (Translations of some prayers into English are available. Please ask at the front desk.)

Why are the priests dressed differently?

- While our priests perform services and rituals from many traditions in Hinduism, they wear the clothing and symbols of their own family heritage and religious schools.

What is the role of the priests?

- Priests at a Hindu Temple have been trained from their earliest years, in the scriptures and the performance of rituals. Many come from families who have been priests for many generations.
- The priest's primary role is to ensure that rituals and services, performed either at home or in the Temple, are conducted correctly and meaningfully.
- While Hindu priests generally do not give sermons, they do explain the significance of prayers and the metaphor of specific services and, may, if asked, offer spiritual advice.
- Some priests do teach children and adults the Sanskrit scriptures and prayers.

Can visitors participate in the service?

- Visitors are welcome to participate in the aarti (the individual offering of the lamp at the end of the service) and to receive the blessing at the end of the service. For the final blessing, participants line up on the left, and receive from the priest a spoonful of the water (often scented with spices) in their cupped right palm and drink it. Participants will also receive some of the fruits and/or sweets offered during the service (again received in the right hand).

Will there be any efforts made to convert visitors?

- No. Hindus believe all faith traditions are paths to liberation, and do not seek to convert others to Hinduism. We hope your observations lead you to see the common values and spiritual goals of people of all faiths.

About Hinduism

Who founded Hinduism?

Hinduism is not founded by one prophet; our foundational scriptures (the Vedas and Upanishads) were "heard" or intuited by sages in a state of transcendence.

What is Hinduism's creation story?

The Hymn of the Origin says that the universe was manifested from love and truth by and from the primordial One. The universe is said to have been created and destroyed many times as "the divine play" of the Lord.

What is the goal of life, according to Hinduism?

All of creation has emerged from the Divine Being and is charged with the divine presence; we should see God in ourselves, all around us, and beyond. The goal of life is to free oneself of illusory attachments, remain in constant awareness of God's presence and to experience the oneness of all creation in God.

Why don't we experience this oneness?

Hindu sages have pondered this question at length and concluded that the problem lies in the human mind's tendency to wander, to be distracted by the senses and to assume that the mind's experiences, desires, fears and knowledge reflect the full nature of reality.

How do we rise beyond the mind's illusions?

There is another part of us, called the Atma (soul), which is the indwelling divine witness, eternal and imperturbably in peace, love and bliss. We learn to discipline our minds so that we may know the Atma present in us.

What disciplines help us achieve this goal?

These disciplines of meditation, spiritual learning, service, worship and contemplation of God all help us still the mind's restless nature. These are called yoga, the connecting of the individual soul (Atma) to the all-pervading spirit (Paramatma).

What is the Hindu view of sin?

Sin arises from the error of the mind which believes it is alone and separate. Such a mind constantly oscillates between pain and pleasure, uncontrolled desire and uncontrolled anger. To expiate sin, one must learn to moderate desire and anger and to act selflessly to manifest God's will.

From the Bhagavad Gita (a Sanskrit scripture)

(The Lord's teaching to His devotee Arjuna)

No matter what conditions you encounter in life, your right is only to the works--not to the fruits thereof. You should not be impelled to act for selfish reasons, nor should you be attached to inaction.

--*Bhagavad Gita 2.47*

Just surrender completely to My will with firm faith and loving contemplation. I shall liberate you from all sins. Do not fear.

-- *Bhagavad Gita 13.31*



How do Hindus think about God?

The Vedas proclaim that there is one God, and only God. We can think of this One in many ways:

- **Paramatman:** God as infinite, all-pervading, absolute, beyond attribute or limit.
- **Ishvara:** God in relation to the universe: the Creator (Brahma), the Redeemer (Vishnu) and the one who impels evolution and transcendence

(Shiva). Each of these is an aspect of divinity, a way for minds used to names and attributes to contemplate the infinite and attributeless divine.

- **Shakti:** A feminine personification of God as the divine energy or grace that makes the Ishvara aspects manifest in the world.
 - **Avatar:** God as a teaching incarnation who uplifts mankind to a higher level of consciousness.
 - **Antharyaamin:** God as the indweller
 - **Archa:** God as the one who accepts our worship
- When Hindus chant the prayers addressed to different aspects of God, we see that each is not a separate entity but a different way of contemplating the same Reality.

Do Hindus worship idols?

Before the Temple was built and again, when the Temple was opened, we prayed that God, in His/Her/Its infinite grace be present to us in this place. When the deities were brought in, we prayed once more, in the Pranaprathishta ceremony, that God be present to us in these forms, to accept our devotion and worship. While we believe that God is graciously present to us at the Temple, it is clearly understood that the Divine Reality is beyond all names and forms.

How does Archa worship contribute to spiritual evolution?

- The deities all embody specific and evocative iconography and the prayers and rituals bring out each symbol for contemplation.
- The deities can be viewed as mirrors for the Atma present in us or as windows through which we see the infinite.
- The rituals are metaphors for a symbolic cleansing of the mind and the senses, in order to more clearly see the presence and the grace of God within, around and beyond us.
- The rituals also bring together body, mind and soul together in the act of worship. We participate fully in the ritual and it helps us focus our minds on the presence of God.

Are there religious practices followed by all Hindus?

Hindus often describe their faith as a way of life, a constant effort to make oneself mindful of God's omnipresence. However, individuals practice what is meaningful to them at their level of readiness and evolution. Practices may include daily prayer and meditation, service, religious study, ritual worship, celebration of sacraments and observances, pilgrimages, dietary laws etc. It is important to distinguish social customs from spiritual observances.

A Typical Service

- A typical service begins with the chanting of **OM** to attune ourselves to the divine vibration. This is followed by **Ganapathi Prarthana**, a meditation upon the ideal selflessness of one who is constantly attuned to the divine presence.
- The priest then offers the deity the "**sixteen services**" that one would offer an honored guest. These include the offering of a seat, water to refresh, new clothes, flowers, sandalwood paste, food, fruit, and incense. Sanskrit scriptures and music are chanted, often including contemplation on various attributes of divinity (including that of being without attributes!).
- The prayers of individual participants are also offered during the service and at this time, the priests will read the names of those making the prayers. The priest then performs **Archana**, chanting an excerpt from one of the Ashtotras (108 Names of God) or Sahasranamas (1008 Names of God). With the recitation of each name or phrase, the priest holds a flower or petal to his heart, invoking those divine qualities in us, and then surrendering that flower at the feet of the deity, as an offering of our best to God and as a recognition that the name invoked cannot reflect the totality which is God.
- Finally, realizing that all we can offer is already God's in the first place, we offer ourselves to God, an act symbolized by **aarti**, the offering of the small, lighted lamp, a spark of the divine energy which fills the universe. This surrender to God is accompanied by the singing of the aarti prayer and ringing bells.
- All services end with a **prayer for peace:** *Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi* (Let there be peace, always peace, everywhere peace!)
- The water and food offerings are then distributed to all participants as part of the final blessing.

Abhishekam

Abhishekam is a service in which the deity is bathed in water and milk, and sometimes in other natural substances such as turmeric, honey or fruit. The abhishekam can be understood in many ways:

- It maintains the integrity of the structure.
- It is a symbol of the abundant, overflowing grace of the Lord.
- It illustrates the presence of God in the sweetness and selfless abundance of nature,
- By offering the rewards of our labors to God, we purify ourselves of desire, possessiveness, and other forms of egoism and reveal the divinity within ourselves.

Abhishekam Prayer

O Supreme Lord! May we realize your infinite sweetness
In the coolness of the reviving breeze, in the life giving waters of the flowing rivers, in the healing qualities innate in the herbs.
O Supreme Lord! May we realize your infinite sweetness
In the promise of fresh opportunities present in the day time, in the prospect of renewal and restfulness during the night!
O Supreme Lord! May we realize your infinite sweetness
In the fruit bearing trees and plants, in the nourishing milk of the cows.
O Supreme Lord! May we realize your infinite sweetness
In the vastness of the star studded sky, in the life giving warmth of the Sun, in the fertility of the soil that sustains life on Earth!
And, O Supreme Lord, our repeated salutations to You!
May we be eternally grateful to you for all the Grace that you so unconditionally shower upon us!
We offer thanks to you for all the blessings which we enjoy.