

Practices & Rituals & Symbolism

HINDUISM

PRACTICES & RITUALS



- ✘ Passed down through generations
- ✘ No standard form
- ✘ Daily worship at home, no need to attend temple
- ✘ Purification before religious rituals
- ✘ Syllable “OM” chanted at the beginning and end of all Hindu prayers and readings (represents the supremacy of Brahman)
- ✘ Mantras: worshippers chant the names of deities as well as sacred phrases repeatedly
 - + “I meditate on the brilliance of the sun; may it illuminate my intellect”

WORSHIP AT HOME

- ✘ Elaborately decorated shrine serves as altar for worship
- ✘ Shrine includes pictures and statues of deities to help them focus and concentrate





WORSHIP AT HOME

- ✘ Most common form of worship at home: Puja
 - + Form of thanksgiving in which offerings are made to deities
 - + Offerings are placed on a tray near the shrine and presented to deities at certain points during worship
 - + Offerings: flowers, fruit, incense sticks, water, milk, clarified butter, lamp

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PUJA CONTINUED...

- ✘ Traditional Puja = 16 steps
- ✘ Performed on festival days and special occasions
- ✘ Concludes with the waving of a lamp around the altar while worshippers sing hymns and verses of praise
- ✘ After the final prayers are recited, the food that has been offered – and is now considered blessed – is redistributed to those present at the ceremony as a gift from the deities



WORSHIP IN THE HOME

✘ Homa:

- + Ritual that involves the burning of offerings in a fire that has been blessed by a priest
- + Also performed at Puja



WORSHIP IN TEMPLES

- ✘ Not a requirement
- ✘ Hindus usually visit temple during festivals or for special functions
- ✘ Conducted by priest and his helpers
- ✘ In the morning, priest rings temple bells, prepares the deities, and offers fresh flowers, incense and food on behalf of the devotees
- ✘ In the evening, devotees sing sacred hymns and share in waving of the lamp around the altar and distributing offerings

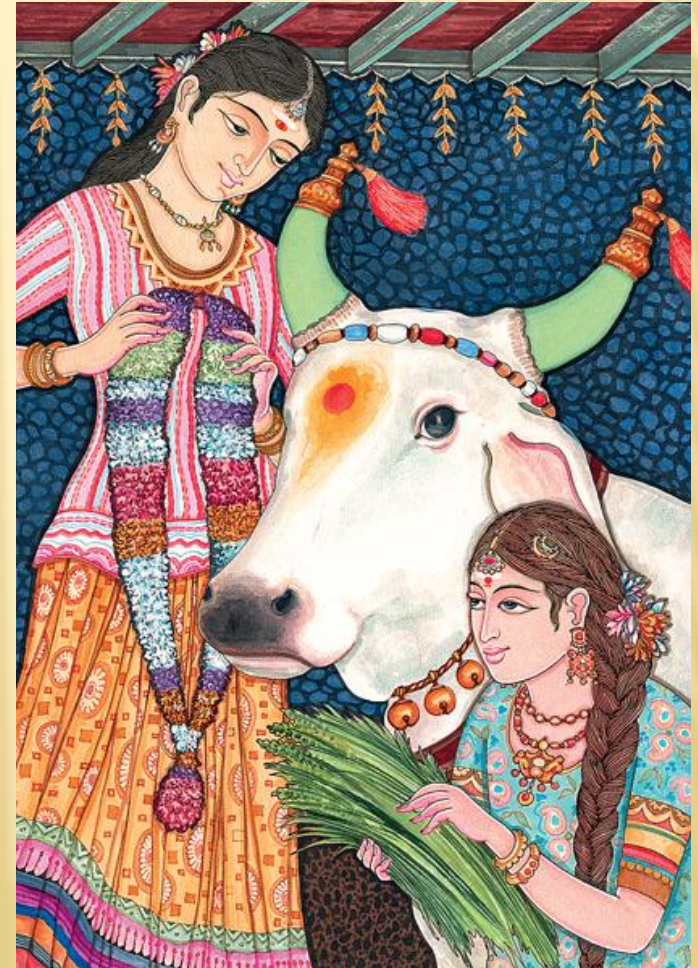


- ✘ Images of deities are treated like royalty – given ritual baths, adorned, and taken on procession on special occasions
- ✘ Many temples offer classes for children



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COW

- ✘ Most Hindus refrain from eating beef since cow is sacred
- ✘ “Holy cow”
- ✘ Cow = manifestation of all that is good and precious, symbol of the Earth – the nourisher, ever-giving provider

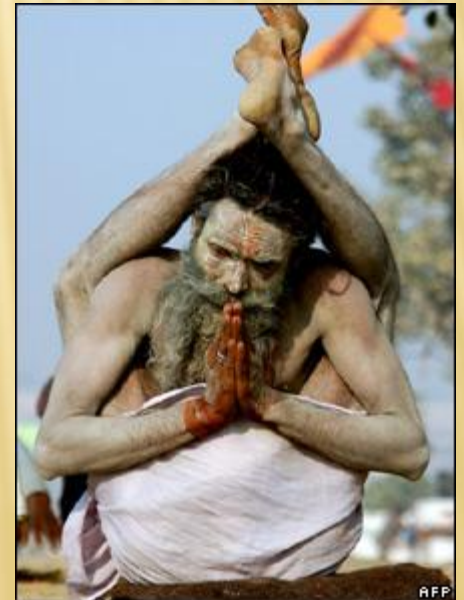
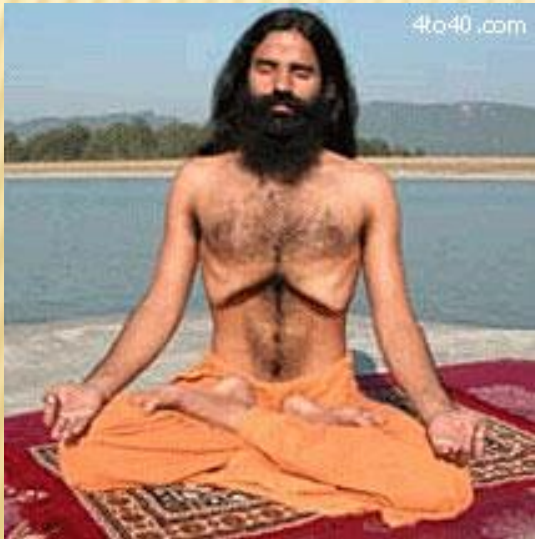


- ✘ Hindus aspire to a vegetarian lifestyle
- ✘ They don't worship the cow as they would a deity, they respect and honour it



YOGA AND MEDITATION

- ✘ Spiritual disciplines
- ✘ Yoga signifies the atman in union with the Brahman
- ✘ To achieve this union, meditation is necessary
- ✘ Meditation requires a sitting posture for long periods of time



- ✘ Meditators control their breathing so that it is regular and will not break their concentration
- ✘ They concentrate on a single object, sound, or idea until they are in a deep meditative state and are experiencing the divine presence
- ✘ **Swamis:**
 - + Holy men in India who dedicate their lives to meditation



PILGRIMAGES

- ✘ All Hindus strive to visit, at least once in a lifetime, the holy city of Varanasi, located along the west bank of the holy Ganges River
- ✘ It is believed that Ganges River fell from heaven to earth, giving life to people and watering the plains that produce much needed food



- ✘ Bathing in the river is the first thing pilgrims do when they arrive (daily right of local residents)
- ✘ Bathing in Ganges River cleanses Hindus of their sins



SYMBOLISM

× Om

- + Used as a mantra to evoke Brahman
- + Believed to contain the secrets of the universe and is chanted at the beginning of prayers, blessings, and meditation
- + Has 3 sounds and means:
 - × 3 worlds – earth, atmosphere, heaven
 - × 3 major Hindu gods – Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva
 - × 3 sacred Vedic texts



SYMBOLISM

✦ Swastika

- + Good luck
- + Well-being
- + Prosperity
- + Honesty
- + Usually in red
- + On wedding invitations, decorative drawings, textiles



SYMBOLISM

✘ Nataraja

- + Shiva, Lord of Dance
- + 4-handed Shiva whirling and playing drum
- + Drum symbolizes sound, speech, and the divine truth heard through revelation
- + Dance symbolizes energy and the endless cycle of creation and destruction



SYMBOLISM

✘ Forehead marks

- + Indicates the deity they worship
- + Symbolize the 3rd eye of wisdom
- + Many married Hindu women mark their forehead with red dot = symbolizes they're married
- + Worn daily or on special occasions
- + Thought to assist in concentration and meditation
- + Based on deities that are followed



SYMBOLISM

✘ Lotus Flower

- + It is believed that Brahman came from a lotus flower
- + Potential
- + Purity
- + Resurrection

