

# PUSPĀÑJALI

## Flowers of Submission

by H.H. Bhanu Swami

*Puṣpāñjali* literally means a handful of flowers that is offered to the Lord. Offering flowers is one of the *upacāras*, or ingredients of Deity worship. It is among the sixteen items, and among the five items (incense, lamp, *gandha*, flowers and food), and even among the two basic items (*gandha* and flowers) of worship. Flowers may also be used as substitutes for other items not available in worship. Clearly, flowers are a major ingredient in worship, present in both elaborate and abbreviated worship. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī dedicates a whole chapter to describing the flowers that are pleasing to the Lord. Thus an offering of flowers constitutes a means of worship which, though simple, is very pleasing to the Lord.

The worship of *devotees of the Lord* is similar to worship of the Lord. Sixteen items may be offered, and *ārati* may be performed essentially in the same way one would perform it for the Lord. On appearance and disappearance days of *ācāryas* this type of worship should be performed, just as we perform special worship of *avatāra* forms of the Lord on Their appearance days. Special food items should also be prepared and offered.

The worship of an *ācārya* on his appearance day with sixteen items is usually executed by one or two trained and qualified *pūjārīs*. To bring participation in worship to the rest of the devotees, there is a simple form of worship: offering of flowers, or *puṣpāñjali*.

This is done in the following way: As in general worship wherein one recites a *mantra* while offering an item in worship (for instance while offering a lamp, we say *eṣa dīpaḥ* and the *mūla-mantra* of the Deity), in the same manner, while offering the flowers we can also recite the appropriate *mantra eṣa puṣpāñjaliḥ* and a *mūla-mantra* for the person being worshipped, if there is one.

This is combined with the *praṇāma* or offering of obeisances, while reciting a *praṇāma* prayer. This is the last among the sixteen items of worship, indicating complete surrender, and therefore it may be used to complete any type of worship. It is usually performed after a special *pūjā*, *abhiṣeka* or *ārātrika (ārati)*.

To make this a little more elaborate, the offering of flowers and *praṇāma* with recitation of prayer is performed three times. Since many people do not know the specific *praṇāma* prayer for the personality being worshiped, the prayers may be recited responsively (word by word) by the public just before the *praṇāma*. □

### ***Puṣpāñjali* Procedure:**

1) (Before the event) Fill a large basket or baskets with flower petals, or whole flowers if sufficiently available.

2) Have everyone gather before a picture or *mūrti* of the personage being worshiped, and distribute the flowers, so that everyone has some for offering (best is to pass the basket around each time after offering obeisances, since the *praṇāmas* are offered three times. It is awkward to hold flowers in the hands while offering obeisances before offering them the second and third times).

3) The devotee leading the *praṇāma* chanting explains how the procedure will go, then begins to chant the *praṇāma-mantra(s)*. Some like to begin with *om ajñāna-timirāndhasya, śrī-caitanya-mano-bhiṣṭam, vande 'haṁ*. up through the *guru-paramparā* to the person being worshiped, repeating only the *praṇāma-mantra* of the person being worshiped the second and third times.

4) Having chanted the *praṇāma-mantras* the first time responsively, the leading devotee calls out *eṣa puṣpāñjaliḥ* (and possibly the applicable *mūla-mantra*).

5) Everyone offers (throws) the flowers toward the person being worshiped and then offers *praṇāmas (pañcāṅga*, with five limbs, or *aṣṭāṅga*, with eight limbs).

6) The chanting of *praṇāma-mantras*, offering of flowers, and offering of *praṇāmas* is done three times (in between distributing flowers to everyone, to be offered by them).

7) *Puṣpāñjali* can then be followed by *ārati*, accompanied by *kīrtana*.