

Why Do We Place Our Hands Over the Flame?

Flame is the “flame” of true knowledge. At the end of any aarti, we place our hands over the flame and then touch our eyes and the top of the head. It means “May the light that illuminated the Lord light up my vision; may my vision be divine and my thoughts noble and beautiful.”

The metaphysical implication of aarti extends further. The sun, moon, stars, lightning and fire are the natural sources of light. The Lord is the source of these wondrous phenomena of the universe. It is due to Him alone that everything exists.

As we light up the Lord with the flame of the aarti, we turn our attention to the very source of all light which symbolizes knowledge and life. Also, the Sun is the presiding deity of the intellect, the moon, that of the mind, and fire, that of speech. The Lord is the supreme consciousness that illuminates all of them. Without Him, the intellect cannot think, the mind cannot feel and the tongue cannot speak. The Lord is beyond the mind, intellect and speech.

How can these finite entities illuminate the Lord? Therefore, as we perform the aarti we *chant*:

*Na tatra suryo bhaati na chandra taarakam, Nema
vidyuto bhaanti kutoyamagnib*

*Tameva bhaantam anubhaati sarvam, Tasya bhasa sarvam
idam vibhaati*

“He is there where the sun does not shine, nor the moon, stars and lightning. Then what to talk of this small flame (in my hand), everything (in the universe) shines only after the Lord, and by His light alone are we all illumined.”

In our spiritual journey, even as we serve the Guru and Society, we should willingly sacrifice ourselves and all we have, to spread the “perfume” of love to all.

We often wait a long while to see the illuminated Lord. But, when the aarti is actually performed, our eyes close automatically as if to look within. This is to signify that each of us is a temple of the Lord.



Studies Reveal Omicron Survives Longer on Some Surfaces

Two recent studies report that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus survived at least twice as long on surfaces like plastic, paper and skin compared to the original Wuhan strain. Infections were more likely to occur by inhaling the virus as increased stability helped the Omicron variant survive longer in the air, making it more contagious.

In the first study, researchers in Japan collected and grew all the major coronavirus variants of concern in cells in a lab, concentrating and purifying them and finally spreading them on squares of plastic and skin from human cadavers in warm air at about 77°. It was observed that the Omicron survived on the plastic surface for 193 hours, which was approximately 8 days after it was spread, which was much higher than other variants. While on the skin, the Omicron could be detected even after 21 hours.

In the second study, researchers in Hong Kong spread samples of the original strain and the Omicron variant on squares of stainless steel, plastic, glass and paper. The Omicron variant was detected even after 7 days on those surfaces and longer on tissue and printer papers. This study was done for the BA.1 strain of Omicron and not the newer BA.2.

Hence, experts are of the view that hand hygiene and disinfection of contaminated surfaces are very important. Omicron seems to be stronger than earlier variants and hence proper ventilation, including air filtration, was necessary along with frequent hand washing with soap and water which prevents the virus from entering the body from contaminated surfaces. (*CNN, March 18, 2022*)