

Nine Forms of Devotion

Padasevanam (Serving the Feet of the Lord)

Padasevanam is serving the Lord's Feet and this is the next stage of the journey to God. Swami has said, "The idea behind bowing one's head at the Feet of Bhagawan is that thereby sacred thoughts enter the devotee's mind. This means that when one comes in contact with Bhagawan's Feet, the sacred impulses from them flow to the devotee." He has assured that, "The touch of the Divine liberates one from all Karmic bonds." We see at Prashanthi that devotees deem it a gift of grace, when Baba allows them to touch His Feet. Paduka puja is done every year at Prashanthi now in a regular function. Worship of the Padukas blessed by the Lord, with formal puja is done by chanting mantras and Ashtothra Namavali, the 108 Names, which summarises His Divine attributes and Leelas, while offering flowers at His Feet with each Name that is recited.



Swami says, "The Goddess Lakshmi is the supreme example of one who earned unique distinction by devoted service to the Feet of the Lord. Though she is the Goddess of wealth and presided over all prosperity, she showed to the world that serving the Lord's Feet was greater than all the treasures on earth. Today's devotees worship wealth more than the Lord. What foolishness is it to go after money, forgetting the Lotus Feet of the Lord, which are the fountain source of all prosperity!"

Explaining the significance of worshipping the Lord's Feet, Bhagawan Baba has said, "A spiritual significance is attached to the touching of the Lord's Feet, which sanctify the earth by walking on it. Scientifically also there is meaning in Pada-sparsha (touching the Holy Feet). The blood circulates from the feet to head. When one touches the toe of the Lord's Feet, one can experience a current present in the toe. That is Divine energy. From a mundane point of view the body appears as a physical form. But from the spiritual point of view, there is an aura around every body. It has effulgence (Tejas) from which arises spiritual energy (Ojas). This energy produces vibrations. That is why it is declared, 'Sight of the Lord destroys all sins, dialogue with the Lord destroys all sorrows, the touch of the Lord frees one from the consequences of one's actions'. When the devotee touches the Lord, it is like the linking of the negative and positive wires, which generates Divine energy. This connection should be from heart to heart. Only then the Divine energy will flow from the Lord to the devotee."

Constant admiration or adoration of anything, leads us to bow to the base of that object. An attitude of surrender at the Feet of the Absolute gives us added confidence and courage. This helps us to face difficult situations, with a feeling of innate support from that Supreme power. The fear of lonely travel through a jungle just disappears when we find that a lion is giving us friendly company. How fitting and sacred it is to worship the Feet of the Lord, the Feet that carry us across the ocean of Samsara.

In the Sikh Religion, Shri Guru Granth Sahib talks about God's Lotus Feet: God's Lotus Feet are the Source of Nectar, O Nanak, I am tied to them by a knot; Meditating on His Lotus Feet deep within, one realises the Lord and Master in each and every heart; Clinging to the Lord's Feet one is ferried across this dark ocean of the world; One who does not appreciate talk of the Lord's Lotus Feet, is just an outcast; I take the support of Your Lotus Feet and in the protection of Your Sanctuary, I attain perfection; The Lord's Lotus Feet are the cause of causes, the Lord Master saves even the sinners; prays Nanak, I meditate on the Lord's Lotus Feet and grasp the protection of the Lord of the Universe, the merciful, the ocean of kindness; I seek the Sanctuary of Your Feet, I am the slave of Your slaves, my mind has blossomed forth, and my body is rejuvenated.

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In the Gospels- Luke 10- Jesus comes for dinner at the home of Mary and her older sister Martha. While Martha is running around, distracted by all the preparations that had to be made, Mary... sat at the Lord's Feet listening to what He said. When Martha wants Jesus to tell her to get busy serving, "Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."



In another incident- John 12- A dinner is being given in Jesus' honour at Mary and Martha's house. Mary appears with a jar of expensive perfume, and the Bible says, "She poured it on Jesus' Feet and wiped His Feet with her hair." Again Mary is at the Feet of Jesus- kneeling, pouring out her love and worship.

And then comes the darkest moment of her life to that point- her beloved brother Lazarus dies. When Jesus finally arrives, she is really struggling. But notice where we find her- John 11- When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His Feet. And then comes the awesome resurrection miracle.

Mary knows where we belong when we are with Jesus- at His Feet, on our knees. She is at His Feet, worshipping with total surrender. We need that kind of lavish praise and worship regularly. When life makes no sense, on your knees at the Feet of the Lord is the place to be. This seemingly powerless position is the most powerful position on earth.

Swami brings to our notice another aspect of Padasevanam. He says, *"Everyone of you has the yearning to do Padaseva, fondly massaging my Feet. And, if I give the chance to all who are anxious to get it, what will happen to my Feet? And, what a crush there will be around me! But, know my Feet are everywhere, My Feet are within your reach at all times wherever you are. 'His hands and Feet everywhere' declare the scriptures. The Supreme Sovereign Person has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. The heads, eyes and feet of the thousands who gather here, are My Heads, My Eyes and My Feet. Nurse them, respect them, attend to their needs"*. The implication of this is that the people are His limbs and by serving them, we worship His Feet. So service to mankind is another aspect of Padasevanam.

Pada means feet. Seva means service. This is when you get to blend your practice of Karma yoga (seva) with Bhakti yoga (devotion). In doing your duty and serving humanity, develop the bhava (state of mind) that you are serving and worshipping the Lord's Feet. The Lord's Feet are an important symbol of the sacredness of the Divine. Worshipping the Feet of God drives home the point that God is a higher entity and it helps establish humility in the devotee's heart.

Yet another aspect of Padasevanam is following the path laid by the Lord. Walking in His Footsteps and living His message is also Padasevanam!