

Stages in spirituality

1. Spiritual knowledge: knowledge of stories, rituals, festivals, scriptures etc.
2. Spiritual faith:
3. Spiritual practice
4. Spiritual experience

Spiritual practice:

1. Occasional and intermittent practice:
Going to temples on special days – New Year, Birth day etc
Doing pujas at home on special days – Thai Pongal, Navaratri, Deepavali
Conducting ceremonies – house warming, weddings, funerals
2. Consistent and persistent practice:
 - a) **nitya anushtana – sandhya vandhanam** – serious spiritual seeker approaches a Guru for initiation and personal mentorship. This is called **Deeksha**. Then practice daily routine of contemplation of the received mantra at sunrise and or sunset times with prescribed ritual which takes 5 to 10 minutes.
 - b) **nitya aradhana - puja** - worship of their personal god daily after sandhya vandhanam.

This is done with flowers by offering,

1. **Dhupam/ incense**
2. **Deepam/ oil lamp light**
3. **Chandanam/ fragrant scent paste**
4. **Naivedyam -food for offering** and
5. **Catpura/ camphor light.**

Flowers can be substituted by **akshata** – the whole grain rice sprinkled with turmeric powder.

Food can be even dried fruits like raisins, dates if not fresh fruits, warmed milk or cooked food.

The whole process is called **pancha-upachara-puja**.

This puja concluded with prayer songs or slokas takes about 5 to 10 minutes.

- c) **nitya anusandhaana** – Practice of spiritual values in our day-to-day life. Try to practice “help ever; hurt never”

யாவர்க்கு மாம்இறை வற்கொரு பச்சிலை
யாவர்க்கு மாம்பசு வுக்கொரு வாயுறை
யாவர்க்கு மாம்உண்ணும் போதொரு கைப்பிடி
யாவர்க்கு மாம்பிறர்க் கின்னுரை தானே

yāvarkku māmirai var̥koru paccilai
yāvarkku māmpacu vukkoru vāyurai
yāvarkku māmunnum pōtoru kaippiṭi
yāvarkku māmpirark kinnurai tāṇē

Easy for all to offer at least a green leaf if not flower to the God,
Easy for all to give at least a mouthful to the cow/ animals,
Easy for all to give at least handful of food to others before you eat,
Easy for all to say at least some good kind words to cheer them up.

Thiru-manthiram, the 10th Thirumurai, song 252