

Arya Samaj Newsletter

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Importance of Yajna

Polluted environment is the biggest challenge being faced by the world today. It is threatening the very survival not only of human race but the entire living world. Environment is being polluted by industries, vehicles, crackers, candles, human and animal excreta, perspiration, expiration and smoking etc. The radiation from atomic tests and many other similar weapons of mass destruction are the latest addition to this list. Despite innumerable hospitals and other health care measures various types of diseases will go on increasing until and unless our environment is made pollution free. Best way to keep the environment pollution free is to perform Havan. Various gasses produced during Havan decompose the poisonous gassed liberating free oxygen and other useful products acting like disinfectants. Performance of daily Yajna by all the members of the family sitting together every morning and evening therefore cannot be over emphasised. This is an activity with multiple benefits. We not only purify the air but also remove the impurities of our mind and body. The process also helps to in maintaining the unity and harmony in the family. In Saam VED about 114 mantras speak about the importance of Havan. Yajur VED says that Havan is the most important necessary and useful deed. Atharva VED says that by performing Yajna daily one gets birth as a good human being. Lord Rama and Shri Krishna Ji used to perform Havan daily. Chanakya says that homes without Yajna are like cemeteries. Maharishi Swami Dayanand says that one who does not perform Yajna is a great sinner. Dr. Mumukshu Arya

Havan is not a worship of the visible fire. Agni is one of the important names of GOD. It means all pervading adorable and brilliant. Fire is an indicator of radiance and heat. The flame of the Yaj or the lamp is a symbolic representation of the victory of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance and prosperity over poverty.

Chanting of Sanskrit Mantras

The Atharva VEDA deals with the sound therapy aspects of Mantras. They can be used for the treatment of the ailing human system at the physical, psychological and spiritual levels. Modern science and ancient knowledge have both acknowledged the power of sound vibrations in the field of medicine. The Ultra Sound imaging and ultra sonic physiotherapy are very well known to us. With substantial amplification, these vibrations can penetrate the energy spheres at the subtle and cosmic levels. All the alphabets of the Sanskrit language are endowed with special impulsive phonetics, which send out harmonious wave patterns when pronounced. Mantras are pronounced in Yajna in accordance with the prescribed methods and rules. It benefits the persons concerned and makes it possible to stimulate useful vibrations and excitement in the atmosphere. The patterns of chanting of the Mantras are so designed that they latently contain the essence of the music or the quintessential sound of the torrent of life sustaining energies emanating from the cosmic energy center of the corresponding Mantras. Research conducted at the Shanti Kunj Haridwar has shown that the chanting of these mantras produces vibrations which are soothing to human mind and all plant and animal life. These vibrations also help in spreading specific energy waves in the surrounding atmosphere.

There are two basic energy systems in the physical world: heat and sound. In performing Yajna, both these two energies, namely the heat from Yajnas fire and the sound from the chanting of VEDIC Mantras, are blended to achieve the desired physical, psychological and spiritual benefits.

Experimental studies have shown that the incidences of physical ailments, sickness and or diseases become less in the homes where the Yajna or Agni-hotra is regularly and properly performed because it creates a pure hygienic, nutritional and healing atmosphere. It renews the brain cells, revitalises the skin, purifies the blood and prevents growth of pathogenic bacteria. Maharishi Dayanand has described the Agnihotra to be the best method of purifying air.

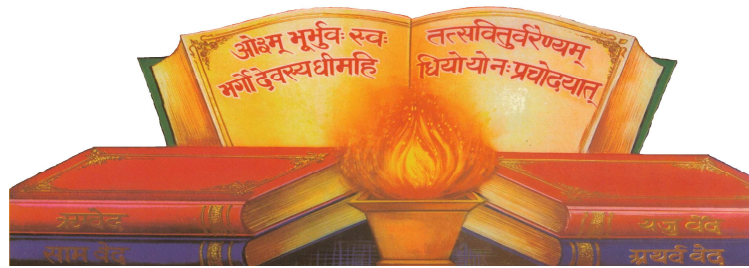
Agnihotra

Agnihotra is one of the five Yajnas / duties (panchamahayajna) to be performed by every householder twice a day. It has been an integral part of the Vedic culture and it is also known by the names Deva Yajna, Havana and Homa. The last word is phonetically very similar to the English word 'Home'. Could it be that a house is worthy of being 'Home' only if Homa is performed there every day? All the 16 Sanskaras including marriage ceremony start with Agnihotra.

Agnihotra is a multi-dimensionally useful karma. It is a spiritually enlightening experience. The selected verses from Vedas and other allied Vedic literature are recited during performance of this Yajna. It is an act promoting / strengthening the bond of love among one other in a family/community because it is performed in a group. Of course, it purifies the air all around. It is the most ancient science which helps to purify air and environment. It elevates us in all the domains of body, Prana, mind, intellect, and the innermost spirit.

Agni Hotra and Yajna: Agnihotra is a true Yajna as it covers all the meanings of the word *Yajna*. The word Yajna is derived from the root 'yaj' that stands for *devapuja, sangatikarana & daan*. That is, *Yajna* is a karma that should be 1) in due honor of devtas, both sentient and insentient, 2) an assembly of noble persons, and 3) in the nature of sacrifice. In this context it is pertinent to mention that Devta in Vedic Sanskrit means any living or non living entity which gives without expecting any return. Our arents and teachers are devtas, so are the Sun, the Moon and the Earth.

First, it is for purifying of air, a devta of insentient nature. It enhances the characteristics of the herbal substances (that are also devtas in nature) many fold. Two, it is a collective affair, when a number of people with a positive frame of mind assemble together. Three, the oblations offered are akin to making a sacrifice from a personal point of view, the benefits of which become available to all living beings. The Mantras are chanted with the endings of "idam na mama", i.e. this is not mine. This reinforces in mind that all the material possessions of ours in the world are actually not ours; they are for the purposes of transfer and diffusion to others in keeping with the spirit that all the wealth is actually that of the Creator. The Agni Hotra, as stated above, is a multi-dimensional affair. The two main aspects are: Spiritual and Scientific.



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Agnihotra is both ,a Prophylactic and healing process

Heal the atmosphere and the healed atmosphere will heal you

Dr. Madhukar Gaikwad

The purpose of Agnihotra is not to burn the substances that are added in the form of oblations,rather it is to vaporise them.Thus they diffuse into the surrounding air and transform the air quality.

The Yaj(Havan) holds a place of great importance at all VEDIC religious ceremonies.It is performed in all sixteen sanskars (sacraments) and at other religious performances.The word Yaj is derived from the root Yaj which has three meanings Prayer to GOD,Being in the righteous company and Charity.In the act of performing havan sacred VEDIC verses mantras are recited in prayer to GOD .When the havan is performed members of the family and other members of the society get together and after havan deserving learned persons and charitable organisations are given donations.In this way all three meanings of Yajna given above become part of the procedure when havan is performed.

SPRITUAL ACPECTS

As stated above the word Yajna is derived from the Sankrit root yaj, which has a three-fold meaning: *devapuja*, *sangatikarana* and *daan*. The philosophy of *Yajna* teaches a way of living in the society in harmony and a lifestyle which promotes and protects higher human values in the society, which is the basis of an ideal human culture. In its gross form, *Yajna* is a spiritual experiment of sacrificing and sublimating the *Havan saamagri* (herbal preparations) in the fire accompanied by the chanting of Vedic mantras.

We pollute the environment by various biological & chemical means. It is our duty to purify the environment at least to that extent. According to Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati failing to purify the environment polluted by us amounts to committing a sin. Agnihotra is physical as well spiritual science, and it has the power to correct some of the imbalance caused by our adharmic actions. The performance of Agnihotra helps many others, in turn, helps us as well

Panchmahayaj-five important duties of every householder

(1)Brahmayaj- prayer,meditation and study of the scriptures

(2)Devayaj-performance of agnihotri (havan)

(3)Pitriyaj-service to mother,father and elders

(4)Balivaishvadevyaj-service to deprived living beings including animals

(5)Atithiyaj- hospitality and service to the learned ones and visitors.

Scientific Aspects / Dimensions

In order to understand scientific aspects / dimensions we have to first understand some important definitions of scientific terms. These are i) the basic of burning a substance or combustion as it is called in scientific terms ii) the principle of conservation of mass iii) Sublimation iv) Photosynthesis v) Chlorophyll, vi) Calorific Value of a fuel vii) Aerodynamic effect, viii) Graham's Law of Diffusion of Gasses and iv) Exothermic Reaction. *The Science of Agnihotra – Shri.Ish Narang*

Maharishi Swami Dayanand Saraswati has stated in Satyarth Prakash that the herbal substances to be added with purified butter (ghee) into Agnihotra should be wholesome ie health givers,anti-bacterial,aroma-builders or aromatic substances and sweetners.

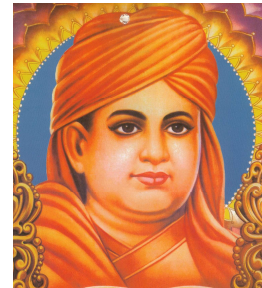
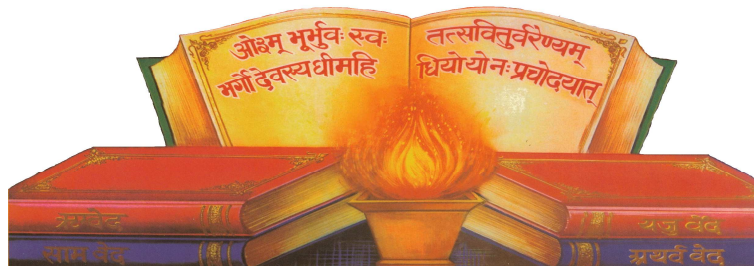
The importance of the Vedic practice of agnihotra

The agnihotra (sacred fire) has been a very important part of all Vedic ceremonies since the beginning of time. The act of putting ghee (clarified butter), fragrant wood, samagri, dried vegetable matter,medicinal herbs,roots and food products like grains,nuts,spices etc into a specially lit fire represents the sacrifice of valuable material resources essential for human survival and contentment such as food and fuel. The ingredients of the samagri include sandalwood, dried medicinal herbs and food (such as sweet dishes cooked in the home that day or dried fruits etc;

The composition of samagree was scientifically formulated by sages in pre-historic India to confer disinfectant and sterilising properties to the vapours produced by the fire. Effectively, it is an ancient – and organic - method of purification of the environment. The heated air produced by the fire spreads to all places in the home or building where it is performed and so purifies the air by destroying germs as well as producing a pleasant fragrance that replaces foul air. This explains the historic practice of havan in households in India after a funeral; the hot fragrant 'smoke' from the fire drives out the smell of putrefaction of the dead body through that process the modern science of physics refers to as convection.

The light from the flame of the fire is a symbol of knowledge replacing ignorance (darkness). Enlightenment of the mind is enhanced by the act of chanting mantras (verses from the Vedas – the most original religious scriptures known to mankind) whilst the fire is fed. This form of prayer not only brings peace but its daily repetition is also an act of mental concentration that enables the mind to memorise the wisdom contained in the Vedic mantras. Furthermore, by pledging to embrace dharma and observing the law of karma, the flame symbolises the burning of any future tendency towards sinful behaviour.

**One should always be ready to accept truth and renounce untruth
(Arya Samaj principle No.4)**



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It is signally not – and this cannot be emphasised enough – not the worshipping of fire. Instead, it is a process for worshipping God which has the valuable side-effect of purifying the householders' home twice daily, at sunrise and sunset, by using a strictly correct method of producing fire .

The use of items such as cooking-ghee, food, samagri, fragrant wood and water is altruistic because such valuable materials are sacrificed for the greater good of society. It acts as a reminder that human beings require only that bare quantity of materials necessary for our subsistence. In other words, performing agnihotra promotes unselfishness and doing good to the rest of the world (thereby guiding people to reject unnecessary materialism and possessive individualism). The desire to improve the environment is not just for the personal good but also for the good of all, fostering a spirit of universal good.

History: Vedic seers originally enjoined that agnihotra should be performed twice a day. It is one of the five good deeds (pancamahayajna) every householder is expected to carry out daily. Even during student life, a brahmachari was expected to do so at his/her college (gurukula). Furthermore, in the Indian tradition every marriage ceremony and all sacraments includes agnihotra. A newly wed couple then conduct it at home as their very first act together after the wedding. Other sanskrit names for it are devayajna, havan and homa. Perhaps a house is worth being referred to by the English word home only if homa is carried out in it daily!

Even today, life without fire is unthinkable. Almost all machines – from the cooker to the internal combustion engine of a car - are powered by fire directly or indirectly. That great fireball we know as the sun is the primary source of energy on earth. One of the meanings of agni, the first word in the Rigveda, (the very first book in the library of mankind) is fire. Thus, fire surely was the first great scientific discovery by mankind, as facilitated by the knowledge in the Vedas.

It is truly remarkable that Vedic seers had the ingenuity to decree that agnihotra as a ritual must be repeated frequently when, intuitively, it would seem senselessly wasteful to throw away useful and valuable substances into a fire. But, the rishis of ancient India must have understood that fire has the ability to break up substances into a gaseous form and that hot gases have the buoyancy and other aerodynamic properties to cleanse air both the indoors and outdoors. They would have been aware of another principle of modern physics referred to as the Conservation of Matter: matter is neither created nor destroyed. They knew that the various materials that are put into the fire only appear to vanish, but that in reality they have been transformed into a state of vapour which is not visible.

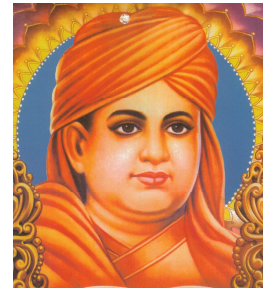
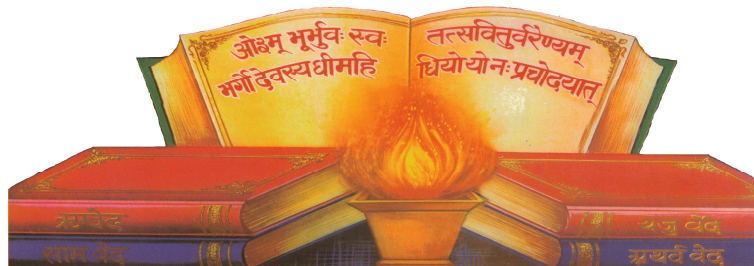
Benefits: The worth of agnihotra is multi-dimensional. Spiritually, it has an enlightening effect on the soul because selected verses from the Vedas and other allied Vedic literature are recited during the course of agnihotra. Other than enhancing intellectual and cognitive agility, such regular recitation of so many important mantras leads to them being memorised. The logical sequel of this is the educational quest of their meaning being learned and understood. Socially, it strengthens bonds between members of a family or community because groups of people get together to carry it out communally. Hygienically, it has the effect of medicinal cleansing of air in the vicinity. Physically, agnihotra also has an uplifting effect on the material domains of human life, that is, the body and mind (memory, intellect, autonomic and sensori- motor functions). It encompasses all the meanings that are conveyed by the word yajna, a word that is derived from the sanskrit root yaj (which denotes devapuja sangatikarana danesu) and which means that yajna is

- an act that honours devas, both sentient and insentient. Air and herbs are examples of devas that are insentient in nature
- an assembly of noble souls

Science: agnihotra merits further analysis through the use of some of the tenets of modern Combustion Science. Combustion is the oxidizing of a fuel, usually by atmospheric oxygen; it is a chemical reaction which gives rise to thermal energy. The mixing of fuel and oxygen alone does not lead to combustion. It must be initiated by a source of ignition. For example, fuel and oxygen in a car's petrol tank fail to combust until a spark plug ignites the flicker of a flame; in the ensuing fire the heat energy inherent in the fuel is released, giving rise to an increase in temperature. Some fuels release much more energy than others. For example, typical hydrocarbon fuels such as methane, propane, gasoline and diesel have thermal energy levels in the range of 10,000 calories per gram of fuel. This measure is referred to as the Calorific Value of the fuel. Upon combustion the final temperature may rise to as much as 2500 degree Celsius.

Complete combustion leads to the formation of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and water vapour. If there is a deficiency in the amount of available oxygen, some fuel remains either unburned or is only partially oxidized to carbon monoxide – a by-product that is poisonous to humans. In the event of combustion resulting in temperatures as high as 2000 degrees Celsius, nitrogen and oxygen may react with each other to form the pollutant oxides of nitrogen. It can be seen, therefore, that uncontrolled combustion leads to pollution of the atmosphere as is best-exemplified by the contemporary global concern that indiscriminate production and consumption of energy by mankind is leading to excessive levels of gases such as CO₂ causing the earth to suffer the 'greenhouse' effect.

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agnihotra allows a fire to only be generated in a specially-designed vessel built or fixed at ground level. Only firewood of certain specified characteristics is allowed to be burnt in this fire. To this base fire, additional substances such as purified butter (ghee or ghrtam) and certain dried herbs are added periodically as ritual oblations. Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83) stated in his seminal book Satyarth Prakash that the herbal substances to be added into agnihotra must have the four properties of being health-promoting, germicidal, deodorising and sweetening.

The purpose of agnihotra is not to burn wood but to heat the ingredients to the specific point of temperature at which they evaporate, thereby diffusing into the surrounding air as a means of improving the air quality. Their intrinsic heat energy confers buoyancy and aerodynamic effects that cause these vaporized fumigants to permeate the entire room. Crucially, the combustion of ingredients added into the fire, such as ghee, is not polluting to the atmosphere because they pass the tests set by Vedic Science aimed at ensuring they are medically purifying or sterilising.

The overall result of agnihotra is that beneficial substances can be inhaled because this route is more efficient than oral ingestion by a factor of several hundred. As we know, bringing a chilli too close to the nostrils makes that one person sneeze; if the same chilli is put into a fire then scores of people in the vicinity will sneeze. Further evidence for the superiority of inhalation as a route is that modern medicine is increasingly striving to deliver drugs (such as Insulin and asthma treatments) in the form of sprays for inhalation, instead of tablets or injectable liquids. Quite simply, it is the only way of purifying indoor air that has been polluted by humans breathing. As modern man is spending increasingly more time indoors, agnihotra becomes even more relevant. In contrast, air fresheners merely try to neutralize stale air; agnihotra not only drives dirty air out for it to be replaced by outdoor fresh air diffusing in but also effectively neutralizes the stale indoor air.

The vessel is purposefully designed to maximise the amount of oxygen that reaches the burning firewood, so that both carbon monoxide and unburned hydrocarbons are minimally released. Admittedly carbon-dioxide, a greenhouse gas, is formed. However, the Vedas prescribe that agnihotra ought to be performed during and after sunrise, and well as before sunset, in the vicinity of green plant life. Modern biological science vindicates the excellent logic of this Vedic practice, that is, the process of photosynthesis (production of starch through the chemical reaction of water and carbon-dioxide) by plants can only occur in sunlight.

Conclusion: We should marvel that ancient Rishis truly understood the specific Vedic teaching that fire (agni) is in actual fact a devata - of an insentient type - because of its ability to benefit life on earth through its property of cyclically burning solids and liquids into useful gases. These vapours cover a, literally, widespread area that neither solids nor liquids could ever match in their breadth of penetration (from the viewpoint of both distance and number of people reached). According to the great rishi Yaska, a devata is that which is useful to life, such as light or knowledge. It can be seen, therefore, why agnihotra is accorded the status of being one of the devatas to be valued and cherished by humanity as well as why it is also referred to by the word devayajna.

If the practice of homa can be revived, through a co-ordinated mission, for it to become widespread there will be a quantum betterment of human society world-wide. The tremendous gains include improvements in the quality of air, water and food that we utilise, as well as our morality and behaviour. If the practice of yoga can become widespread among enlightened people in the western world, it is not at all fanciful to hope and strive for a similar growth in the popularity, internationally, of performing agnihotra.

by Arya Samaj (Vedic Mission) West Midlands

*Hota hai saare vishva ka kaliaan yajya se,
Jaldi prasann hote hai bhagwan yajya se,*

*Rishiyon ne uncha maana hai, sthaan yajya ka,
Bhagvaan ka yah yajya hai, bhagvaan yajya ka,
Jaata hai dev lok mein, insaan yajya se. Jaldi prasann.....*

*Jo kuch bhi dalo yajya mein, khaate hain agnideo,
Ik ik ke badle sao sao hain, dilaate hain agni deo,
Baadal banakar paani hain, barsaate agni deo,
Payda anaaj karta hai, bhagvaan yajya se, Jaldi prasann.....*

*Hota hai paani grahan, iske hi saamne,
Pooja hai isko Krishn ne, aur Ram ne,
Shakti va tej yash bhara, is shuddh naam mein,
Milta hai raaj Kriti, santaan yajya se. Jaldi prasann.....*

*Iska pujaari koi bhi, parajit nahin hota,
Iske pujari ko, koi bhi bhay nahin hota,
Hoti hain saare mushkile, aasaan yajya se. Jaldi prasann.....*