

# The Acts of Cleansing prior to Sandhya and Havan

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Prior to both Sandhyaa and havan we perform the acts of cleansing like aachamana i.e. sipping the water and aṅga sparshaḥ i.e. touching our bodily organs. These procedures clearly establish the ancient traditions of cleanliness in our culture. Our sages, through these procedures have identified the importance of cleanliness. However, is this cleansing mere physical or is there a deeper spiritual meaning to it? It is well known that water is a cleanser. The more clean water we drink the cleaner our internals shall be. Everyday bath also helps us maintain hygiene. But, while performing yajña what is the import of performing acts of cleansing again after having taken a proper bath?

These acts of cleansing are symbolical in nature pointing us towards the cleansing of our thoughts and actions. During the sacrament of sipping the water, we are focusing on the Almighty God and trying to purify our thoughts. We are praying that all our thoughts be positive and dharmik; and beneficial to everyone. We are also praying that a bad or destructive thought may never even come near our mind. We are praying for acquiring qualities that lead us towards righteous knowledge, wealth and fame.

Similarly while touching various bodily organs and praying for vigor and vitality in them, we are also making an inherent promise of keeping our actions pure. We are promising that we will use our organ of speech only to say what is both true and beneficial. We will, even by mistake, never make derogatory remarks about someone else or ourselves. We will follow this rule even while being critical. We will refrain from any form of criticism that insults or demeans someone. We will also use the same organ to consume only pure and righteous foods and drinks that are saatvik in nature. We will follow the vaidik wisdom “Tena tyaktena bhuñjeethaa” (Yajurveda 40:1) which means that we should consume without attachment whatever has been left for us. We will keep the air that we breathe, pure and not pollute it with any kind of smoke. We will use our eyes to see good and not for finding faults. We will use our ears only to listen to words that are worthy of listening and never lend our ears to any gossip. We will use our hands to perform deeds that are virtuous. We will use our legs to take us to places that are

worth visiting and stay away from places that are not good. And overall any actions that we perform shall be in accordance of the vaidik dharma.

At the very beginning of the yajña, these procedures have clearly outlined the purpose of the yajña. All procedure like stuti upaasanaa, svastivaachana, shaantikaraṇa, agnihotra etc. take us deeper into these feelings. Rising above self-interest and performing actions that are beneficial to the entire society is the primary teaching of Bhagavad Geetaa as well. Yajña is the first step on the ladder leading to God. The only contribution of yajña is that it keeps us spiritually grounded and prevents us from deviating from the righteous path. The true worship of God is in performing good actions. Acting selfishly after performing yajña destroys the virtue attained from yajña. When all of our actions are righteous in nature then according to vedas “vyashemahi devahitañ yadaayuhḥ” (Yajurveda 25:21) our whole life becomes a prayer to the Almighty God.