

The Benefits of Shankha

The *shankha* (conch-shell) is regarded sacred and auspicious in the Indian system. Like the *swastika* symbol [c.f. Akhand Jyoti Jan-Feb 2005], it is an integral part of Vedic sacraments. It is blown to initiate religious ceremonies. God Vishnu is shown with a *shankha* in one hand and a disc (*chakra*) in the other. In the battlefield (Kurukshetra) of Mahabharata, Lord Krishna is said to have wielded a mighty *shankha* called the '*Panchajanya*'. It is believed that when it is blown it announces the victory of good over evil.



Chapter 2

Using tremendous lung-power, stamina and sustained breath control the player blows air into the shell to produce a powerful resounding reverberation that is deemed to match with the primal sound of creation. While the *shankha* has but one note, by controlling the breath, the player can alter the magnitude, timbre and resonance of the note. Though it does not have much application as a musical instrument, the vibrant, sonorous sound of *shankha* inspires valor, courage, enthusiasm and inner spirit. The holy Gurbani of the Sikhs also recognizes these effects as – “*Sankhan ki dhun ghantan ki kar phulan ki barkha barkhavae ...*”. (The conch and the bell produce blissful sounds...).

An adept yogi is said to subliminally hear the *śankhanāda* (sound of perfect blowing of a *shankha*), within himself during the higher stages of trance in *Nadayoga Sadhana*. When the conch is blown with controlled breath, the primordial sound of “*Om*” (*Oam*) emanates from it. This eternal sound is said to be the origin of all Vedas. All knowledge enshrined in the Vedas is an elaboration of the omnipresent sublime sound of *Om*. It was this sound that was chanted by the Lord before manifesting the cosmos. It represents the creation and the Truth behind it. It represents *dharma* or righteousness that is one of the four noble goals of human life.

As per the scholarly analysis of Shastric terminology, that which leads to welfare is called “*shankha*”. It is with the sounding of conch that the doors of temples are opened.

Another well-known purpose of blowing the conch with or without some devotional instruments, known traditionally to produce auspicious sounds, is to ward off negative vibrations or noises that may disturb the ambience or the minds of the devotees.

Some German scientists are reported (<http://mailerindia.com/hindu/veda>) to have experimented on conch shell's sound and found that diseases like those of thyroid and some other hormonal disorders are healed or significantly cured by this sound. Surprisingly the sound waves generated by collective blowing of *shankhas* are also believed to prevent spread of plague, cholera etc in the surroundings. This indicates the existence of an advanced knowledge and scientific use of sound in Vedic India.

In ancient India, each village was presided over by a main temple deity and several smaller ones. During performing the *Aarti* (devotional prayer-song after *pooja* – worship) and before and after all the important sacraments and on sacred occasions, the blowing of conch was a must. Since villages were generally small, the sound of the conch would be heard all over the village. People who could not make it to the temple were enjoined to stop their work, at least for a few seconds, and mentally bow to the Lord. The conch sound served to awaken people's minds to a prayerful attitude even in the middle of their busy daily routine.

The *shankha* is placed at the altar in temples and homes next to the Lord as a symbol of *Nada-Brahma*, *Om*, the

Vedas, Dharma, righteous victory and auspiciousness. It is often used to offer devotees sanctified water (of sacred oblation) to uplift and focus their minds towards nobility and truth.

Like the pyramids, the specific geometry of a *shankha* generates remarkable energy-effects. More remarkable is the fact that these are formed naturally. Different kinds of *shankhas* are therefore used as *yantras* for different purposes in the *mantra*- and *tantra*- based *sāadhanās*. Some adept astrologers also recommend the types of *shankha* and the location where these are to be placed to control negative planetary effects. Several kinds of methods of worshipping the *shankhas* are also described in the Indian scriptures for benefits varying from wealth, success and peace of mind to health, healing and hypnotism.

The *shankhas* that open towards left hand (*vaamavarti*) are commonly available but rare are the ones that open towards right side (i.e., facing South). This kind of *shankha* is called *dakshinavarti*. *Dakshinavarti Shankhas* are available in white color and with brown lines on them. Their sizes differ, starting from the size of a wheat grain to as large as a coconut. Mostly these shells are available only at Kanya Kumari. A completely white colored *Shankha* is indeed rare.

Dakshinavarti Shankha is the symbol of Goddess Lakshmi. Her idols and pictures always depict *dakshinavarti shankha* in one of Her hands. *Dakshinavarti shankha* should be kept

at the place of worship or, after being wrapped in a white cloth, at any sacred place or locker in the house. It is said to bring good luck and prosperity to the individual and his family. In the Puranas, the gods and goddesses are depicted as holding a shell, whenever they are happy or setting out on war against evil forces. Whenever the shell is blown it is said to purify the environment from all evil effects. Even the scientific minded, nonbelievers have experienced it and agree to the fact that the blowing of a *shankha* enhances the positive psychological vibrations such as courage, hope, determination, willpower, optimism, etc, in the blower as well as those around him/her.

As mentioned above, most of the conches or seashells are *Vaamvarti* i.e., their bulge opens towards left side (facing North); only a few shells are *Dakshinvarti* – their bulge opening towards the right side (i.e., facing South) and even their spiral lines run towards the right. South is the direction of Kuber, the God of wealth. Tantra Shastra has also given great importance to such types of shells. These shells are very rare and are found only in a very few places. *Dakshinavarti shankhas* not only bring wealth but also purify the atmosphere. All the negatives energies are swept out of the place.

Shankhas are also classified according to their sizes. *Yavakar shankhas* are very small in size; as small as the size of a wheat grain and are usually dark grey in color. They are quite strong and cannot be crushed easily. *Ellakar shankhas*

are a little bigger, varying between the size of a cardamom, a round beetle nut or a lemon. These are mostly found in lakes. A significant class of these shells is the *Hira Shankha*. These are as expensive as diamonds and are considered very valuable among the shells. *Moti Shankha* (a conch shell that shines like a pearl) is even more rare and difficult to find. It has the luster of a pearl and is generally round in shape. This precious variety of *shankha* is available in all big and small sizes.

The ancient text of Brahmavaivart Purana contains deep knowledge related to the different forms of Goddess Lakshmi. It is mentioned that *Soubhaagya Lakshmi*, the bestower of good luck, is present in *Moti Shankha*. The Jain Tantra describes Padamavati *Sāadhanās* in great detail. In this sect Lakshmi is worshipped in the form of Padamavati and *Moti Shankha* forms an important part of many Padamavati *Sāadhanās*.

This shell has great significance in Ayurveda. If water is stored in the shell it absorbs amazing medicinal properties capable of curing several physical defects. Swami Girijananda, a Himalayan Yogi has experimented with several kinds of *shankhas*. Some of the simple health tips vis-à-vis *Moti Shankha* have been prescribed by him as - (i) Store some water overnight in the shell and the next morning rub the water on your skin. This cures all skin problems. (ii) Store water in the shell for 12 hours. Then rub it on white spots on the skin. Do this regularly. After

some days the white spots shall disappear and healthy skin shall reappear. (iii) At night fill the shell with water and in the morning add some rose water to it. Then wash your hair with the mixture. This shall keep the hair black and healthy. The hair of the eyebrows and the beard too could be turned black thus. (iv) If you suffer from stomach related problems or if there is a laceration in the intestines, then early in the morning drink a spoonful of water kept in the shell for 12 hours. This will cure the problem. (v) Mix water kept in the shell for 12 hours in ordinary water and early in the morning wash your eyes with it. Doing this regularly for some time will cure all eye related problems. The eyes would become perfectly healthy and one might not even need to wear spectacles in the future. (vi) If after a bath in the morning the shell is rubbed gently on the skin of one's face, wrinkles would start slowly disappearing and the face will gain a new glow by regular use of this process. (vii) If you have dark circles under your eyes rub the shell gently on those spots early in the morning. This will gradually make the spots disappear.

This *shankha*, like the *Dakshinavarti Shankha*, is said to banish poverty and boost one's profits in business. Placing this shell (after performing some rituals of its worship) at home or in one's shop or place of work is believed to bring prosperity. This shell can also be worshipped on Diwali so as to gain the blessings of the Goddess Lakshmi.

Some rigorous *sādhana*s using *moti shankha* endow one with the power of hypnotizing others. However, practice of such *sādhana*s is risky and it is strictly enjoined that such powers should be used only for healing and helping and not at all for harming others.

Another precious and largely worshiped *shankha* is the *Ganesha Shankha*. Its appearance resembles the idols of Lord Ganesha. Ganapati or Ganesha, the Lord of Ganas, manifested in an elephant faced form, represents the power of the Supreme Being that removes obstacles and ensures success in human endeavors. Ganesha is revered as the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, and is the first to be worshipped and invoked in Vedic worship rituals. He is worshipped for *siddhi* - absolute success in undertakings, and *buddhi* - intelligence. He is also the deity of education, knowledge, wisdom and literature. Ganesha is revered as one of the five deities whose worship was popularized by Adi Shankaracharya; the other four being Vishnu, Shiva, Durga and Surya. The worship of these five deities is called the *Pancayatana Puja*.

According to Vedic astrology, Lord Ganesha is helpful in nullifying the malefic effects of planet Rahu, which are similar to those of *Shani* or Saturn. The *Ganesha shankha* increases the power of will and intelligence and helps in achieving happiness, fame, good health and self-confidence. This is especially used in daily worship. Worshipper of this conch shell is blessed with healthy and

long life of nobility, wisdom, scholarship, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship and foresight.

Lord Ganesha's blessings are invoked, in all Vedic rituals, before any important work is undertaken, be it the starting of a business, the building of a house or the writing of a book or even undertaking a journey. This worship (*Ganesha Pujan*) can be performed through an idol or by using *Ganesha Yantra* or *Ganesha Shankha*. From the view point of 'Feng Shui' this shell attracts business luck from overseas and augments the chances of travel abroad.

This *shankha* is one of the eight auspicious symbols found on the feet of Lord Buddha. It is extremely beneficial for those who are in the export business or those who have gone into foreign business ventures. Placing it in the South sector of the living room helps augment the owner's fame and reputation. To enhance academic achievements the conch can be placed in the North East area; if placed in the South West it harmonizes relationships.

Ganesh shankha should be kept in the Puja-Ghar (place of worship) on all auspicious occasions and during religious festivals. It brings good luck and prosperity to the individual and the family. Some astrologers recommend that every house should have *Ganesha shankha* to gain prosperity and for protection against malefic effects of planets. It is believed that those who keep this shell in their lockers would never face any dearth of money. *Ganesh*

shankha should be kept on red cloth in Puja-Ghar or wrapped in red cloth, if kept in a locker.

Shankha Mudra (shell posture) is of significant importance in yoga. Hands are folded in the shape of a *shankha* here (blowing through which the mouth makes a sound similar to that of a conch shell). This *mudra* makes all the five elements (in the body) join in the fire element, which leads to enhanced and orderly flow of harmonized vital energy.

Similar to other sacred symbols and objects recognized in the Vedic sacramental rituals, use of *shankha* seems to have been derived from a deep scientific observation of sound, geometry and energy fields of Nature. Still deeper investigations on these aspects would unfold newer horizons of knowledge and well-being.

