



## AVANI AVITTAM / THREAD CHANGING CEREMONY

## UPAKARMA ROUTINE

1. Pratah Snanam – Daily morning cleansing (bath)
2. Pratah sandhyavandhanam – Daily morning medication
3. Pratah samidadhanam – Daily morning homam
4. **Yagyopavitha dharaNam / PooNaI maral (changing the sacred thread)**
5. **Kamokarsheeth Japam – Atonement for previous non-performances**
6. [Panchayatana Puja] – Optional pujas
7. Brahma Yagnam – Daily revision of vedas
8. **Maha Sankalpam – Wow to atone for previous sins, and start new performance**
9. **Yagyopavitha dharaNam – Changing the sacred thread**
10. **Kanda risi tharpaNam – Water oblations to the seers of the vedas**
11. **Upakarma homam – Homa oblations to the seers of vedas**
12. **Veda Arambham – Starting the study of vedas**
13. **Jayaadhi Homam – General homa oblations for success**
14. **Homa upasthana – Conclusion**
15. **Namaskarams to the Guru and elders**
16. Sayam sandhavandhanam – Daily evening meditation
17. Sayam samidhadhanam – Daily evening homam

In the list above, only the sections in bold are new / specific to the upakarma day function. The remainder are the activities that all of us should be performing daily. If we do not perform the mandatory daily routines, we at least try to follow the rest on this one day.

**Please note the following:**

- Everything upto and including the Brahma yagyam can be performed alone in one's own house
- The upakarma procedure is performed in the afternoon – after madhyahnikam and Brahma yagnam
- The homa Agni is the witness to the vedharambham. Both are performed in the same site
- The vedharambham must be performed in the presence of a guru
- The vedharambham must be performed by a guru

**Time commitment:**

The majority of the sections above (which are specific to the upakarma) will take only about 5 minutes each. The only exceptions are the homas and vedarambham, which will require an hour (all together). Thus, this function requires a time commitment of an hour and 40 mins plus the travel time to reach the Veda-guru.

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**See you on Upakarma day!**



## KANDA RISHI HOMAM / THARPANAM

This is a Yajurveda (more particularly Krishna Yajurveda) specific ritual. This is also part of the mandatory daily Brahmayagyam to be performed by all, as "Deva-Rishi-Pitr Tarpanam). While most have skipped the daily one, all invariably perform on the Upakarma day at least. The Yajurveda is divided into seven parts, called Kaanda. Each chapter is ascribed to be the compilation by a particular rishi, who thus are called Kaanda rishi. They are: Prajapati, Soma, Agni, Vishve Deva, (saamhiti devata, yaajniki devata, vaaruni devata.) Havyavaha, Aruna, Sadasaspati. The final amalgamated spirit governing as Brahman Swayambhuva. This Rishi Tarpana is done with water only, daily and on Upakarma day, with water, rice and black til (sesame). The tradition is that Deva Tarpana is performed with flower, with water pouring out of the four fingers straight, the rishi tarpana with Kusha (darbha) grass, the water flowing out of palm of right hand leftward and the Pitr tarpanam with Til, the water flowing out of the gap between the thumb and index finger of the right hand. Also, the sacred thread is savya (on the left shoulder) niveeti (like a garland on the neck) and apasavya (on the right shoulder) while performing the Deva, Rishi and Pitr tarpanam, respectively. This mode is applicable irrespective of the Vedic branch of adherence by the performer

The Kanda Rishis and their Significance We saw that the "kAmo'karshIt manyur akArshIt" japam is done with a sense of contrition. Who else but Vasudeva can bear the burden of our acts of omissions and commissions with regard to shastras? SAstramayena sthira pradIpena -- Daya Devi (compassion of the Lord personified) lights the lamp of shastras so that the jiva can find its way to its home in the Absolute. After the kamo'karsheeth japam, we proceed to perform the Upakarma function. It is done after mAdhyAhnikam and bhagavad-ArAdhanam (ijyA). The main purpose of the Upakarma function is to offer prayers and express our gratitude to those rishis who gave us the Vedas -- the rishis through whom the Vedic mantras were revealed. These rishis are known as "kaanda rishis". There are different rishis for the different Vedas. We are expected to worship those rishis who belong to our shakha or branch of the Veda, one of Yajur, Rk, Samam etc. The Yajur Veda consists of 4 kaandams. These are known as

prAjApatya kaaNDam saumya kaaNDam Agneya kaaNDam and vaishvadeva kaaNDam. These kaandams are named after those rishis who first taught the Vedas, viz., Prajapati, Soma, Agni and Vishvadeva. Subsequently we also offer our prayers to the Upanishads saamhiti, yaajniki, and vaaruni, and finally to Svayambhu and Sadasaspati, through whom the Yajur Veda came down to us.

The sankalpam is mainly taken for performing the Upakarma Homam. Then we say tad angam snAnam karishye, tad angam yajnopavIta-dhAraNam karishye, tad angam kANdarshi tarpaNam karishye -- which implies that all other activities like snaanam, yajnopaveeta dhaaranam, tarpanam etc., are only performed as an 'angam' or subsidiary to the Upakarma Homam (which is the angi or primary).

In the Upakarma Homam as well as in the tarpanam, the offerings are made to the kaanda rishis. In fact this tarpanam is so important that it is included as part of our nitya karma-anushthanam, our daily worship. There are other minor points that are worth noting:

Brahmacharis should wear maunji (belt made of sacred grass), ajinam (deerskin) and dandam (stick made of palaasa wood) after they wear the poonool (sacred thread). There are separate mantras for each. It is said that: purAtanAn parityajya which implies that you should wear a new set of clothes (veshti and uttarIyam) before the tarpanam and homam. It is also said that: kANdarshi tarpaNa-kAle punaH snAtvA Ardra vastra eva tat kuryAt, i.e, before performing the kaanda rishi tarpanam you should once again take a dip in the water and do it with wet clothes. The rishi tarpanam is done with the poonool in the nivita position (like a garland) and the water along with rice and sesame seeds should leave the root of the small finger. In some traditions you fast on the Upakarma day or at least fast till the end. In some traditions a general pitr tarpanam is also done.

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See you on Upakarma day!



## Upakarma (Avani Avittam): Significance

Upakarma (/upaakarma/) means beginning or "Arambham", i.e. to begin the study of the Veda (Veda Adhyayanam). For example, Yajur Upakarma means to begin the study of the Yajur Veda. Those belonging to the Yajur Veda observe the Upakarma in the month of Sravana (August-September), on the day of the full moon (purnami). Why begin study of the Vedas on this particular day? This auspicious day also happens to be the day when Lord Narayana took the avatara as Lord Hayagriva. Lord Hayagriva as we all know restored the Vedas to Brahma and also is the God of Knowledge.

The next question is: why do this every year? In the not too distant a past, Veda Adhyayanam was performed only during the period Avani to Tai (from mid-August to mid-January). Therefore, one is supposed to perform an "utsarjanam" in the month of Tai, i.e., a giving up of the learning of Vedas from Tai to Avani. Just like a Upakarma function there was a Utsarjana function in Tai. The period between January to August was then devoted to learning other branches of our shastras. Thus the cycle of Upakarma and Utsarjana with regard to Vedic studies was established. However, this method took 12 or more years to learn just one veda. Slowly this became impractical and Vedic studies continued throughout the year.

Therefore, the first thing to do before the Upakarma function is to do a praayaschitta (atonement) for having learned Vedas during the prohibited period. Specifically, one atones for not having performed the Utsarjanam in the month of Tai. That's why we begin the function by doing the "kAmo'karshIt..." japam. The purpose is declared as "adhyAya-utsarjana-akarana-prAyaScittArtham.." (to atone for not doing the utsarjana of Vedic study) and the sankalpam continues as "...ashTottara-sahasra-sankhyayA kAmo'karshIt manyur akArshIt mahA-mantra-japam karishye" (I will now do recite the great "kAmo'karshIt" mantra 1008 times). The meaning in Tamil is "kAmaththAl seyya pattadhu, kOpaththAl seyya pattadhu" -- done out of desire, done out of anger. The correct way of chanting this mantra is "kAmo'karshIt manyur akArshIt". Don't add namo nama: etc. The right time to perform is immediately after your morning anushthanam like sandhya, samidaadaanam (if you are a brahmachari), brahma-yajnam etc. This is performed during the abhigamana kaalam. Brahmacharis are supposed to have a hair-cut (preferably by a man!) after this.

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