

# **Upanayana Samskara**

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## **What is a Samskara?**

Samskara is a ritual, which spiritually refines and strengthens the mind. The samskaras to be performed are given by Rishis (Hindu Seers) in Shastras, There are several samskaras advised for humans, which result in both spiritual and materialistic fulfillment in life. There are about 40 samskaras, however only 16 samskaras are popularly practiced. These samskaras encompass the life cycle. Some of them are Namakarana (Naming), Annaprashana (First solid food feeding), Upanayana (beginning study of Vedas), Vivaha (Marriage) etc. The performance of the rituals learnt through samskaras with a sincere effort in understanding their meaning and purpose will result in purity of mind, which then provides spiritual insight.

## **What is Upanayana?**

Nayana means 'leading to'. Upa means 'proximity'. Thus it means 'leading one to proximity'. The next question is to 'proximity of what?' That is to proximity of Bramhan. The Vedas describe Brahman as that all-pervading casual source which is in the heart inside. That is why Upanayana is also called as 'Bramhopadesha'. In addition to the above meaning Nayana also means 'eyes'. This samskara with practice gives spiritual insight.

## **What happens after Upanayana?**

One becomes eligible to undertake study and chanting of Vedas under an Acharya. The boy also known as 'Vatu' gets a second birth through this Samskara and hence is called as 'Dvija'.

## **What is the important thing done in Upanayana?**

The boy or 'Vatu' will be taught to chant one of the most important mantras called 'Gayatri Mantra' which has 24 syllables. His father teaches this to the boy by taking the role of spiritual teacher in Upanayana.

## **When is Upanayana done?**

Shastras advise eighth year and this is because as the baby in the womb during the eighth month has seen God, so the eighth year is advised to remind that.

However, it should be done as early as possible after the eighth year depending on given particular circumstances.

### **What is the significance of Gayatri Mantra?**

Gayatri Mantra is a Mantra that leads the sincere chanter to the source of knowledge (Bramhan) by spiritually awakening his intellect. The Gayatri also refers to a metre (chandas) and the presiding Deity Sun God of the mantra. The Gayatri mantra is chanted with five pauses namely, Om, Bhoorbhuvassuvaha, Tatsaviturvarenyam, Bhargodevasya Dhimahi, Dhiyoyonahprachodayat. After chanting Om, Salutations are offered to Bramhan pervading the earth, mid-space and heavens. The Gayatri mantra (the last three lines) means, " We meditate upon the most adorable Supreme Luster of Sun God, the Creator, who inspires our intellect". It is important that Gayatri mantra be chanted with proper intonation and with mind contemplating on its meaning.

### **What is Sandhya Vandana?**

Sandhya Vandana includes in its process several steps such as praying, offering water to Sun God (Arghya), Pranayama and chanting of Gayatri and salutations. The Acharya conducting the Upanayana will teach the detailed procedure. It is recommended that Sandya Vandana be done regularly three times a day during the times of Sun-rise, Mid-day and Sun-set as these times indicate the transition times (Sandhya) during which the mind is naturally in relaxed condition.

### **What does one wear after Upanayana?**

In addition to learning to chant Gayatri Mantra, the vatu will wear sacred thread (Yagnopavita) around his left shoulder and under the right arm. This has a special knot called the 'Bramha' knot. The sacred thread will have three strings in which the Gods Bramha (Creator), Vishnu (Protector) and Maheshwara (Dissolver) are invoked. Each of these three strings is made from fine threads. Also a thread will be worn at the waist. The sacred thread and the waist thread should be worn all the time. The sacred thread reminds the boy that his mind is strengthened by the Chan ting of Gayatri mantra in Sandhya Vandana. Also, he can perform certain rituals. The waist thread is to remind the discipline that is needed to excel in general and Vedic studies. Once a year, during Upakarma day the sacred thread is changed with rituals and chanting of Gayatri mantra and other mantras.

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*This brief introductory notes are prepared with the reference of "Amaravani" Lectures of Sri Ranga Sadguru, (in Kannada), Vol.9 (Samskaras), published by Ashtanga Yoga Vijnana Mandiram, Mysore-570004.*