

Ati Rudra Mahā Yajña – Highest form of worship of Lord Śiva



While performing ritual one should pray, “O Lord! I will bathe Thee with water, milk, etc. Do Thou kindly bathe me with the milk of wisdom. Do Thou kindly wash me of all my sins, so that the fire of worldliness which is scorching me may be put out once for all, so that I may be one with Thee – the One alone without a second.”

Surrender is the main duty of everyone. Surrender means the feeling of oneness: I and God are One. Why? The reason is that the One who is present in you is present in Me. – BABA 1

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Do not think that the *yajña* is only this ceremony performed in this enclosure, marked out as specially holy, attended by readings and recitals from sacred texts and the chanting of *Vedic* hymns, and nothing other than this. No. *Yajña* is a continuous process; every one who lives in the constant presence of God, and does all acts as dedicated to God is engaged in *Yajña*.

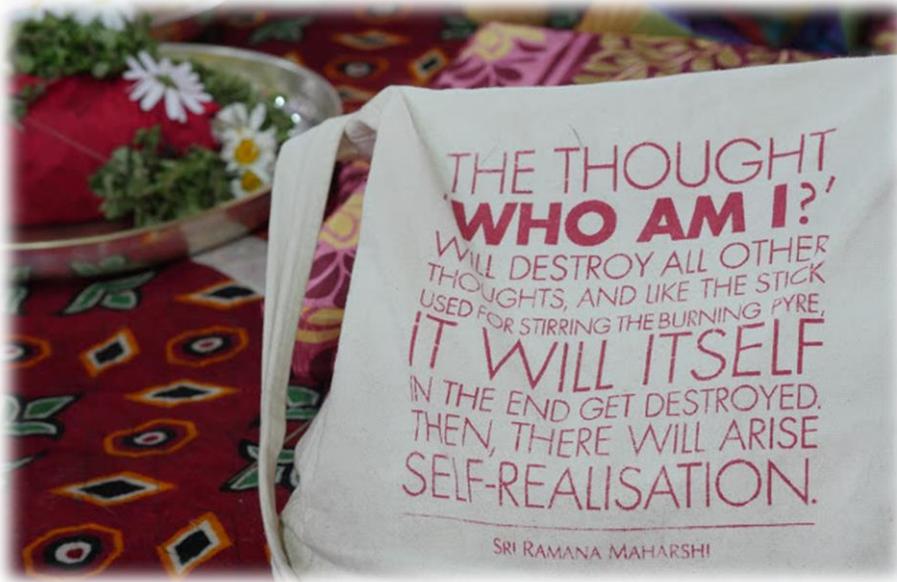
Three processes go together in spiritual discipline, as laid down by the sages: *Yajña*, *dhāna* and *tapas* (Sacrifice, Charity and Self-control). They cannot be partitioned and particularised thus. Charity and self-control are integral parts of *yagna*. That is why *Yajña* is translated as Sacrifice, for, the process of charity or *dhāna* is essential in *yajña*. Also *tapas*, that is to say, strict regulation of emotions and thought-processes, to ensure peace and faith.

The *Vedapuruṣa* is the *Puruṣottama* (the Supremest Person) for by His Will He manifested Himself as the cosmos and its components, out of Himself. There is nothing that is not He; so, how can you be different? In these matters, faith comes first; it has to. Believe that you are Divine; conduct yourselves in accordance with that sovereign status; then, you will be blessed with the *anubhūti* -the experience, the vision, the realisation, the awareness, the bliss. And, as a result, you are merged in that everlasting *ānanda*.

You must perform another *yajña* too, every day. Pour the egoistic desires and emotions, passions, impulses and acts into the flames of dedication and devotion. In fact, that is real *Yajña*, of which these are reflections and prompters, guides and prototypes. This *yajña* is only the concrete symbolic representation of the abstract underlying Truth. Just as a child is taught to pronounce the words 'head', 'net', 'wave', 'garland', by making it associate the sounds and the letterforms with pictures of the objects so named, through this *kṣara* (temporary) symbol the *akṣara tatva* (the Eternal Principle) is brought before the consciousness.

Peace of mind cannot be gained by wealth or fame or scholarship or skill. For that, you have to clean the mind, purify the heart, yearn for service of the divine forms that move around you. Do every deed as an act of worship; make every thought a longing for Him; change every word that comes from your tongue into a hymn in His praise. This is the lesson that you have to learn from Prasanthi Nilayam, every Dasara, during the week the *yajña* is celebrated. – Bhagawan Śrī Sathya Sai Baba, *Prashaanthi Nilayam*, 11-10-1972

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„What is the meaning of *yajña*? Any action that you perform, if you offer the fruit there of to the Lord, it becomes a *yajña*. In other words, a true Yajña involves unity of mind, action and words.” – Bhagawan Śrī Sathya Sai Baba, during ARMY in PN, August 2006.

„People think that only offering oblations in fire is *yajña*, but the true *yajña* is offering oneself to God, to please God and to become worthy of His love. *Yajña* should not be performed for attaining selfish ends. It should be performed for the welfare of the entire world. ” – Śrī Sathya Sai Baba, *Sacred company confers mental purification and bliss*, Divine Discourse on 10th August 2006, ARMY in Prasanthi Nilayam



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Ati Rudra Mahā Yajña is the highest form of worship to Lord Śiva. Sage Bodhayana identifies *japa* (repetition), *homa* (sacred fire), *arcana*, (worship) and *ābhiṣeka* (cleansing) as the rituals to offer respectful prayers to Lord Śiva.

The *lingam* is traditionally used to represent Lord Śiva and has a deep meaning and significance. It is considered the “amorphous’ form of Lord Śiva. The Lord is in the 3 forms i.e. the formless state of God, the lovely ash-smearred form of Lord Śiva with the blue throat and the snakes around His waist that we are all familiar with, and in the *lingam* – the amorphous state of formlessness and yet also with form, as the *lingam* has no defined beginning and end. The *lingam* is thus indicative of the beginningless and endless Brahman. *Lingam* is a combination of two words namely *līyate* (mergence) and *gamyate* (emergence) suggestive of the creation and dissolution of the Universe. The Śiva *linga* is usually bathed and anointed in this order: with water, milk, rice, flowers, fruits, honey and sugar.



Śrī Rudram, also known as Rudrapraśna, is a hymn devoted to Lord Śiva. It is one of the greatest of the Vedic hymns for all round benefits and to remove all maladies and obstacles. It contains within it two of the most potent *Mantras* – *Pañcākṣari* (*Om Namah Śivaya*) and the *Mṛtyuñjaya* (*Tryambakam Yajāmahe*). Śrī Rudram is in two parts. The first part is known as *namakam* because of the repeated use of the word ‘*namo*’ (salutations) in it. In this sacred hymn the devotee repeatedly salutes the Lord who pervades the animate and the inanimate, tangible and intangible, visible and invisible aspects of creation. The second part of the Rudram, is

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known as *camakam* because of the repeated use of the words ‘*ca me*’. The devotee prays to the Lord for blessings and benefits both in this world and beyond.

The Rudram starts with ***nyāsam***, meaning the one who chants, who would visualize himself with each of his parts of the body as given to a deity. The chanter then surrenders body, mind and spirit (*ātma*) to the deity and become one with him. Thus the effect of *Rudra Pārāyaṇam* will be distributed to entire universe.

An important point to note here is that Rudram is the only *mantra* which starts with a prostration to Lord Parameśvara (*Om namo bhagavate rudrāya*). In the Vedas none of the *mantras* start with prostration. This makes Rudram the ultimate and supreme *mantra*, amongst other great *mantras*.

“The Mind is adored in the Vedas as Rudra. The Mind contacts the objective world and experiences it through the instrumentality of the five senses. This aspect of the Mind is the Indra aspect. It has also another capability. It can master the senses and become aware of the Universal Inner Truth of the multiplicity called the Objective world. This aspect of the Mind is designated as Rudra. This is the reason why the Vedas describe Indra and Rudra as th One with two names.” – Bhagavān Śrī Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Vahini*, Chap. 3

„Śrī Rudram forms a very important section of Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda. Rudram is generally understood to be a prayer to Lord Rudra. In fact, it is the essence of all the Vedas, viz. Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharvaṇa Veda. Another important feature of Rudram is the *ekatva* (unity) between its two parts, *namakam* and *camakam*. *Namakam* lays stress on *virakti* (detachment) whereas *camakam* dwells on desires for this and that. What is to be discarded and what is to be desired? That which is evil is to be discarded and all that is good is to be desired. Understanding of both these aspects is essential for man.”

– Extracts from Bhagavān Śrī Sathya Sai Baba’s discourse during ARMY in PN, August 2006

The hymn Śrī Rudram is organised into eleven portions called *anuvāka* in both the *namakam* and *camakam*. Normally, one chant of the *namakam* followed by one chant of the *camakam* constitutes one ***Rudram***. Eleven recitations of the Śrī Rudram (*namakam*) followed by one recitation of the *camakam* is called the ***Ekādaśa Rudram***. This also constitutes one unit of the *Rudra Homam*. Eleven *Ekādaśa Rudram* recitations make one ***Laghu Rudram*** (11x11=121 times of *namakam* and 11 times recitation of *camakam*). This is achieved if 11 ṛtviks chant 11

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times the *namakam* and 1/11 of the *camakam* for every single recitation of the *namakam*. Eleven Laghu Rudram recitations make a **Mahā Rudram** (11x11x11=1331 *namakams* and 121 *camakams*). This is achieved if everyday 11 *ṛtviks* chant 11 times for 11 days. And eleven Mahā Rudram recitations make an **Ati Rudram. Rudram, Ekādaśa Rudram, Mahā Rudram** and **Ati Rudram** – each being more potent than the preceding one.

Thus, in an Ati Rudra Mahā Yajñam, the *namakam* will be recited 14,641 times and the *camakam* 1331 times, with the performance of 1331 Rudra Homams by 121 *ṛtviks*. (121 *ṛtviks* x 11 times per day over 11 days).

The 121 *ṛtviks* are spread over 11 *homa kuṇḍams* (fire pits), with each *kuṇḍam* associated with 11 priests. Apart from these 121 *ṛtviks* there will be 14 other priests who will do *pūjās* to various deities, thus totalling to 135 *ṛtviks and priests* who will take part in this *yajñam*.

Each of the *homa kuṇḍam* is associated with a name of Lord Shiva. The Central or main pit (No 1) is associated with the name **Mahadeva**. The names associated with the other *homa kuṇḍams* numbered 2 through 11 in the figure are: 2. **Devadeva**, 3. **Īśvara**, 4. **Vijaya**, 5. **Ādityātmaka Rudra** or **Śrī Rudra**, 6. **Bhima**, 7. **Śiva**, 8. **Rudra**, 9. **Nilalohita**, 10. **Bhavodbhāva** i 11. **Śankara**.



The rituals during ARMY – their order and meaning

The positive energy and light of Śrī Rudram is invoked by two most powerful rituals; a) Yajña or homa or sacred fire, b) *abhiṣeka*, an offering that includes worship using holy waters and other liquids such as milk, honey, etc. Doing these rituals along with the chanting of the divine mantras amplifies the power of the *mantras* several thousand fold. **For example, chanting Śrī Rudram while offering into the sacred fire is believed to amplify the energy of the *mantra* at least 100,000 fold!**

Pañcāmṛta abhiṣeka is performed to the *liṅgam* (bathing with five sanctified substances: milk, yoghurt, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, and sugar), and in addition with coconut water, flower essence water, turmeric water, *kumkum* water, sandalwood water, *vibhūti* water, etc. accompanied with the chanting of vedic hymns.

After the *Pañcāmṛta abhiṣeka* ended *abhiṣeka* is performed with *Rudra Pārāyaṇa* (recitation of the Śrī Rudram). The priest pours the milk into the silver cup above the *liṅgam* from which there was a steady trickle of milk onto the *liṅgam*, while the *liṅgam* was continuously recited for the requisite number of times.

It is said that *Śrī Rudram* is a great purifier which when repeatedly chanted with devotion can expiate the worst of the sins and in the words of the head Priest, “One can attain *bhukti* or all material benefits for enjoyment of life on earth and *mukti*, which is freedom from the ills of the world.” But an important aspect to note is what Dr. Kashyap, Director of the Śrī Aurobindo Kapalishastri Institute of Vedic Culture, conveyed when he said, “The *mantras* we chant are potent and full of power. But it manifests only if we chant it with full of faith.”

After the completion of the *Rudra pārāyaṇa*, ***Rudra Homa*** was done. In the *Rudra Homa*, *Rudra mantras* are chanted, each ending with „*svā-hā*“ while offering *ghee* and other items to Lord Agni in the *homa kuṇḍam*. The main priest pours the *ghee* with a wooden spoon, and the other priests sitting around the *homa kuṇḍam* throw articles like rice, flowers, etc together.

Homa – why are the oblations being offered to Fire?

In every religion, God is revered as light (Fire). In fact, in every religion fire finds a place in rituals as it is the symbol of God. Yajña (which means Sacred Fire Ceremony) is the most

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ancient form of worship from time immemorial. Vedas invoke fire to offer worship to various Gods.

Fire symbolizes the brilliance of the Lord. Fire stands purification, sacrifice, effulgence and illumination. Fire is symbolic of the supreme wisdom and the sacrificial offering is symbolic of transformation from changing to the changeless. Fire is the only element that does not get polluted by contact with any other material.

Bhagawan has declared that what everyone should offer in the sacrificial fire are his bad qualities. Swami has explained that the sacred smoke rising from the sacrificial fire, fully charged with the power of the sacred Vedic mantras, enters the clouds and purifies the rain falling from them. The smoke of the sacrificial fire thus purifies the pollution in the atmosphere and on earth.



Is the *yajñam* a Waste of Resources?

A good act can only result in good results just like a mango seed can grow only into a mango tree as Swami often says. There are some who question the various oblations made to the fire during the *yajña* – the grains, the ghee, etc. Is it not ludicrous to submit all these edible articles to fire when thousands do not have food to eat?

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To this Bhagawan gave a beautiful reply in His discourse on the 16th of August 2006 during ARMY in PN. He said, “Today a farmer sows five bags of paddy in a field. When they sprout, he transplants them in the entire field and waters them. Can anyone say that he is throwing valuable paddy into mud and water? Ultimately, he reaps a harvest of fifty bags. Similarly, the rituals being performed by the *ṛtviks* (priests) confer great benefit on humanity; they are never a waste. Whatever is offered to God today is like this paddy and ghee; they all confer great benefit to humanity at a later date. Just as a bag of paddy sown in a field multiplies itself into fifty bags, similarly all the materials that are offered to *Agnihotra* (the fire-god) multiply themselves several times.... **Whatever is offered to God, comes back to us a thousand fold.**”

http://media.radiosai.org/journals/Vol_04/01SEP06/CoverStory_Army.htm

“When the mantras are chanted and offerings are made in the fire to the Lord, the grace of the Lord is showered on the people in the form of peace and plenty. There is a saying: "As is the fire, so is the smoke. As is the smoke, so are the clouds. As are the clouds, so is the rain. As is the rain, so are the crops. As are the crops, so is the food. As is the food, so is the intellect." As the clouds these days are not formed by the smoke coming from yajñas, the food consumed by the people is not conducive to the growth of intelligence. When the smoke going up from the yajña kuṇḍa enters the clouds, you have sacred rain, which helps to purify the crops and sanctify the food that is consumed. As a result, the people are sanctified”.

– Bhagavān Śrī Sathya Sai Baba, Oct 3, 1989



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