

AWGP NORTH AMERICA YOUTH NEWSLETTER

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YAGYA

2022 (July to December)

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Introduction

We wish you all a Happy New Year! Stepping into the New Year serves as a symbol of leaving behind bad habits and negativity and focusing on peace and positivity. In the spirit of letting go of our vices and developing more virtues, this newsletter will focus on the significance and meaning of yagya. The Sanskrit word "Yagya" means selfless sacrifice for noble purposes. The purpose of yagya is to sacrifice ego, selfishness and material attachments and adopt compassion, positivity and altruism. The philosophy of Yagya aims to create societal harmony in order to promote and protect higher humane values, which is the basis of the ideal human culture.



Excerpts from Indian Wisdom Traditions

1) "**Ayam Yajna Vishvasya Bhuvanasya Nabheehiâ**"

- Atharvaveda (9.15.14)

Meaning: Yagya is the fundamental process of manifestation of nature, or alternatively is the basis of creation.

2) "**Annā d bhavanti bhūtāni parjanya danna-sambhavaḥ yajñā d bhavati parjanyo yajñāḥ karma-samudbhavaḥ**"

- Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Verse 14

Meaning: All living beings subsist on food, and food is produced by rains. Rains come from the performance of sacrifice [i.e. yagya], and sacrifice is produced by the performance of karma/prescribed duties, without which the eco-system will not sustain.

3) "**Yajño vai viṣṇuḥ** "

- Bhrihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.5.11)

Meaning: Yagya is indeed Lord Vishnu himself.

4) "**Yajñadānatapaḥ karma na tyājyaṁ kāryameva tat yajño dānaṁ tapaścaiva pāvanāni manīṣiṇām**"

- Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18, Verse 5

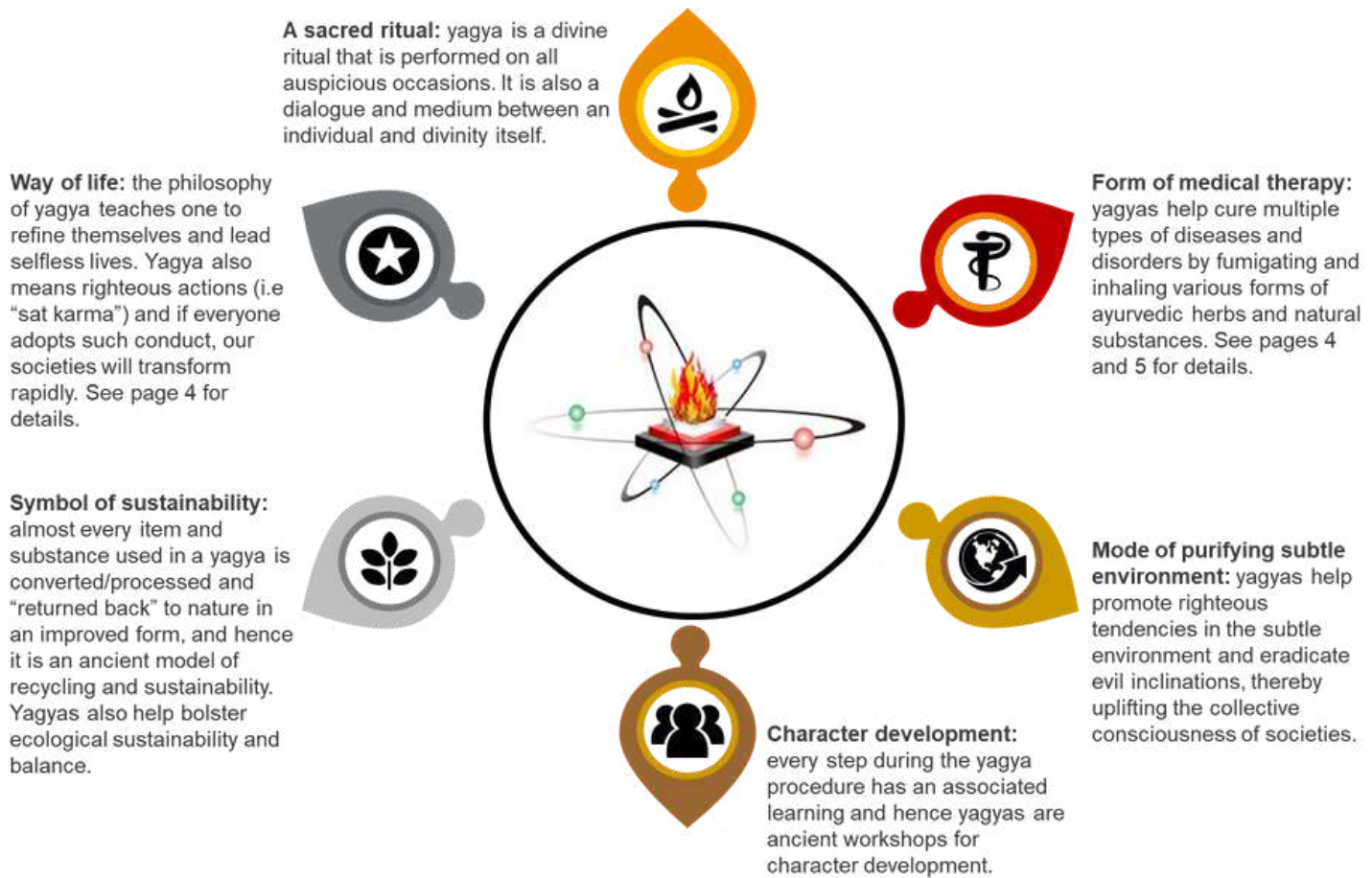
Meaning: Acts of sacrifice [i.e. yagya], charity and austerity are not to be given up, they should be performed for sacrifice, charity and austerity purify even great souls.



Overview of Yagya

The sacred knowledge and practice of yagya is so pivotal, pristine, and paramount to Indian culture that it has been revered as the one of the two pillars of the Vedic culture (with the other being Gayatri). The scriptures even advocate that our world and existence is entirely dependent upon the cosmic yagya that is ongoing in the universe (as implied by the scriptural verses on page 2).

There are numerous knowledge traditions in India, such as yoga, ayurveda, sankhya, law of karma, etc. that are sacred in their own right. They all are referenced in dedicated scriptures, however yagya is a concept that is referenced in every major form of scripture (i.e. Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, the Gita, etc.) It also is at the core of all 16 *sanskars*. We believe this is because of the various spiritual and scientific facets that are assimilated within it. The below graphic captures some of these facets:



Deep Yagya

One of the key movements that Pujya Gurudev initiated was to disseminate the knowledge of the yagya tradition to the masses. His belief was that such sacred wisdom can never be contained to a set class, creed, gender, race, or country but rather should be available to all. He presented yagyas as a medium through which individuals could transform themselves into enlightened, noble, and socially uplifted citizens. Deep Yagyas were created by him to enable this form of transformation to occur more rapidly and at a larger scale. He streamlined the ritualistic portion of traditional yagyas and highlighted the core philosophy more prominently. More specifically Deep yagyas:

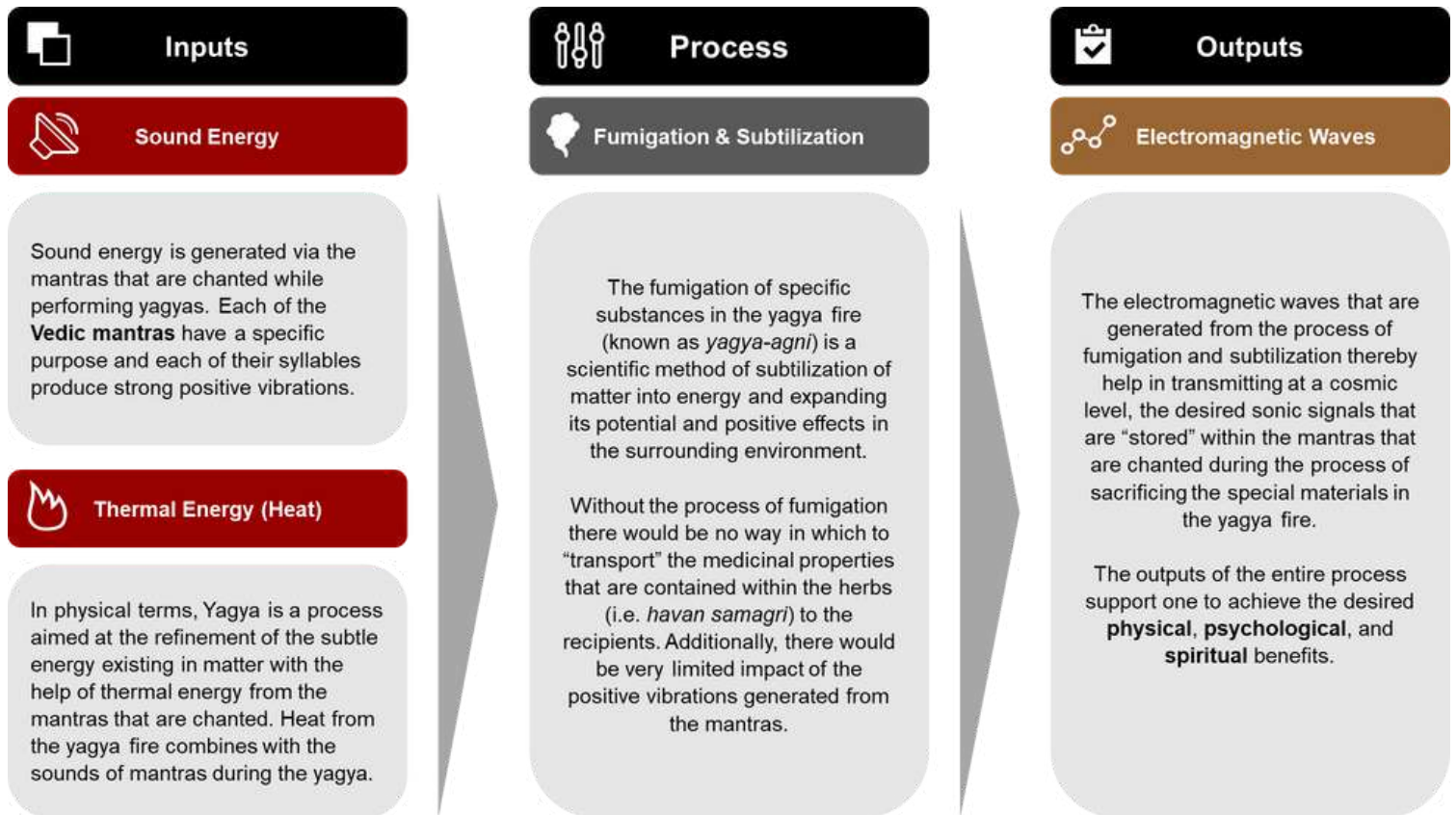
- use "dijas"/lamps instead of the traditional "yagya-kund" (i.e. fire pit) and herbal substances
- have fewer ritualistic steps, more Sanskrit "sutras", and less "shlokas" versus traditional yagyas
- can appeal to wider audiences of different backgrounds and religions since a diya/lamp is a universally appealing symbol that is prevalent across multiple cultures and religions

In essence it's a symbol of *Gyan Yagya* where the focus is on the spirit of the ritual and not its form.



Science of Yagya

Since time immemorial, humanity has always utilized reason and inquiry to question every aspect of our lives. Fact and logic may seem at odds with faith and belief. The beauty of the yagya tradition is that it caters to both of these topics; the religious and scientific. The book *Integrated Science of Yagya* outlines that yagyas have a deeply scientific component to them. The below presents our understanding of the various energy systems and processes that are interwoven within the procedure of yagya:



Philosophy of Yagya

Notably, yagya is more than offering physical elements into a fire. It is a commitment to continue refinement as we seek the righteous path. The philosophical teachings of yagya transcend its physical form. Below are some quotes from the book *Integrated Science of Yagya* along with three philosophical types of yagya that shed further light on the topic:

- **Meaning:** "Yagya means – selfless sacrifice for noble purposes. Sacrificing of the ego, selfishness and material attachments and adopting rational thinking, humane compassion and dedicated creativity for the welfare of all – is indeed the best Yagya which should be performed by all human beings." – page 4
- **Teaching:** "The philosophy of Yagya teaches a way of living in the society in harmony, a living style to promote and protect higher humane values in the society – which is indeed the basis of the ideal human culture." – page 4

Seva Yagya: altruist service of the society is a noble example of Yagya.

Gyan Yagya: implies the service of people by enlightening their lives in the glow of knowledge and education.

Prana Yagya: implies the service of saving the lives of people from suffering, agonies, and inspiring liveliness and respect for him in them.



Advice by Dr. Chinmay Pandya

What is the importance of yagya? What are the benefits of performing yagya?

Yagya is one of the most sacred ceremonies of India. For a very long time it was considered a very mystical ceremony. Unfortunately, generations passed and those competent enough to perform yagyas turned it into a business. It became a commercial activity rather than a sacred activity. A great task that Gurudev did was reviving the tradition with a scientific understanding and also reinforced the concept that anyone from any walk of life should be able to take part with no monetary expectation involved.

The purpose of yagyas is to purify the subtle environment in its surroundings. While atmosphere is something which can be perceived physically, the environment is that which cannot be perceived physically but influences our thoughts/feelings. If one is seated in a church, temple, or mosque they feel very differently than they would at a club or bar, due to their respective subtle environments.

The philosophy of yagya motivates everyone to return with a great purpose in their lives. The word "yagya" originates from the sanskrit word "yajan", which means: 1) collectiveness (*sangatikaran*), 2) divinity (*dev-pujan*), and charity (*daan*). When you live a life of complete selflessness it is referred to as *yagya-jeevan* (life in accordance with the values of yagya).

The third aspect is spiritual. Gurudev created it as a dialogue between you and divinity. We begin by cleaning ourselves, similar to if a guest is expected; we would clean our house and we would make everything ready. If your parents are coming then you need some preparation, if it's the mayor of your city then even more preparation, if it's the prime minister then even more preparation, and if it is divinity that is arriving you need the best preparations possible. So the idea is you start cleaning not only the place, but your mind, thoughts, and emotions, and then invoke the deities.

The fourth aspect is scientific, wherein do three things: light the fire, chant mantras and offer ahutis. When we light the fire, carbon dioxide is generated, which is absorbed by plants, and they in return provide oxygen. There is always a relationship between us plants. The fumes of yagyas have been proven to control free radicals and hence increase rainfall, they help reduce suspended solids in the atmosphere and hence reduce air pollution, and also reduce the bacteriological count within water. Finally, the residue ash is rich in soil nutrients and increases agricultural fertility when sprinkled over fields. In essence, whatever we took from nature, we are able to return back to nature. It is the first ever zero-waste management process that was created by the sages. They created the concept of recycling a long time ago.

What are the clinical benefits of yagyas?

The clinical impacts of yagyas are very significant. There are three primary ways to provide medicine to the human body. The first is an oral medicine, which goes through the hepatobiliary circulation system, wherein the liver absorbs a significant chunk. Some of the medicine is metabolized and some is excreted and hence only the remainder is what is used for its intended purpose. The second method is via an injection (i.e. parenteral route) but it is a painful/invasive process. The third and better method is inhalational, where you deliver the drug/medicine directly to the organs and tissues. This is why we give anesthesia through inhalation. Yagyas consist of this third type of drug delivery, which is inhalational where you transport the medicine directly. The herbs used in yagyas are carefully designed and are of varying combinations to treat varying diseases. Additionally, you can easily provide this form of "medicine" to not one but thousands of people at once (during larger yagyas). We [i.e. DSVV] has scientifically tested the viability of yagyas on more than 40 different kinds of disorders. For example, we had a famous study on tuberculosis where the tuberculosis algae-medium/culture reduced by 75%, which was equally as effective as contemporary tuberculosis medicines.



Special Highlights & Learnings

DSVV's Yagyavalka Research Centre

The Gayatri Pariwar has always been committed to enlightening the masses about the pristine knowledge of ancient India with a scientific lens and framework because, as mentioned earlier, faith is always questioned by fact in the world in which we live in today. The Yagyavalka Research Centre at DSVV is another beautiful example of the co-existence of belief and logic. It was established to reinvigorate and re-contextualize the knowledge of yagya, which is believed to be one of the greatest gifts of Vedic India to the rest of the world. More specifically, it was developed to showcase the wider applications that yagya has on areas including: human health, social welfare, agricultural benefits, environmental purification, along with its spiritual teachings and implications.



Interdisciplinary Journal of Yagya Research

One of the main initiatives of the Yagyavalka Research Centre is the Interdisciplinary Journal for Yagya Research, which is designed "to provide a wider platform for disseminating and sharing the results of scholarly studies in relevant areas of Yagya Research in the pursuit of furtherance of science." The journal is entirely dedicated towards academically advancing the scientific understanding of yagya and it's associated benefits. It is a peer reviewed open access journal who's aim is to provide researchers, scholars, innovators, experts, educators and students with the ability to share the results of their research and experiments. It is published semi-annually and is available for anyone to read at no cost. Click [here](#) to download previous editions.

Five Lessons to Learn from the Yagya Fire

The fire is one of the main aspects of yagya because of its symbolism. It teaches us 5 important characteristics we should embody in our everyday lives:

- 1. Radiance:** Fires are always warm and bright. We should adopt these traits to live bright, radiant, and active lives like the fire.
- 2. Rise upwards:** The flames of fires always point upwards. It teaches us that despite immense pressures, fears, and temptations, our flame of wisdom and foresight should be kept alight and upwards.
- 3. Excellence of character:** Anything that comes in contact with fire becomes fire itself. We should also have such a quality of excellence in our character, so that anyone we encounter may also become refined.
- 4. Selflessness:** Fires accumulate nothing. Whatever is offered in the fire is vaporized. It is scattered throughout the atmosphere and becomes universal. We should also not accumulate possessions for our selfish needs but utilize all our resources and qualities to advance the collective good.
- 5. Maximize your present impact:** The residue of fires are ashes. Ultimately, physical forms of all human beings are reduced to a handful of ashes. The ashes of yagyas are applied on the forehead to remember the inevitability of death and utilize each and every moment of our life in the best possible manner.



Self Care Corner

SOOTHE YOUR SOUL

Yagya combines two natural elements, heat and sound, to create the desired physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits. These elements can also be used individually to bolster positive feelings and minimize negative emotions.



Sound Therapy

Sound healing has been used by many cultures for centuries. There are many working theories as to why sound waves are so beneficial to well-being. Some believe sound has the potential to decrease stress by reducing cortisol levels and activating the parasympathetic nervous system and in turn lowers heart rate and decreases arterial blood pressure. Others believe that the binaural beats (sounds frequencies of two tones) produced in a sound bath brings the brain into a brainwave state of deep relaxation, similar to beta waves, or a meditative state similar to theta waves.

One [observational study](#) compared the feelings of stress, anxiety and pain between those that participated in a sound bath and others that did not. The study found that the participants of the sound bath reported a significant difference in all of the study endpoints including mood, tension, anxiety, pain, fatigue, and spiritual well-being.



Heat Therapy

Heat is an essential element. The sun's rays are a critical part of our livelihood and well-being as they produce enough light and heat to make the earth habitable. Some studies have found that warmth can energize different parts of the brain, such as the midorbitofrontal cortex, the pregenual anterior cingulate cortex, and the ventral striatum. Activation of these regions are subjectively associated with feelings of positivity. However, in patients with depression, the thermoregulatory functions are abnormal.

A 6-week, randomized, double-blind study researched the effects of a safely administrated whole body hyperthermia session. The study found participants had a substantial reduction in depressive symptoms within 1 week of the session. Read more about the thermotherapy randomized control study [here](#).



Steps of Yagya

The performance of yagya begins with the remembrance of the divine gurus and invite them as guests for the yagya. We also call on Maa Saraswati to guide us during the yagya and in our life.

1: Pavitrikaranam

Action: Place water in your left hand and cover it with your right hand and keep eyes closed. Sprinkle the water all over yourself. Imagine the water is purifying you by removing all negativity and bad thoughts.

Significance: Just as you must sanitize yourself before going to a sterilized place like an operating room, you must also sanitize your thoughts and body before performing a sacred yagya.

2: Achamanam

Action: Drink water either with a spoon or using your right palm, along with swaha. Repeat this sequence three times, after each "Swaha"

Significance: This action is to purify our senses. The mind, our speech and consciousness.

3: Shikhavandanam

Action: Using water placed in your left hand, wet the tips of your right hand fingers and touch your head-crown (shikha-s-than).

Significance: Touching the shikha-s-than is symbolic of touching our mind. This prayer is done to seek blessing so that only noble thoughts should arise in the mind.

4: Pranayamaha

Action: Sit straight, erect back, both palms on your lap, right palm resting on your left palm. Eyes closed. Imagine with every inhale you are taking in positivity and with every exhale you are releasing negativity.

Significance: Pranayam is the Life force (pran). It helps in strengthening the vital forces of our body.

5: Nyasaha

Action: Take water in your left hand, wet all your right hand's fingers from the water and from left to right touch your mouth, nose, eyes, ears, shoulders, and thighs. Sprinkle the remaining water all over your body.

Significance: We purify by touching these senses with water. Touching from left to right symbolizes refinement from wrong to right.

6: Prithvi Pujanam

Action: Take rice, flowers, and water in the right hand. After the mantra place by the yagya-kund (fire pit).

Significance: We must show deep gratitude towards Mother Earth for providing us with so many resources.

7: Chandan Dharanam

Action: Apply tilak on the forehead with the right ring finger.

Significance: Tilak is applied on the forehead as a symbol of prestige and self-respect. As all actions of the body are done through thoughts, we aim to keep our minds calm, judicious and prudent.

8: Kalash Pujanam

Action: Close your eyes and focus your energy on the power and symbolism of the kalash (copper vessel).

Significance: Kalash is a symbol of the entire universe. This step presents praying for universal harmony.

9: Deep Pujanam

Action: A lamp of oil or ghee is lighted during this step.

Significance: A candle flame removes darkness and spreads light. Our lives should also spread the light of knowledge and devotion towards divinity to remove all darkness of suffering and ignorance.

10& 11: Devavahanam & Sarvadeva

Namaskarah

Action: Chant the mantras with eyes closed

Significance: We are inviting the deities: Guru, Gayatri and all other powers to come. We open the door to our hearts and greet them graciously.

12: Shodasopcharpujanam

Action: During this step you will worship the divine forces by offering them 16 different items.

Significance: This step is symbolic of offering valuables to our invited deities such as water, flowers, rice, light, food a place to shower, a place to sit, clothes.

13: Svastivachanam

Action: Take rice, flowers, and water in the right palm with left palm underneath. Place these on a plate once the mantra is chanted.

Significance: This step is to worship the invited deities by asking them for their blessings.

14: Raksha Vidhanam

Action: Place rice in the left hand and use the right hand to throw it in 10 different directions.

Significance: This step is asking for the deities to ensure our safety from evil or wicked energy from all directions while we are performing yagya.

15: Agnistapanam

Action: After placing ghee soaked lamps (*batis*) in the yagyakund, the fire should be ignited.

Significance: The yagya fire represents Brahma. The fire is the bridge between this world and spiritual world.

16: Gayatri Stavanam

Action: With your hands folded together, worship the Sun God, Gayatri.

Significance: The Sun God makes us pure by allowing us to feel the brilliance and divinity within us.



Steps of Yagya (contd.)

17: Agni Pradiptanam

Action: Once the fire is lit, fan the flame to make it more ablaze.

Significance: While an ineffective smoking fire may live for a long time, a blazing fire is more powerful and meaningful. The light of the yagya fire symbolizes the awakening of the power within us.

18: Samidhadhanam

Action: Four small pieces of ghee soaked wood should be offered to the fire one by one.

Significance: Each piece of wood represents the four divisions of life: adopting self-control; working towards liberation; living a life of worship, discipline and service; gaining physical and mental strength.

19: Jalaprasechanam

Action: Take water in a spoon and sprinkle on all four sides of the yagyakund.

Significance: Water is the symbol of calmness. This step represents creating and promoting serenity.

20: Ajyahutih Homah

Action: Give 7 ahutis (offerings) with ghee with every *Swaha*.

Significance: Ghee is symbolic of positive qualities, such as compassion, kindness, generosity and affection.

21: Gayatri Mantrahuti

Action: Chant Gayatri Mantras aloud in unison while offering Samagris. You can choose the number of ahutis that you would like to offer.

Significance: The Gayatri Mantra asks for divinity to show us the righteous path for the collective well-being.

22: Svisthakrit Homaha

Action: A sweet is offered to the yagya-kund.

Significance: Offering sweet to divinity symbolizes sweetness in speech, behaviour and thoughts.

23: Purnahutih

Action: Offer three final ahutis at the end of the mantra along with *Swaha*.

Significance: This step shows the importance of aspiring for higher ideals and spiritual fulfillment. It declares your dedication to adopt virtues and give up vices.

24: Vasordhara

Action: While standing, a slow and constant offering of Ghee should be made into the yagya-kund.

Significance: The constant flow of ghee symbolizes that this yagya will reach to its pinnacle.

25: Nirajanam Arati

Action: Arati is done with a small light in a dish.

Significance: The knowledge, goodness and blessings of Yagya should be spread far and wide with song and bells.

26: Ghritavaghranam

Action: Take the coagulated ghee from inside the yagya-kund and rub onto palms of hands. Let the yagya-kund warm your hands then rub your hands on your skin.

Significance: The transdermal absorption of ghee symbolizes our positive atmosphere of divinity.

27: Bhasmadharmam

Action: Ashes from the yagya-kund should be taken and touched to the forehead, on the neck, over the heart and arms

Significance: Ashes symbolize that every life comes to an end. The ashes are placed to the forehead so the yagya knowledge is deeply embedded into our mind, on the neck to symbolize our speech, to our heart to symbolize good intentions, and on our arms to indicate good actions.

28: Kshama Prarthana

Action: Close your eyes and focus on the mantra.

Significance: In this mantra, we ask for forgiveness and guidance from divinity for our wrongdoings.

29: Sashtang Namaskarah

Action: Bend your legs in sitting position and bow your forehead to the ground.

Significance: This mantra symbolizes the complete surrender of yourself to God with reverence and devotion.

30: Subhakamna

Action: Spread out both hands with palms upwards.

Significance: This mantra represents asking God for good wishes for all. Even if we have an altercation with someone, we should pray for their well-being.

31: Pushpanjalih

Action: Take flower petals and rice in your right hand, place them in a plate after the mantra.

Significance: Shower the Gods with flowers as we bid them farewell.

32: Shanti Abhisinchanam

Action: Dip a flower in the water of the kalash and sprinkle atop of all of those present.

Significance: The kalash water is pure and represents virtues such as good physical health, mental peace, and spiritual growth.

33: Suryarghyadanam

Action: While facing the sun, the kalash water should be let out slowly in a stream.

Significance: As water heats up, it rises and spreads to the limitless sky and the Sun God.

34: Pradakshina

Action: Walk around the yagya-kund.

Significance: This symbolizes the journey of walking on the path of yagya virtues. It also represents us vowing to remove one bad habit within ourselves and replace it with a positive one (sankalpa).

35: Visarjanam

Action: Put rice in the yagya-kund and put flowers on the dev sthapan

Significance: This is a symbolic farewell to the divine forces that were invoked during the yagya, with a promise from them to return for any future divine undertaking.



Regional Pariwar Updates

Toronto Pariwar

Environment: Youth from the Toronto region participated in three tree plantation sessions that were organized by the city. These sessions are great because the city provides all necessary supplies and tools and all one has to do is show up and volunteer. More importantly, such efforts are critical to help save our environment. Pujya Gurudev had also said that planting a tree is equal to perform a full yagya. **Diwali:** We held a Diwali get together for all parijans, which featured performances by the BSS students and older youth. It featured dances, singing, a piano performance, a presentation on North America wide youth activities, and much more. **Navratri:** older youth were also a key part of the volunteers that conducted the Navratri purnahuti yagya. **New Years:** the youth similarly prepared to help conduct the new year Deep yagya that took place on Jan 2nd, 2023.

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Long Island Pariwar

Education: After being online for the past few years, the GGKLI finally returned back to in persona classes for yoga, culture, language, and festive events. With the new year older student volunteers have risen up to run and manage over 15 clubs for younger students! **Vidya-arambh Sanskar/Navratri:** parents and techers welcomed new students back to GGKLI by holding a Vidya-arambh Sanskar to pray and wish their kids a wonderful journey in education as well as much success and prosperity.

GGKLI aslo held a huge celebration for Navratri, with lots of activities including: a wonderful skit about Navratri, its origins, and acted out stories from the Ramayana to tech the students about the significance of why we celebrate Navratri. Students had practiced their characters, lines, costumes, and acting for weeks prior, which cultivated a wonderful performance. Finally everyone came together to do Garba, singing, and had lots of laughs.

Diwali: the morning of the Diwali class, students came early to decorate the class and set up the space with diyas, colour, and decorations. During class students taught one another how to draw rangoli and worked together to decorate our entire space beautifully, to invite Mata Lakshmi to our place! Afterwards, everyone poured in together to watch a wonderful presentation about Diwali and its origins, and its common foods, desserts, activities, and celebrations. All the students and attendees enjoyed snacks and drinks afterwards.

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Regional Pariwar Updates



Vedanshi
Thakur



Rasika
Chaudhari



Harshita
Kharbanda



Dallas Pariwar

BSS Achievements: Three of our BSS youth (shown to the left) graduated from the 2022 session and obtained 100% college credits in their Hindi exams organized via their high school. **BSS Opening Ceremony:** Celebrating the opening with a vidya-arambh sanskar and 24 kundiya Gayatri yagya, with attendance of 200 people. **Diwali Deep Yagya:** Diwali was celebrated with AWGP families and BSS youth/kids. The kids/youth conducted the deep yagya, chanted all the mantras, and presented group songs to an audience of 225+. **Yug Sahitya Stalls:** The BSS also organized book stalls of Pujya Gurudev's literature in many places in the DFW (Dallas Texas Area). They're drive book sales and also explaining the meaning and purpose of Pujya Gurudev's life and his literature.

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Chicago Pariwar

Education: The Gayatri Gyan Mandir Chicago BSK had a summer break from May to August 2022. The new session post the break started with an invocation ceremony ("Vidya-arambh Sanskar") on Sept 11, 2022. During the BSK session for the period, the kids returned to hybrid classes, which was first of its kind for Chicago BSK, allowing the kids to join virtually (for those out of town) and onsite. Continuing from last year, we have focused on teaching Yagya and Vedic practices to the kids, and have tried to make it fun and engaging for them via the following: teaching festivals, prayers, yoga, crafts, etc.

The classes start with a quiz & discussion based on the previous class, and the "News Reporter" segment where students share their favourite prayers and meanings. This year the kids are also learning advanced pranayama yoga techniques. A memorable event was when all the kids and their families were able to come together during Diwali to celebrate Dusshera, fireworks, and "ravan dahan". To promote diversity and inclusion we also celebrated Halloween, Thanksgiving, and had a Christmas party for the kids. For the latter, they played Bingo, made gingerbread house and decorated a Christmas tree. The BSK session will resume after the winter break with preparations for Vasant Panchami and the annual recital.

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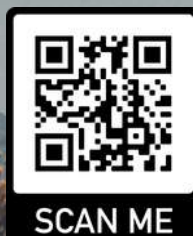
Other Updates and Initiatives

- **Calling All Readers:** Please join us on Wednesdays from 9-10 PM EST as we continue reading the book "Sleep, Dreams and Spiritual Reflections". There is no compulsion to have read every week, and participants can join to listen in as well. Please email us for the call link if you are interested in joining.
- **Feedback and Q&A:** Please fill out this [Google form](#) in order to anonymously ask questions to Respected Dr. Chinmay Pandya for the next newsletter, give feedback on Newsletter improvement, or submit pictures/stories or other original work.

"Yagya symbolizes noble deeds and altruistic mode of life that generates and expands benevolence in all forms of Nature. In simple terms, it means giving, distributing and thus expanding good."

- Applied Science of Yagya for Health & Environment

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