
Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Aug 2021

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Living Our Traditions

Gayatri Japa and Upakarma

By Swamini Brahmaprajnananda

There comes a day once a year that we honor and potentise the mantra bestowed upon us. A mantra is sacred because it is revealed by *Bhagavān* to the *ṛṣis*. Further through the *guru-śiṣya paramaparā* the mantra has come to us as a blessing. It carries a certain *śakti* in and of itself, but it is our duty to potentise it by repetition. The mantra helps us to invoke the complete grace of *Bhagavān* through the invocation of a particular deity. *Mananāt trāyate iti mantra*. A mantra protects, nourishes and enriches us by repetition.

In the Vedic tradition, *upanayana*, a ritual initiating a student into a mantra, initiates a person into Vedic studies. One has to be qualified to study the sacred Veda. An important rule is unless you are initiated into the Gayatri mantra you cannot study the Veda.

Dates for 2021

Yajur Veda *upakarma* – 22nd Aug

Rig Veda *upakarma* – 21st Aug

Sama Veda *upakarma* – 9th Sep

In fact before teenage years, it is better for children to be initiated into a life of *vaidika dharma* which is a life of prayers and duties paving the way for self growth. Then before teenage years, one gains enough strength through mantra japa to ride the difficult times and live within the fold of *dharma*. Once the initiation is done between the ages of 8 – 12 years the child wears the *yajña-*

upavīta, the sacred thread which commits one to perform *yajña*, a Vedic ritual offering daily. This *yajñopavīta* can only be given up during *sannyasa*.

Every year there is an *Upakarma* day when the *yajñopavītam*, sacred thread (for those Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas who have been initiated), is changed. Typically males have a dip in a holy river or pond or add a few drops of Ganga water to their shower and then change the sacred thread by chanting some mantras. It is a day of renewing one's commitment to one's Veda. Depending on the Veda that your family follows, the dates will be different.



If you don't know which Veda your family followed, or your family did not follow a Veda, or you are from another culture, then you could consider Yajur Veda as your affiliation because we belong to the *paramparā* of Pujya Swami Dayananda ji and are affiliated to the Sringeri *matha*.

It is best to be guided by your Guru who will initiate you into a mantra because the qualification is your commitment.

The Gayatri mantra is chanted for 1008 times the next day following the *Upakarma*. Gayatri is the name of a *chandas*, metre, as well as the name of the mantra. Since it is present in all the four Vedas it is most sacred and popular among mantras for initiation. The Gayatri mantra is to be chanted only by people who are initiated within the family or by one's Guru. It is not to be chanted by someone who has casually picked it up by listening to audios and videos. Please don't think that only the Gayatri mantra is powerful. Every mantra is powerful. What matters is your devotion and commitment.

On 23rd August, Monday this year, let us make a *sañkalpa*, a sacred resolve and prayer of chanting our mantra an x times (multiples of 108 on the *mala*) and invoking the grace of *Bhagavān*. Schedule your time accordingly. Do follow all the stipulations of chanting only after taking a bath and wearing clean clothes.

Visualise the deity blessing you and then begin the chant. You can take short breaks and drink adequate water. While your mind may wander bring back your mind to the sound of the mantra as you chant softly or mentally. We bless ourselves by mantra japa.