

Sanatana Dharma

**Lesson 10: Yajña: The Fire Ritual
Festival: Maha Shiva Ratri**



**Review of
Lesson 9: The Four Varṇas**

Śānti Mantras



- ॐ सह नाववतु ।
सह नौ भनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥
- Om saha nāvavatu |
sa ha nau bhunaktu |
sa ha vīryam karavāvahai |
tejasvināvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai |
Om shāntiḥ shāntiḥ shāntiḥ ||

Śānti Mantras



- Meaning:
 - 1: Om, May God Protect us Both (the Teacher and the Student),
 - 2: May God Nourish us Both,
 - 3: May we Work Together with Energy and Vigour,
 - 4: May our Study be Enlightening, not giving rise to Hostility,
 - 5: Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

Review: Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- The Vedic society is a duty-based society
- Every duty is considered to be sacred and essential and should be performed with the proper attitude as prescribed by Karma Yoga principles
- Just because a person is born into a varṇa does not mean that a person has certain “rights” and superiority over others
- Karma Yoga teaches us that we only have duties; we are not “entitled” because we are born into a certain caste

Review: Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- We see varṇa-based divisions in modern society – in every country, every organization, and even in every family
- Group activity with children
 - Take 5 minutes to discuss amongst yourselves on how you see the varṇa system in action in your school
 - How does the varṇa system provide the infrastructure for every individual to gain maturity?
 - Present your analysis

Review: Lesson 9: The Four Varnas



- When the Varna System devolved into the rigid caste system, it became oppressive
- We must reject the rigid caste system and recognize that the four varnas are guna-based and duty-based;
- We should respect the work and our duty, no matter what it is; this is an expression of Karma Yoga

Festival: Vasanta Panchami



- Dedicated to **Goddess Sarasvati**, Goddess of knowledge
- We pray to Goddess Sarasvati so that our ignorance is replaced with knowledge
- Goddess Sarasvati is the one who gives the “sara” (essence or knowledge) about “sva” (the Self)

Festival: Vasanta Panchami



- Traditionally, children are initiated into education on this day according to a ritual called “Akṣara Abhyasa” or “Vidya ārambham”
- “Akṣara Abhyasa” is a very significant rite in Sanatana Dharma
- “Akṣara” also means that which is unchanging or the Truth, i.e., God!
- Chant verse 15:16 from the Gita

Festival: Maha Shiva Ratri



- From “Hindu Festivals and Celebrations” by Smt. Anasuya Sastry
- **Maha Shiva Ratri** is celebrated on the 14th day of the waning moon in the month of “Magha”
- Maha Shiva Ratri is celebrated in honor of Lord Shiva
- Shiva and Pārvati are regarded as the parents of the universe
- Shiva represents Puruṣa (primary cause) and Pārvati represents Śakti (energy)

Festival: Maha Shiva Ratri



- Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of linga
- The linga is symbolic of something without a beginning or end, the infinite, the Supreme
- The linga form in which Shiva is worshipped is symbolic of the Supreme with a form - because the linga has a particular shape
- The linga form is symbolic of the formless aspect of the Supreme also - because the linga has no head, limbs, etc.
- Shiva means “auspiciousness”

Festival: Maha Shiva Ratri



- When the devas and asuras churned the milky ocean, poison issued forth first (only later did the ambrosia come)
- Lord Shiva is said to have drunk the poison to save the worlds
- Pārvati stopped the poison from going below the neck of Lord Shiva
- Hence the name “Neela-kanṭha” or “Blue-necked One”

Festival: Maha Shiva Ratri



- The poison made Lord Shiva's body hot. In order to cool the body, the devas channeled Ganga through the locks of hair on his head
- When even that did not cool the head, the moon was placed on top of Lord Shiva's head
- It is customary to bathe the Shiva Linga with a continuous Abhisekha of cool water on his head

Festival: Symbolism of Lord Shiva



- Lord Shiva is the aspect of the Godhead that represents **dissolution**
- Many of our actions are driven by our ego (“me”, “my”, “I” etc.)
- Contemplation on the form and representation of Lord Shiva helps us to overcome the limitations imposed by our egocentric actions and helps us to open our vision to act selflessly

Festival: Symbolism of Lord Shiva



- However, we must understand that “dissolution” happens through knowledge and not through action
- When we see the oneness of the Self, we experience “Shiva” or auspiciousness
- In Chapter 15 the Gita, Lord Krishna says “One can see the Truth of this changing universe of names and forms only by cutting asunder the bondage to them by the sword of detachment”

Festival: Symbolism of Lord Shiva



- Attachment happens through ignorance or incorrect understanding, a feeling of “otherness”
- Detachment happens through understanding that the Divine is expressed in all forms;
 - We can learn to love and accept others as they are
 - We do not discriminate on the basis of color, gender, income, religion, nationality, etc.
 - We learn to enjoy whatever work comes our way and learn to dedicate our actions and their results to the Lord

Yajña: The Fire Ritual



- A ritual is a religious practice that is to be performed
 - In a systematic way
 - As per the directions in the scriptures (Vedas)
 - With the proper Knowledge and understanding
 - In the right spirit

Yajña: The Fire Ritual



- Through Vedic times, fire has been used as a medium for devotees to pray and seek help
- Fire is considered a medium that carries the oblations offered by a devotee to an invoked deity

Yajña: The Fire Ritual



- The three essential requirements of a Yajña are:
 - Mantra
 - Material for oblation
 - Deity invoked
- Yajña brings the devotee's attention to focus by:
 - Speech (mantra)
 - Body (offerings made)
 - Mind (Deity invoked)

Yajña: The Fire Ritual



- When we chant “kāyéna vaca...” we invoke the three essential elements that constitute a yajña
- When we perform all our actions as a yajña, we get closer to the goal of performing our actions with the attitude of Karma Yoga
- This is the attitude that is expressed in the Gita and also in the form of Lord Shiva during Maha Shiva Ratri festival

Meditation



- Open your eyes and look at the picture of Lord Shiva – don't look elsewhere for 1 full minute
- Reflect on the symbolism of Lord Shiva's form
- Slowly close your eyes and look at the picture within your heart
- Visualize within and be silent for some time



Concluding Śānti Mantra



- ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम पूर्णात् पूर्णमदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमीदाय पूर्णमैवावशिष्यते ॥
Om Pūrṇamadah Pūrṇamidam Pūrṇāt-Purṇam-
Udacyate
Pūrṇasya Pūrṇamādāya Pūrṇamévāvaśiśyate ||
Om Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ Śāntiḥ ||

Meaning:

That (God) is infinite; this (world) is whole;
from the infinite the world becomes manifest.

From the infinite, even if the whole is taken away,
what remains again is the infinite.