

## PAÑCA MAHĀ YAJÑAS



pañca sūnā gṛhasthasya cullī peṣaṇy upaskaraḥ |  
kaṇḍanī ca-udakumbhaś ca badhyate yās tu vāhayan || 68 ||

68. A householder has five slaughter-houses (as it were, viz.) the hearth, the grinding-stone, the broom, the pestle and mortar, the water-vessel, by using which he is bound (with the fetters of sin).

tāsām krameṇa sarvāsām niṣkrtyartham maharṣibhiḥ |  
pañca kl̥ptā mahāyajñāḥ pratyaham gṛhamedhinām || 69 ||

69. In order to successively expiate (the offences committed by means) of all these (five) the great sages have prescribed for householders the daily (performance of the five) great sacrifices.

adhyāpanam brahmayajñāḥ pitryajñas tu tarpanam |  
homo daivo balir bhauto nryajño 'tithipūjanam || 70 ||

70. Teaching (and studying) is the sacrifice (offered) to Brahma, the (offerings of water and food called) Tarpana; the sacrifice to the manes, the oblation to the sacrifice offered to the gods, the Bali offering that is offered to the Bhutas, and the hospitable reception of guests — the offering to humans.

pañca-etān yo mahāyajñān na hāpayati śaktitaḥ |  
sa gṛhe 'pi vasan nityam sūnādoṣair na lipyate || 71 ||

71. He who neglects not these five great sacrifices, while he is able (to perform them), is not tainted by the sins (committed) in the five places of slaughter, though he constantly lives in the (order of) house (-holders).

devatā.atithi.bhr̥tyānām pitṛṇām ātmanaś ca yaḥ |  
na nirvapati pañcānām ucchvasan na sa jīvati || 72 ||

72. But he who does not feed these five, the gods, his guests, those whom he is bound to maintain, the manes, and himself, lives not, though he breathes.

ahutam ca hutam ca-eva tathā prahutam eva ca |  
brāhmyam hutam prāśitam ca pañca yajñān pracakṣate || 73 ||

73. They call (these) five sacrifices also, Ahuta, Huta, Prahuta, Brahmya-huta, and Prāsita.

japo 'huto huto homaḥ prahuto bhautiko baliḥ |  
brāhmyam hutam dvijāgryārcā prāśitam pitṛ-tarpanam || 74 ||

74. Ahuta (not offered in the fire) is the recitation (of Vedic texts), Huta the burnt oblation (offered to the gods), Prahuta (offered by scattering it on the ground) the Bali offering given to the Bhutas, Brahmya-huta (offered in the digestive fire of Brahmanas), the respectful reception of Brahmana (guests), and Prasita (eaten) the (daily oblation to the manes, called) Tarpana.

svādhyāye nityayuktaḥ syād daive ca-eva-ihā karmaṇi |  
daivakarmaṇi yukto hi bibharti-idaṁ cara.acaram || 75 ||

75. Let (every man) in this (second order, at least) daily apply himself to the study of the Veda, and also to the performance of the offering to the gods; for he who is diligent in the performance of sacrifices, supports both the movable and the immovable creation.

agnau prāstā-āhutiḥ samyag ādityam upatiṣṭhate |  
ādityāj jāyate vṛṣṭir vṛṣṭer annaṁ tataḥ prajāḥ || 76 ||

76. An oblation duly thrown into the fire, reaches the sun; from the sun comes rain, from rain food, therefrom the living creatures (derive their subsistence).

yathā vāyuraṁ samāśritya vartante sarvajantavaḥ |  
tathā gṛhastham āśritya vartante sarva āśramāḥ || 77 ||

77. As all living creatures subsist by receiving support from air, even so (the members of) all orders subsist by receiving support from the householder.

### **Gītā 18:5**

yajñā dāna tapaḥ karma na tyājyaṁ kāryam eva tat |  
yajño danaṁ tapaścaiva pāvanāni manīṣiṇām || 5 ||

The acts of yajña, philanthropy and self-discipline should never be relinquished; but should be performed. For yajña, philanthropy and self-discipline are the purifiers of the wise.

## THE FIVE GREAT SACRIFICES

The term 'yajña' is associate with 3 roots;—

*Yaj* — to offer, to give

*Yāc* — to request, to receive, to obtain

*Yuj* — to balance, harmonize, equalize.

In a yajña an offering is given, a blessing is received or a request is made, or a previously obtained gift or favour is acknowledged, and then through mutual reciprocation, balance and harmony are achieved.

devān bhāvayet ānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ |  
parasparaṁ bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ param avāpsyatha || 3:11 ||

By this (yajña), may you nurture the gods, and the gods will nurture you [in return]. Thus, nurturing one another, you will obtain the highest good.

The two dynamic factors of Yajña are:—

1. A sincere feeling of gratitude and
2. The demonstration of that heartfelt gratitude in the making of offerings and performing of service.

Yajña in its narrow primary sense refers to the ancient Vedic Sacrifices that are now redundant.

In its secondary and applied sense it refers to the *Five Great Sacrifices* which requite the Five Great Debts with which each one of us is born.

The fact of our birth in human embodiment incurs 5 debts (*ṛṇas*) it is our duty therefore to discharge these debts for the rest of our lives. These are:—

***Pitru ṛṇa*** — debt to the parents and the ancestors.

***Pitru Yajña*** — The fact of our birth, and the loving care, protection and nurturing of our parents obligates us to them and to our grandparents and all the other members of our family.

This debt is discharged by —

1. honouring our parents and paying them respect.
2. Seeking their advice and guidance knowing that they are our greatest well-wishers.
3. by marrying and procreating to continue the line.
4. After marriage in householder stage it is our duty to take care of them and support them in their old age.

5. Upon their death we need to perform their funeral rites appropriately.
6. Thereafter the performance of the śrāddha ceremonies to honour their memory.

**Rishi Runa** —  
debt to the sages

**Brahma Yajña** — Our sages (Rishis) have dedicated themselves to the path of enlightenment for the welfare of all beings. These magnanimous sages have performed intense austerities to realize the truth and have passed down their wisdom through their disciples in order that we too may spiritually develop, unfold and progress towards enlightenment.

The debt that we owe them is called “*brahma*’ which means ‘immense’. It is discharged by:—

1. Taking the trouble to study their teachings daily, to spend some time every day reading spiritual books such as Gita, Upanishads, Ramayana etc.
2. By researching, investigating and studying our cultural heritage or at the very least making the attempt at being culturally informed about the basics.
3. Teaching this knowledge to our children, passing on our spiritual and cultural heritage.

**Deva Runa** —  
debt to the gods

**Deva Yajña** — The Devas are the cosmic forces which administer and govern the universe under the direction of the Supreme Lord. All these forces of nature and cosmic principles are rewarded by making daily offerings to them to show our gratitude and to help us cultivate an awareness of the underlying cosmic consciousness behind all phenomenal appearances.

1. We should keep an altar at home and make daily offerings of flowers, water and incense.
2. Whenever possible we should go to the temple to make some offerings and attend festivals.
3. On festivals and special occasions we should conduct a puja or havan ceremony at home.

In the Gīta Kṛṣṇa says that the one who enjoys the bounty of the gods without offering them anything in return is verily a thief!

*iṣṭān-bhogān-īha vo devā dāsyante yajñā-bhāvitāḥ |  
tair-dattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhūṅkte stena eva saḥ || 3:12*

**Manuṣya Runa**

**Manuṣya yajña** — We are by nature social animals and cannot live in isolation. Everything that we enjoy comes to us through

<p>— debt to society</p>	<p>the agency of other people. We are therefore indebted to the society in which we live.</p> <p>Traditionally this debt was discharged by daily offering hospitality to strangers in the village. An orthodox Hindu would try to feed a stranger every day. There are three minimal requirements which must be offered to a guest; a seat, water to drink, and kind words. Nowadays we can discharge this debt by:—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By welcoming and offering hospitality to strangers whenever and however possible.</li> <li>2. By caring for the poor and the needy whenever the occasion arises.</li> <li>3. By contributing to social causes such as disaster appeals.</li> <li>4. By even paying taxes, abiding by the laws of the country and by fulfilling our civic duties in everyway possible we are contributing to the welfare of the society.</li> <li>5. To protect others in the society and to ensure we cause no harm in anyway or obstruct the legitimate pursuits of other communities.</li> </ol>
<p><b><i>Bhūta Runa</i></b> — debts to the elements</p>	<p><b><i>Bhūta yajña</i></b> — And lastly we are part of an environment which is made up of the five elements and consists of plant and animal life (<i>bhūtas</i> = elementals). This ecosystem is vital to our survival and thus it is our duty to continually protect it. This is done through:—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joining tree planting programs and minimization of habitat destruction.</li> <li>2. Supporting sustainable farming methods and protection of wildlife. Try to buy ethically produced foods avoiding factory farming</li> <li>3. Decreasing our consumption of valuable resources. In our homes we can take the effort to limit the amount of water, gas and electricity consumed.</li> <li>4. By becoming proactive in recycling and avoiding the unnecessary generation of harmful waste — such as the use of plastic bags and all unnecessary packaging etc.</li> </ol>

These five sacrifices form the basis of Hindu practice.

It's the discharging of these debts that form the core of our ritual and social duties. These yajñas unite all Hindus in common practice whereas theological and philosophical beliefs and convictions may differ widely and serve to divide one group from another.

## Hospitality

The householder is then (after sandhya and vaisvadeva bali) to remain in his courtyard to await a stranger (*atithi*), for as long as it takes to milk a cow (about 12 minutes) or longer if he chooses.

If a stranger comes he must be worshiped and welcomed with all due hospitality. He must be offered a seat, and his feet are to be washed. Food should be respectfully served and he should be engaged in pleasant conversation.

When he departs, he should be lovingly farewelled — the host accompanying him (for a short distance). The householder should always welcome and venerate with great care as a guest that stranger who comes from another country and whose name and family are not known.

A fellow villager is never considered a guest (*atithi*). He who eats, neglecting an unknown stranger, who is poor and friendless, and who is hungry, goes to hell. VP 3:11:56 - 60

The stranger, who being disappointed, leaves a house and goes elsewhere, transfers his own demerit to the owner of the house and takes away the house-holder's merit.

Brahma, Prajapati, Indra, Agni, the Vasus and Aryama are ever present in the person of a stranger/guest share the food that is offered to him. Therefore O best of men! One should assiduously discharge the duties of hospitality; for one, who eats without giving any to a stranger/guest, feeds upon sin.

Thereupon the householder must satisfy with well-prepared meals the young married woman (*suvāsini*), the unwell (*duhkhi*), the pregnant woman (*garbhini*), the aged (*vrddha*) and the children (*bālaka*) of the house and then only he himself should eat. The householder, who eats without first feeding these, feeds upon his own iniquity and after his death is condemned to hell to feed upon phlegm.

He, who eats, without performing ablutions, feeds upon filth; he, who eats without doing japa, feeds upon pus and blood; one who eats unblest food, drinks urine; and he, who eats before the infants and the others (mentioned previously) is doomed in hell to live on excrement. (V.P. 3:11:67 – 71)

In the evening, the householder, should again, according to his means show hospitality to any stranger/guest who may come, receiving him with

the salutation of evening and offering him water to wash his feet, a seat, supper and a bed.

The sin, consequent upon not receiving hospitably the stranger who comes after sunset, is eight times greater than that of neglecting one who comes during the day, A person should therefore show particular respect to one who seeks refuge after sunset, for by venerating him all the gods are venerated.

The householder should therefore according to his means, give a stranger/guest rice, vegetables, water, a bed, a mat, or if he cannot give

