

CHAPTER ONE



RELIGION

Introduction to Religion

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1.1 Hinduism and its God

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is considered to be the oldest of the world's living religions. It is known as 'Sanatana Dharma' or 'Vaidika Dharma.' Sanatana Dharma means eternal religion and Vaidika Dharma means the religion of the Vedas (God Knowledge or God Science). Hinduism is sometimes called the way of living.

Who founded Hinduism?

The values of the religion are taught through two sources known as Shruti and Smriti.

The word 'Shruti' means what has been heard by the seers (rishis or saints) direct from the gods or what was revealed to the seers. It is recorded in books called Vedas. There are four Vedas.

The word 'Smriti' means what has been memorized or remembered; they are morals handed down by human authors; some of them are the Puranas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and law codes such as that of Manu.

Hindu religion as such knows no age. Hence it is an Ancient and Revealed – Religion. In fact being the first religion, it was known a concept of moral values and peaceful living. The word Religion came to be attached in later days.

Who is God and where is God?

People worship different forms like Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Muruga, Ganesha, Ayyappa, Rama, Krishna, Venkateshwara, Hanuman, etc. Yet there is a persistent principle of unity

- Which is the acceptance of the authority of the Vedas
- All forms come from one God called OM, the Brahman also called Paramaatma (Supreme soul).
- The God is also within us called Jeevaatma (individual soul).



1.2 Hindu/Sources of religious information

Who is a Hindu?

A Hindu is the person who lives the life of Dharma (righteousness)

- Accepting Vedas with reverence.
- Recognizing that the means to attain salvation have several paths
- Understanding that many forms are worshipped as God though they all come from one and only source which is Brahman (Om).

Hinduism adopts many different forms of belief and practice. It is quite a large and hospitable family of diverse principles and practices. Yet it is a distinctive way of life.

How the religion got its name as Hinduism?

- The word Hindu is of geographic origin.
- It was derived from the name originally given to the people settled on the river Sindhu.
- It was corrupted by foreign visitors to the word “Hindu”, and
- The vast spectrum of faiths that flourished here acquired the generic name Hinduism.

Where can one attain the knowledge to practice Hinduism?

Shruti	Vedas - 4 Vedas Upanishads – 108
Smritis	18 Smritis Code of Conduct - Manu Smriti (the oldest) 2 Itihasas Epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata (Bhagavad Gita) Puranas Mythology – 18 Puranas. Bhagavata Purana, Markendeya Purana, Skandha Purana, and more Shastras (Rules/Sciences) – Agama, Vaastu, Shilpa, Kavya, Jyotisa, Kalpa, and more Darshanas Schools of philosophy - Six Vedangas The limb of the Vedas - Six Upavedas Secondary to Vedas – Four Literature By Adi Shankaracharya and more
Specialization	(The following is an assembly from the above to specialize in knowledge) Upangas Ancillary to Vedas – Four 14 fold Vedic Vedas 4 + Vedangas 6 + Upangas 4
Practice	Samskaras Sacraments – 16
Practice	Prayer by sound – Chanting, Bhajan Discussion – Sath Sang, Meditation – Japa, Charity, Social Service Yoga – Eight limbed Yoga, Pooja – 16 Step pooja, Idol Worship, Pilgrimage

1.3 Vedas and its teachings

What is in Vedas and who wrote them?

- Vedas were heard by the sages direct from the gods; it is part of an oral tradition; it is considered to be revealed knowledge; it talks about karma (action) and jnana (self-knowledge).

It is believed at the time of Vyasa there were 1180 Sakhas. **Vyasa** classified these sakhas into four branches and handed them to four Rishis. They are **four Vedas** – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva veda. Rig Veda given to Sage Paila,

Yajur Veda given to Sage Vaisampayana, Sama Veda given to Sage Jaimini and Atharva Veda given to Sage Sumantu.

1. Mantras that were in the form of prayers were classified as **Rig Veda**.
 2. Mantras used in performances of rituals were classified as **Yajur Veda**.
 3. Mantras to be sung were classified as **Sama Veda**.
 4. Mantras and yagnas whose subject matter dealt with averting calamities as well as prayers to gods during religious and solemn rites were classified as **Atharva Veda**.
- The Vedas, being in the form of words, were orally taught by the sages to disciples in gurukula through the correct intonation of these words. Even now they are passed on to the interested students in veda patasalas by learned pundits. Many philanthropists support veda patasalas to maintain the Vedic tradition.

Rig Veda X.71.6 about Friendship

He who abandons a friend
Who knows his duty of friendship,
Has no worth in what he speaks.
What he hears is also false and he
Does not know the path of righteous action.

Rig Veda X.85.36 about Marriage Vow

I take hold of your hand for good fortune,
So that with me, your husband,
You may attain to old age.
The Gods gave you to me for leading the life of a house holder.

Four Purusharthas

The Vedas classify **all human pursuits** into four common ends, known as purusharthas:

1. **Dharma**=ethics/righteousness
2. **Artha**=security/wealth
3. **Kama**=desires
4. **Moksha**=liberation

While the pursuits of security and desire are more or less common to and shared among all living beings, dharma and moksha are unique to human beings.

Artha is the foremost urge in every individual to survive in this world. So it is a purushartha. Mere survival is not enough and every person alive wants to be happy and so kama is another purushartha. But the means by which one gain artha and kama is very important and hence Dharma is one of and given the first place in purusharthas. Even after acquiring enough wealth and desires for a happy living if the person is not contented it is the self-conscious person, manifesting in the sense of 'I', who feels

insecure and unhappy. There is no solution to this problem of insecurity and unhappiness through the fulfillment of desires. Only solution to feel free from these limitations is to realize one's own self through self knowledge and is called moksha. Upanishads explain all about self knowledge (Brahma vidya / Atma vidya /jnana). Hence moksha is the important purushartha backing all other pursuits in life.

Karma and Rebirth

Karma means actions or duties we do. The law of Karma is by cause and effect principle.

When we do something well we acquire punya. When we do something badly we acquire papa. Together they form the casual karma for a given birth, be it a human birth or any other lower birth. Their unfoldment is what is meant by destiny, prarabdha karma. They are unfolded either in this life or in the hereafter. Different sets of karma fructify in different births of the jiva (individual) with an appropriate body, time and place.

By revealing rebirth, **the Vedas only point out** that one cannot get away with improper actions and conversely one will not be unrewarded for proper actions. The scriptures like Bhagavad Gita tell us that even the gain of heaven (svarga) is only a result of good karmas and therefore limited to a given time period. When the jiva's punya is exhausted, he will return to earth.

This process of karma exhaustion and accumulation continues until one gains moksha, the final goal. The gain of moksha is in the form of knowledge of the self as free from birth and death. Karma plays an important role in preparing a person for this knowledge. By living a dharmic (following ethics) and prayerful life meaning when good karmas are performed for the sake of the Lord one can gain maturity to realize the self. In other words, doing the duties but leaving the results to Lord one become unattached to actions and hence can gain maturity to realize the self.

Jeevan Mukti (Liberated while Living)

The same Vedas that talk about rebirth also reveal that, in reality, there is no actual birth or death for the jiva. Upon enquiry into the self, one discovers that the jiva is neither a doer nor an enjoyer. The one who has realized his own self and come to appreciate the meaning of the great sentence "tat tvam asi" ('You are that Supreme Brahman,' from Upanishad), is called a "Jeevan Mukta," meaning that he or she is liberated while living. Such a person is thereafter untouched by karma, meaning that he or she continues to live until the prarabdha-karma is exhausted and no future karma will be accrued. At the fall of the body, there is no longer a jiva separate from the Lord to be reborn. Jivan-mukti is thus the ultimate end of every individual's life.

Two lifestyles

Keeping moksha (self-realization) as the primary end in life, the Vedic culture provides **two committed lifestyles** a person may follow.

1. One is a life of activity and duties called **pravrtti marga** wherein one enjoys a disposition of karma yoga.
2. The other is a life of renunciation called **nivrtri marga**.

While the former provides a lifestyle conducive for one's inner growth, leading to self knowledge, the latter is a life exclusively committed to self knowledge. Ultimately, both of the lifestyles are meant for moksha.

Pravrtti Marga

In the life of pravrtti one is primarily committed to dharma. In keeping with the Vedic dharma, one performs actions to achieve artha (wealth) and kama (desires) in this life and in the hereafter.

- Karmas that aid in fulfilling one's desires are known as **kamyā karmas**. E.g. performing putrakameshti yaga=a ritual to obtain a child, King Dasaratha did this yaga to obtain Rama.
- Karmas that are done daily are called **nitya karmas**. E.g. eating, bathing, cooking, cleaning, going to school/work, showing hospitality to surprise guests, etc.
- Karmas that are done occasionally are called **naimittika karmas**. E.g. Sraaddha, karma to propitiate ancestors.

These karmas are considered to be binding when one is impelled to act due to one's likes and dislikes. On the other hand, when the same karmas are performed for purification of one's mind, they become a means for growth, leading to moksha i.e. when they are performed with devotion (bhakti) for the sake of the Lord, they can bring inner maturity. This attitude helps neutralize one's likes and dislikes and the very karma becomes an offering, known as a yagna. The results thereof are received as the grace of the Lord (prasada).

Since the Vedic rituals cover all phases of life, the life of a Vaidika (one who follows the Vedic tradition) is a religious life. In the vision of Vedas, the cosmic laws are functionaries, known as devatas (gods-sun, moon, fire, water, wind, earth etc.). The Lord is propitiated as these cosmic forms and through the Vedic yagnas one comes to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness of all that exists in the creation. Thus, a Vaidika's life is committed to yagna, which brings about harmony between the individual and the creation. Such a prayerful life leads to inner maturity and prepares the person for the discovery of self knowledge and freedom.

Nivrtri Marga

The second lifestyle prescribed by the Vedas is that of nivrtri or sanyasa, renunciation. The Vedas absolve the sannyasi from the performance of nitya and naimittika karmas. Such a person is/should be committed to the pursuit of self knowledge only to the exclusion of all other activities.

The Four Varnas (divisions)

The Vedas not only point out the ultimate end (jivan-mukti/moksha) but also provide a way of life to discover it, giving a direction and a purpose to one's life. In Vedic society, people were divided into four groups on the basis of their qualities, *guna* and what they had to do, *karma* which lead them to the ultimate end eventually.

The gunas themselves are three in number: sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva stands for any type of thinking, rajas stands for activity and tamas stands for dullness. Contemplativeness, enquiry, silence, peace and the various mental and physical disciplines are all saattvic. Discipline is found in rajas also, but there will also be a lot of ambitions, energy and enthusiasm along with it. Tamas is a certain dullness, lethargy and laziness. All people come under the four groups formed by the possible combinations of the three gunas. Everyone has to work his or her way through the four compositions in order to mature.

In the Vedic context,

1. the people having the first combination, *sattva-rajas-tamas*, are called **Brahmanas**,
2. those having the second combination, *rajas-sattva-tamas*, are called **kshatriyas**,
3. those having the third, *rajas-tamas-sattva*, are called **vaisyas** and
4. those having the fourth combination, *tamas-rajas-sattva*, are called **sudras**.

The duty of a brahmana (priest) is to study, teach and officiate rituals, that of a kshatriya (ruler/warrior) is to protect dharma, that of a vaisya (farmer, craftsman/trader) is to make things available to people and that of a sudra (worker/servant) is to help the society achieve its goals.

In the past, people in the four groups kept passing these same duties down to their children. The system was protected by royal families but was destroyed later after foreign invasions. Probably less than one percent of the people still follow this system. However, in terms of quality the division of people does not change even now. We choose our own duty depending on one of these qualities we possess.

In Vedic vision, moksha is the main aim. One has to perform actions with the spirit of karma-yoga. For that yoga one must necessarily have a certain duty and be clear about what one has to do. When one is clear about what one's duty is, then one can perform all activity as duty with the proper attitude following dharma (ethics). Such a person is a karma-yogi who offers all karma to the Lord with bhakti (devotion). Then that person is untouched by karma and eventually realizes his own self and becomes a jivan-mukta/jnani. [Jnani=One who is self realized/who has attained moksha through self knowledge (jnana).]

1.4 Vedic Gods/Havan/Darbha grass

Vedic Gods

Gods mentioned in the four Vedas are Vedic gods. The principal Vedic gods are 33 in number. They are:

- **Vasus** – 8 – personification of nature and natural phenomena.
- **Rudras** – 11 – militant gods of storms & lightning and provider of medicines; Intelligent, and benevolent; protect humanity against its enemies.
- **Adityas** – 12 – personification of laws that rule the universe and the human society.
- **Indra** – lord of the heavens; chief deity in Vedas; rain god in the sky; armed with thunderbolt (Vajrayudha) he is depicted in human form with four arms, riding the celestial elephant Airavata.
- **Prajapathi Brahma** – the Lord of creation of this universe.



The other Vedic gods are:

- **Agni** – fire god; maximum number of hymns in Vedas are devoted to Agni describing and praising him; messenger in carrying the offerings of men to gods in rituals; all-merciful removing people’s difficulties and giving them what they pray for; depicted with two heads, braided hair, a big belly and six eyes, seven arms in which he holds objects like the spoon, ladle, fan etc., four horns and three legs. The smoke is his banner and ram, his vehicle.
- **Asvins** – they are twin deities, youngest of gods; considered brothers of Usha, the goddess of dawn and may actually represent light just before dawn and dusk; expert physicians and surgeons and when supplicated they help the mankind with boons and with their restorative and curative powers.
- **Soma** – moon God; one of most popular Gods of Vedic hymns, the entire ninth mandala is devoted to his praise; cures people’s diseases and gives them joy; the Lord of speech (Vaachaspati); the presiding deity of the Soma creeper whose juice is often used in sacrifices as offering.
- **Surya** – sun god; extremely brilliant; gives light and energy to living beings, and destroy their diseases.
- **Varuna** – water god; lord of moral law; depicted as the rider of a chariot drawn by seven swans, with four hands holding lotus, noose, conch and a vessel of gems and with an umbrella over his head.
- **Vayu** – wind god; basis of all life; symbols of immense strength, loyalty and brotherhood, which are the original qualities of Vayu as a trusted friend of Indra and protector of people.
- **Vishnu** – Lord of preservation of this universe.
- **Visvadevas** – literally mean “all the gods”; protectors of



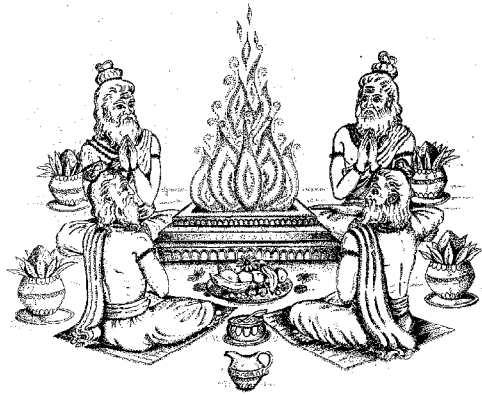
Rita (rhythmic pattern of the universe), the moral law; protect the good.

- **Yama** – god of death; Dharmaraja, sitting on a throne reviews the deeds of men and accords punishment, assisted by Chitragupta (the recorder of men’s deeds) in this task.
- **Maruts** – powerful and destructive storm gods, make the mountains rock and reel, make the earth tremble; progeny of Rudra; work for the welfare of world and men; when worshipped give strength to people, give wealth to people.
- **Brihaspati** – guru of gods in heaven; praised in Vedic hymns.

Yagna / Havan / Homam (The fire ritual)

The word *yajna* is derived from the root ‘yaj’ meaning ‘to worship’. Worship through yagna is a unique form of prayer in Vedic tradition.

Yagna refers to ritual in which one offers specific materials such as ghee and fagots to various deities through the medium of fire. [Any karma performed for the sake of the Lord is also a yagna.]



Why fire is chosen for worship?

1. Among the five basic elements (space, air, fire, water and earth) that make up the creation fire is the first in the order of elements that has form and can be seen. Hence, fire is chosen for worship. But all the other elements are also considered as devatas (gods).
2. Fire – Agni devata is also believed to act as a messenger in carrying the havis (offerings of the people) to the gods.

What type of yagna does one choose to worship?

Approximately four hundred fire rituals have been prescribed in the Vedas. The type of yagna performed depends upon

- the purpose for which it is done,
- the number of officiating priests,
- the duration of the yagna,
- the deities propitiated and
- the type of oblation offered.

How are yagnas classified?

These rituals comprise the **nitya-karmas** (done daily e.g. nryagna-hospitality to guests), **naimittika karmas** (done occasionally in intervals or as need arises e.g. vivaha-marriage ceremony) and **kamya karmas** (done to achieve certain desires e.g. rajasuya yagna –

performed by kings to establish sovereignty). [Also, refer page 11 under Pravrtti Marga.] Nitya and naimittika karmas form the sixteen **samskaras** (sacraments) and based on them yagnas/karmas are further classified into

1. Smarta/grhya yagnas (done for the well being of oneself and one's family) and
2. Sruta yagnas (done for the benefit of the world at large).

Different types of yagnas are discussed in Yajur Veda.



Darbha grass / kusa grass

- Darbha or kusa is an instrument of purification.
- It is a kind of grass that is used while performing Vedic rituals.
- It is used to sanctify items that are connected with worship.
- When it is worn on the ring finger of the right hand with prescribed mantras it is called pavitram and serves to sanctify the person doing the ritual.

1.5 Upanishads

Upanishads or Vedanta, are the end portion of the Vedas. They deal with jnana (self-knowledge). They are the most important part of the Vedas that guides the human beings to spiritual enlightenment. Since this knowledge is in the last portion of the Vedas, it is known as Vedanta, which means the end of the Vedas.

Vedanta, the end portion of the Vedas briefly expounds the philosophic principles of the Vedas and is considered the essence of the Vedas. The philosophy of the Upanishads is sublime, profound, lofty and soul-stirring. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. They reveal the most subtle and deep spiritual truths.

Groups of pupil sit near the teacher to learn from him the secret doctrines. The teaching tradition by which this knowledge is unfolded is known as *sampradaya*. This tradition has been kept alive through a teacher-student lineage, *guru-sishya-parampara*. The lineage of teachers can only originate from who has all knowledge and himself does not need a teacher. Such a source can only be the omniscient Lord. The Lord in his role as the first teacher is given the name **Dakshinamurti**.



There are total of **108 Upanishads** according to the Muktika Upanishad. Of these, the following 12 are considered the principle Upanishads. They are: 1. Isa, 2. Kena, 3. Katha, 4. Taitiriyā, 5. Aitareya, 6. Prashna, 7. Mundaka, 8. Mandukya, 9. Chandogya, 10. Svetasvatara, 11. Brihad-aranya, 12. Maha-Narayana.

How was Upanishad taught - Before beginning the spiritual studies, such as Upanishads, it is customary that the teacher and the students recite a Shaanti-Mantra together to invoke the blessings of God, and to create an atmosphere, conducive to undertaking such a study so that the mind is at rest, peaceful, ready to concentrate and alert. This Shaanti mantra (hymn for peace) is found in Kathopanishad and Svetaasvatara Upanishad from Krishna Yajur Veda:

*Om, Saha naavavatu, Saha nau bhunaktu,
Saha veeryam karavaavahai, Tejasvinaavadheetamastu,
ma vidvishaavahai, Om, Shaantih, Shaantih, Shaantihi.*

Example:

The following stotra (**Mantra Pushpam**) is taken from the **Taittiriya Upanishad found in Krishna Yajur Veda**. It is sung during the offering of flowers to God at the end of a puja often concluded with the aarati mantra – *Raajaadhi Raajaaya*.

*Yopaam pushpam veda(a), Pushpavaan prajaavaan pashumaan bhavati
Chandramaavaa Apaam pushpam Pushpavaan, Prajaavaan pashumaan bhavati
Ya Evam Veda(a), Yopaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati. 1*

*Agnirvaa Apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan Bhavati
Yo-ogner-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
Aapovaa-agner aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Ya Evam Veda(a), Yopaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati. 2*

*Vayurvaa Apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Yo vaa-yor-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
Aapovai vaa-yor-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati.
Ya Evam veda(a), Yopaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan Bhavati. 3*

*Asowvai tapanna-paam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Yo mushya tapata Aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
Aapovaa Amushyatapata Aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Ya Evam Veda(a), Yopaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati. 4*

*Chandramaa Vaa Apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Yas-chandra-masa Aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
Aapovai Chandra-masa Aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Ya Evam Veda(a), Yo paam-aayatanam veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati 5*

*Nakshatraa-nivaa Apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Yo Nakshatraanaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
Aapovai Nakshatraanaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
Ya Evam Veda(a), Yo paam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati 6*

*Parjanyaavaa-apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
 Yaf parjanyaasyaa-yatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati
 Aapovai parjanyaasyaa-yatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
 Ya Evam veda(a), Yopaam-aayatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati 7*

*Samvatsaro Vaa Apaam-aayatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
 Yas-samvatsarasyaa-yatanam Veda(a), Aayatanavaan bhavati.
 Aapovai samvatsarasyaa-yatanam, Aayatanavaan bhavati
 Ya Evam veda(a), Yopsu Naavam pratisthitaam veda(a), Pratyeva tishtati 8*

*Om, Raajaadhi-raajaaya Prasahya Saahine, Namo Vayam Vai Sravanaaya Kurmahe
 Samekaamaan Kaama Kaamaaya-mahyam, Kaamesvaro Vai Sravano dadaatu
 Kuberaaya Vai Sravanaayaa, Maha- raajaaya Namaha.*

Meaning:

1. That one who knows the flowers of Water, he becomes the possessor of flowers, cattle and progeny. Moon is the flower of the Water. He who knows it to be so, he becomes the possessor of cattle and progeny. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
2. Fire is the source of Water. He who knows the source of Fire, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of Fire. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
3. Air is the source of Water. He who knows the source of Air, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of Air. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
4. The Scorching Sun is the source of Water. He who knows the source of the Scorching Sun, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of the Scorching Sun. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
5. Moon is the source of Water. He who knows the source of Moon, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of Moon. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
6. The Stars is the source of Water. He who knows the source of the Stars, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of the Stars. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
7. Clouds is the source of Water. He who knows the source of the Clouds, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of the Clouds. He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self. That one who knows the source of the Water, he becomes established in his Self.
8. Rainy Season is the source of Water. He who knows the source of Rainy Season, he becomes established in his Self. Water is the source of Rainy Season (Samvatsaras). He who knows it to be so, he becomes established in his Self.
 He who knows the raft that is established in the Water, he becomes established in that itself.

(This paragraph has got a hidden meaning – this is to say that there is a raft available to cross over all the forces of Nature and to see the God beyond all of them – God himself is the raft – we have to seek His help to see Him. We need to understand that He indeed is the raft.)

Important understandings of Upanishad: - Maha vakyas from Upanishads:

1. **Aham Brahmaasmi** = I am Brahman (Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad – Sukla Yajur Veda)
2. **Ayamaatmaa Brahma** = This Atman is Brahman (Maandookya Upanishad – Atharva Veda)
3. **Pragnaanam Brahma** = Brahman is pure consciousness (Aitareya Upanishad – Rig Veda)
4. **Tat Tvamasi** = That thou art = You are that Supreme Brahman (Chhaandogya Upanishad – Sama Veda)

These four mahavakyas (great sentences) are considered the quintessence of the Vedas.

The English version of contents of all the four Vedas (with audio) and 108 Upanishads can be found in www.astrojyoti.com.

1.6 Smriti

Smriti - means what has been memorized or remembered. They are morals (**DHARMA SHASTRAS**) handed down by human authors. There are 18 known smritis. Here are the 18 smritis. The Smritis which talk about the code of conduct has known to be changing over time to suit the times.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Angirasa Smriti | 10. Brihaspati Smriti |
| 2. Vyaasa Smriti | 11. Atri Smriti |
| 3. Apaastamba Smriti | 12. Kaatyaayana Smriti |
| 4. Daksha Smriti | 13. Paraashara Smriti |
| 5. Vishnu Smriti | 14. Manu Smriti |
| 6. Yagyavalkya Smriti | 15. Aushanasa Smriti |
| 7. Likhita Smriti | 16. Harita Smriti |
| 8. Samvartta Smriti | 17. Gautama Smriti |
| 9. Shanka Smriti | 18. Yama Smriti |

MANU SMRITI

CHAPTER I. The creation of the world, Caste duties and occupations

CHAPTER II. Sacred rites, Initiation, The First Stage of Life: Studentship, Teacher, Father, Mother

- CHAPTER III. The Second Stage of Life: Householder, The Obligation to Honor Women
 CHAPTER IV. Becoming a Householder, Proper Means of Subsistence for a Brahmin
 Duties of a Brahmin Householder, Various Moral Rules for all
 Householders
 CHAPTER V. Lawful and Forbidden Foods, The Duties of Women
 CHAPTER VI. The Third Stage of Life: The Forest Dweller, The Fourth Stage of Life: The
 Wandering Ascetic (Sannyasin, Sadhu)
 CHAPTER VII. The Duties of Kings
 CHAPTER VIII. Crimes and Punishments, Assault, Battery, Trespass, Theft and Robbery,
 Violence in General, Adultery
 CHAPTER IX. Duties of Husband and Wife
 CHAPTER X. Castes, Mixed Castes, Occupations
 CHAPTER XII. Transmigration, Darkness, Activity, Goodness, Supreme Bliss

GAUTAM SMRITI

Gautam's Smriti not only contains the preaching pertaining to the duties of a man in all the four stages of his life (Varnashram), prevention of his sins and atonement for them but they are also more logical as compared to Manu Smriti. For the benefit of the common man, Gautam has described about the following in his Smriti -

- a. Right conduct (achar dharm)
- b. Celibacy (Brahmacharya Dharm)
- c. **Duties of a householder (Grihasthya Dharm)**
- d. Duties during distress time (Apad Dharm)
- e. Description of various consecrations (Sanskar Varnan)
- f. **Duties** (Kartavya Vidhan)
- g. Occupations of different castes (Jaati Vritti)
- h. Duties of the king (Raj Dharm)
- i. Various types of impurities (Ashouch pratipadan)
- j. Certain time when the scripture cannot be studied (Anadhyaya)
- k. Atonement of sins and its methods (Chandrayan Vrata)
- l. Distribution of wealth among the sons (Sampatti Vibhag).

The preceptor Gautam has made it clear in the very beginning of his Smriti that with the due passage of time, the following of the virtues had been lax during the creation period of the Smriti as compared to the period when Vedas were created.

1. HOUSEHOLDER'S DUTIES:

Gautam has allowed the householder to select the following people for feeding in the given order- "First of all a visitor should be fed, then a child, a patient, a pregnant woman, a married woman, an old man respectively."

a. **DUTIES OF HOUSEHOLDER:**

Some of the duties of a householder, mentioned in Gautam Smriti are as follows -

- To show respect to the teacher.
- It has also been advised to show respect to the relatives of his teacher.
- Regarding the mode of making salutation to the superiors, Gautam says a householder should get up from his seat as soon as he sees a superior person arriving. An ascetic, father-in-law, uncle, maternal uncle etc. are all superior. Even an elder person belonging to a low caste should be given due respect.

b. **BASIC ELEMENTS OF A HOUSEHOLDER'S LIFE:**

Describing about the basic elements of a householder's life, Gautam says: "Wealth, relatives (brothers etc), occupation, caste, knowledge and life-span (age) are the basic elements important in a householder's life, the former being less important than the latter in the respective order."

EIGHT SELF-QUALITIES

According to sage Gautam, the eight natural qualities of a man are as follows:

Kindness
 Not to be envious of other's success,
 Not to find faults in other's qualities,
 Purity,
 Neutrality,
 Good wishes for others,
 Magnanimous and
 Not being greedy

Sage Gautam says, if a man does not possess these eight self-qualities, he will not be able to attain unification with the Supreme Almighty.

2. DUTIES

a. **DAILY BATH :**

Gautam has instructed the householder to maintain purity and cleanliness in his life as far as possible because he feels that a man who is pure and clean represents God. He says - "He should be clean and pure, apply fragrance on his body everyday and if money is no problem, he should not wear dirty and old clothes."

b. GROWING BEARD:

Sage Gautam has left the choice of growing a beard to the householder.

c. RESPECT TO THE DEITIES:

Gautam Smriti prohibits spreading one's legs towards the deities.

d. TRAVELS AND VOYAGES:

Regarding travels and voyages Gautam says - "If there is any doubt in his mind, a man should not board a boat. Here sage Gautam tries to point out the importance of life and feels that it should be protected by all means.

e. NOT TO ASPIRE FOR DESIGNATIONS:

Sage Gautam has advised against having any kind of aspiration for designations, authority and power. He says - "A man should not aspire for designations and authority."

f. INSTRUCTIONS FOR DINING:

Gautam Smriti sheds light on the correct methods of dining. He says - "A man must not eat by keeping the food stuffs on his lap. By all means, one should sit comfortably while dining."

g. SEEKING HELP FROM VIRTUOUS PERSON:

According to sage Gautam, a man should only go to a virtuous person to seek help to overcome his destitution and for the protection of the wealth.

h. NATURE AND QUALITIES OF A HOUSEHOLDER :

Describing about the qualities of an ideal householder sage Gautam says that he is always engaged in virtuosity and treads on the path of truth, follows the character of virtuous people, is civilized by the accomplishment of consecrations, always engaged in self-study of the scriptures (Vedas), and always remains immersed in the study of the Vedas.

1.7 Itihasas

What are Itihasas?

The epic literatures are known as Itihasas. Ramayana and Mahabharata (Bhagavad Gita) are known as Itihasas. These epics reveal dharma stories. They highlight Dharma through stories that are woven around a central character or a particular family.

Ramayana was written by Valmiki. It comprises of 7 sections and 24000 verses. It exemplifies Rama as an embodiment of Righteousness. Rama, along with his three brothers, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna, were born to Dasaratha, the King of Ayodhya after an elaborate ritual. Their birth itself was a strategic step in a divine cosmic effort to vanquish the demon king Ravana of Lanka who had used his supernatural powers to keep the divines under his thumb. Rama grows up as an ideal man, a role model, and was about to be coronated as the beloved prince of Ayodhya - when Fate plays a diabolical trick. The second Queen Kaikeyi, extracts a promise from the King that Rama will be sent to live in the forest for fourteen years and that her son, Bharata, will be crowned as the Prince Royal. Rama accepts the verdict most willingly because for him the words of the father and mother (though step-mother) are gospel. Sita, Rama's consort, and Lakshmana insist on accompanying him to the forest. In the forest Ravana conspires to kidnap Sita and imprison her in Lanka where he seeks her hand which she refuses in no uncertain terms. Rama and Lakshmana get the help of the monkey kingdom, led by their king Sugriva and their mighty warrior-minister Hanuman, to locate Sita in Lanka, then march to Lanka, wage a long war with Ravana and his clan, kill them all and redeem Sita. The fourteen years of exile are over and Rama returns to Ayodhya, where his devoted brother, not accepting the crown connivingly earned for him by his mother, had kept the kingdom safe for his hero Rama. Rama becomes the King much to the pleasure of humans and celestials alike. Throughout the Ramayana, we see powerful arguments, valid for all time, about what is right and what is wrong.

Mahabharata is considered to be the longest literary poem containing 100,000 verses. It deals with two families. The one hundred Kauravas, and the five Pandavas, are cousins, born of two brothers. The eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira, is the eldest of them all. But Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, is obsessed with the passion of ascending to the throne after his blind father, Dhritarashtra, who is on the throne. The rivalry leads to several horrendous schemes on the sly by Duryodhana, led by his uncle Sakuni. Finally the Pandava and their beautiful Queen Draupadi have to undergo not only public humiliation but twelve years of exile in the forest and another year of living incognito. At the end of the thirteenth year, all negotiations fail, including the intervention of Lord Krishna Himself and the Great War ensues. Half of the Mahabharata is occupied with the 18 days of this Great War in which at least four million people die. Enriched by its many digressions and embellishments covering almost every field of human knowledge, the Mahabharata provides the simplest, most

graphic, and most detailed introduction to Hindu thought, culture, vision, and practice of religion and philosophy.

Bhagavad Gita occurs in chapters twenty three to forty of Mahabharata. The Gita comprises 700 verses divided into 18 chapters. Vyasa presents the Gita as a dialogue between Arjuna, the student who seeks to know the truth, and Lord Krishna, the teacher. Even though the teaching of Lord Krishna took place on the battlefield of Kuruksetra and was meant for Arjuna, the message for Gita is a timeless message for all humanity. The Gita addresses the fundamental quest of a human being for freedom from a sense of limitation and sorrow. **Though Bhagavad Gita is a smriti, it is given a status of Shruti** because of its subject matter which is similar to that of Upanishad.

1.8 Puranas

Mythology consists of tales called Puranas that convey the truths of Vedas and Dharma Shastras in such a way an innocent child or an illiterate can understand the religion very well. Puranas literally mean 'indeed the old is new'. **There are eighteen Puranas.**

LORD VISHNU (Predominating Deity)

1. **Vishnu Purana** - 23,000 verses. Stories of various devotees; A description of varnasrama; the six angas of the Veda; A description of the age of Kali; It describes the Sveta Varaha Kalpa. It narrates the stories of Dhurva, Prahlada and Bharata.
2. **Naradiya Purana** - 25,000 verses. This Purana contains a synopsis of everything; it describes Jagannatha Puri, Dwaraka, Badrinatha, etc.
3. **Padma Purana** - 55,000 verses. Contains the glory of Srimad Bhagavatam; the stories of Rama, Jagannatha, Matsya, Ekadasi, Bhrgu, etc.
4. **Garuda Purana** - 19,000 verses. Subject of Bhagavad-gita; Reincarnation; Visnusahasranam; It describes the Tarsya Kalpa.
5. **Varaha Purana** - 24,000 verses. Describes different vrata; Lord Vishnu's glories.
6. **Bhagavata Purana** - 18,000 verses. Most popular describing Vishnu's ten avatars.

LORD BRAHMA (Predominating Deity)

1. **Brahmanda Purana** - 12,000 verses. Describes the Vedangas; Describes the Adi Kalpa.
2. **Brahmavaivarta Purana** - 18,000 verses. Contains the glories and pastimes of Radha and Krishna.
3. **Markendeya Purana** - 9,000 verses. Stories of Rama and Krishna.
4. **Bhavisya Purana** - 14,500 verses. Contains the glories of devotional service; Prediction of Lord Chaitanya.

5. **Vamana Purana** - 10,000 verses. Contains the story of Lord Trivikrama.
6. **Brahma Purana** - 10,000 verses.

LORD SIVA (Predominating Deity)

1. **Matsya Purana** - 14,000 verses. Temple construction; Describes Vamana and Varaha Kalpas.
2. **Kurma Purana** - 17,000 verses. Contains the conversation between Krishna and the Sun-god; Danvantari; Describes the Laksmi Kalpa.
3. **Linga Purana** - 10,000 verses.
4. **Siva Purana** - 24,000 verses.
5. **Skanda Purana** - 81,000 verses.
6. **Agni Purana** - 15,400 verses.

1.9 Shastras

Shastras (rules/sciences like **Agamas**) meaning ‘acquisition of knowledge,’ lay down the theological disciplines for the worship of the deities, construction of Temples, installation of deities and observance of religious rituals. Some of the more commonly known Shastras are Vaastu, Shilpa, Yoga, Kavya, Jyotisa, Kalpa, Gandharva-veda (Natya and Gita), Ayurveda, Dhanurveda and Arthashastra.

Artha Shastra: Deals with more than 80 ways of earning wealth through means sanctioned by dharma.

Chitra Karma: The science of fine arts, consisting of a dozen chapters with more than 200 sketches. It is said that this book explains a method by which an artist can create the figure of a person after having seen only a portion of his or her body.

Dharma Shastra – It is the same as Smritis. Example – Manu Dharma Shastra. Refer to Chapter 1.6 on Smriti.

Gaja Shastra: It deals with the behavior and characteristics of elephants, and gives the methodology of how to categorize elephants on the basis of certain bodily marks.

Malla Shastra: Attributed to Malla Muni, this deals with preservation of health, body-building, the science of gymnastics, athletic activities, wrestling, their principles and methods, etc.

Sakuna Shastra: There is a belief that when we set off towards a place, the person we meet coming from the opposite direction, or the sounds of birds and animals, provide

indications of success or failure in our mission. Sage Garga has written an elaborate treatise on this.

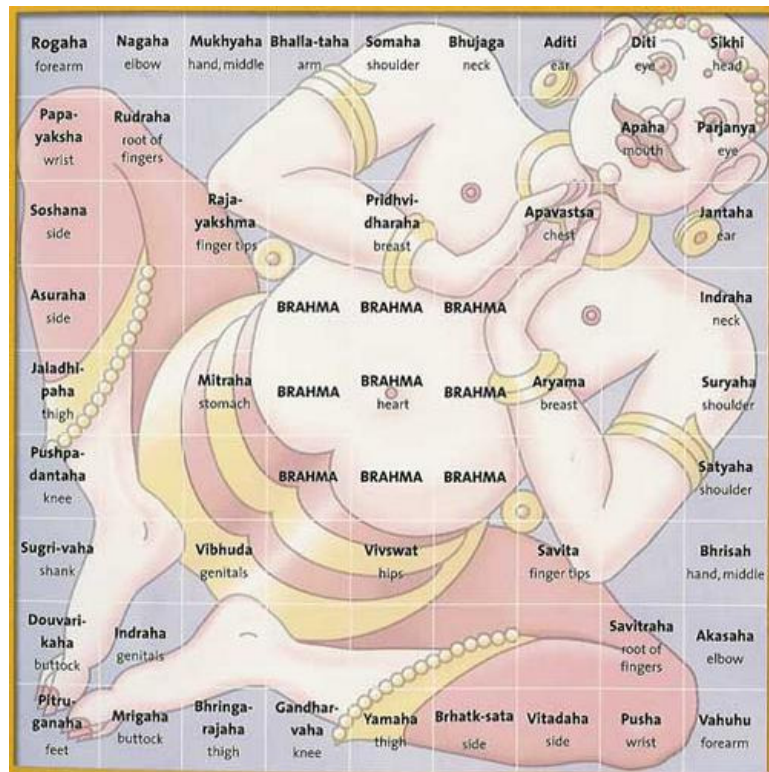
Sabda Shastra: This deals with various sounds, echoes, their categorization and modifications. The mechanical reproduction of sounds, their pitch, frequency, velocity, etc., are also explained.

Supa Shastra: This deals with the science of cooking and is attributed to Sukesha, who is said to have perfected it to a science. Various kinds of preparations, more than a hundred in number -- pickles, condiments, sweets, puddings, cakes and a variety of different dishes to suit the tastes of people in different parts of the world -- are mentioned. In Sanskrit the word supa means "broth," and the word "soup" must have come from this.

Vatavarana Shastra: This is attributed to Sage Atri, and deals with clouds, their categorization and characteristics, 12 different kinds of rains, 64 kinds of lightning, and 33 types of thunder.

Yantra Shastra: This deals with different types of vehicles for movement on land, different kinds of vessels to be used on water for navigation, as well as different varieties of airships. This also deals with the possibility and methods of movement in space without the help of any vehicle, only by the application of mantras and diagrams or yantras.

Shilpa shastras deals with sculptures, the construction of sacred images, temples, palaces, etc., this consists of 22,307 different categories of sculptures, and more than 100 types of images, their dimensions, proportionate sizes and other characteristics. The **shilpa shastras** throw some light on the qualifications of the architect. His is a crucial role in the link between designs at various scales-- from building details to cities to sculptures. The architect is known as the **sthapati** (stha, that which is



fixed and pati, master), one who presides over construction of an edifice. He is the master-builder. However he operates as the head of a team consisting of sutragrahin, takshaka, and vardhakin. The sutragrahin is the draftsman, who uses his knowledge of proportionate measurement by the cord (sutra) to lay out the building. The takshaka carves (taksh) stone, wood, and clay while the vardhakin increases (vrddh) or adds to his work by joining parts and finishing their surfaces.

Vaastu Shastra is a Sanskrit language term combining the words Vaastu, meaning a dwelling or work place, and Shastra, which means a system of science or art. Vaastu Shastra is an ancient Indian architectural science that evolved some 5000 years ago with roots in the sacred Vedic texts. Its principles of building planning and construction seek to bring about an ideal and harmonious balance between humans and the environment. And as a balanced existence generally paves the way for a happy, fulfilled one, following the principles of Vaastu Shastra can result in a life well-lived. Vaastu Shastra considers the earth as a living entity from which other living beings spring forth. What makes this possible on our planet is the presence of the Five Elements (Panchamahabhootas) – Space/Sky (Aakash/Ananta), Air (Vaayu), Fire (Agni), Water (Jala), and Earth (Bhumi). To bring about its aimed-for balance, Vaastu Shastra coordinates these Five Elements with Cosmic Energies and human activities. And, while it does refer to astrology and religion, Vaastu Shastra is rooted more in practicality and logic than any ‘Hindu Mysticism’.

Orientation is very important in Vaastu Shastra. **The basic rules of Vaastu Shastra are based on the eight directions -**

Four principle directions:

- North (Uttara, ruled by Lord **Kuber**, God of Wealth)
- South (Dakshina, ruled by Lord **Yama**, God of Death),
- East (Poorva, ruled by Lord **Indra**, King of Gods, and Lord Aditya/Surya, God of Sun/Energy)
- West (Paschima, ruled by Lord **Varun**, God of Rain/Water)

Four secondary directions:

- East-North (Ishaanya, ruled by Lord **Ishana**, God of All Quarters)
- North-West (Vayavya, ruled by Lord **Vayu**, God of Winds)
- South-West (Nairutya, ruled by **Pitru** or Ancestors)
- South-East (Agneya, ruled by Lord **Agni**, God of Fire)

The Deities of these eight directions are known as **Ashta-Dik-Palakas**.

Of the eight directions, the East and North are considered the most auspicious for:

- How to choose a plot

- What the shape of the plot should be
- What the type of soil should be
- Where on the plot to construct
- When is a good time to begin construction
- What the architectural plan should be like
- What the interior plan should be like
- Where to locate various rooms like kitchen, living room, bathroom and so on
- How to ensure proper ventilation and light
- What materials to use for construction and interiors
- Which colors to use and where
- How to arrange your furniture and belongings
- In which direction to sleep, eat, pray, work, study, make your ablutions, and carry out the other matters of living
- How to plan the garden around your dwelling
- Where to locate the well or water supply
- Where the roads around the plot should be situated.

1.10 Darshanas/Vedangas/Upavedas/Literature

Darshanas mean visions which are **schools of philosophy**.

Need for Philosophy

It always happens that once the basic necessities of life are satisfied and the normal struggles of living are won over, the human being starts wondering what the purpose and meaning of life is? The result of such an enquiry is philosophy.

There are six systems of Indian Philosophy.

- (1) ***Nyaya-sutras*** (guided by pure logic) founded by Gautama Rishi,
- (2) ***Vaisheshika-sutras*** (the earliest school talks about the universe as consisting of countless atoms, each with its own particular quality) by Kanada,
- (3) ***Sankhya-sutras*** (the oldest system believes the universe consists of two elements: purusha, the spirit and prakriti, the matter) by Kapila Muni,
- (4) ***Yoga-sutras*** by Patanjali,
- (5) ***Mimamsa-sutras*** (emphasize on Vedic rituals and sacrifices) by Jaimini and
- (6) ***Vedanta-sutras*** (end of the Vedas-based on Upanishads) by Badarayana (Vyasa).

Vedanta is considered the most valid today. These philosophical works are in cryptic aphorisms called “sutras” meaning ‘thread’ that strings various topics in a given discipline together, either presenting the subject matter or analyzing it.

Vedanta-sutras, also called Brahma sutras, generally deal with four topics:

1. Existence and nature of Brahman
2. Nature of the jiva or the individual soul
3. Creation of the jagat or the world.
4. Moksha or liberation and the disciplines that lead to it.

Vedangas mean “the limb of the Vedas.” Though they are not part of the Vedas, these limbs are complimentary disciplines for the proper understanding of the Vedic texts. The **six** vedangas are:

- **Seeksha** - phonetics,
- **vyaakaranam** - grammar,
- **chandasa** - prosody or meter,
- **niruktam** - etymology,
- **jyotisa** - astronomy and astrology and
- **kalpam** - know-how of rituals.

Upavedas are **four** shastras – They are called as upavedas since they are believed to have evolved from the four Vedas - Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The four Upavedas are:

- Ayurveda** - deals with medicine,
- Dhanurveda** - deals with the subject of armaments and warfare,
- Gandharvaveda** - deals with performing arts (natya shastra-dance and gita-music), and
- Artha-shastra** - deals with the subject of statecraft (written by Chanakya).

Popular religious literatures have been gathered in various languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, and English etc. There have been literature works from Adi Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Alvars, Nayanmars and many more which are old and preserved. There are several works which are a few hundred years old by Ramananda, Vallabacharya, Tulsidas and many more. In the last two centuries there are a notable few like Ramana Maharishi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda and more. All of them draw inspiration from the Vedas, Puranas and epics. Through this literature work all of them provided inspiration and guidance to millions all over the world to follow the Hindu Way of Living.

1.11 Specializations (Upaangas...)

The following two are put together from different subjects to specialize in a set of areas of religion:

- 1) **Upaangas** - They are ancillary to the Vedas and there are **four** upaangas. They are:

- **Nyaya-darshana** (sutras) – Law of nature. (Refer to Chapter 1.10 in page 27)
- **Mimamsa-darshana** (sutras) – Oneness of God and Philosophy of rituals. (Refer to Chapter 1.10 in page 27)
- **Dharma Shastras** (smritis) – 4 Sutras give Guidelines to live a Dharmic life; Specific guidelines to Grhasthas (Married Life); Guidelines for performing rituals and the mathematical principles for construction of various altars. (Refer to Chapter 1.6 in page 18)
- **Itihasas/Puranas/Bhagavad Gita** - the creation and dissolution of Universe, evolution, cycle of time, theology, history of kings (human history). (Refer to Chapters 1.7 & 1.8 in page 22)

2) 14 Fold Vedic Knowledge

By gaining the 14 fold Vedic Knowledge one learns to live a Life of Dharma and the place where he lives using these principles is called the abode of Dharma (Dharma-sthana). The following constitute 14 fold Vedic Knowledge:

- 4 Vedas** (Refer to Chapter 1.3 in page 8)
- 6 Vedangas** – Limbs (Refer to Chapter 1.10 in page 28)
- 4 Upaangas** – Ancillary (Refer to Chapter 1.11 in pages 28 & 29)

1.12 Samskaras

One can practice the religion by performing **samskaras** (sacraments). They serve as prayers for guidance and support from the Lord, which help the individual proceed through the stages of life. Every religion has some sacraments attached to it. [Also refer pages 14 & 15 under classification of yagnas].

Samskaras are based on Kalpa sastra, Manu Smriti and Vedas.

The 16 Samskaras are:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Garbhadhana | (Start of a life) |
| 2. Pumsavanam | (second or third month of pregnancy) |
| 3. Simantonayana | (between the fifth and eighth month of pregnancy) |
| 4. Jatakarma | (At the time when the child is being born) |
| 5. Namakarana | (Naming the child) |
| 6. Nishkramana | (Child is brought out of house, 3rd and 4th month) |
| 7. Annaprashana | (The first feeding of cereal at six months) |
| 8. Chudakarma | (First time cutting of hair, 1st year or 3rd year) |
| 9. Karnavedha | (Piercing the ears in the third or fifth year) |
| 10. Vidyarambha | (Starting of a child with reading and writing) |
| 11. Upanayana | (Investiture of Sacred Thread from 8th year) |
| 12. Vedarambha | (Start of Learning of Vedas) |
| 13. Keshanta | (First shaving Brahmachari's hair) |

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 14. Samavartana | (When studies are completed) |
| 15. Vivaha | (Marriage ceremony) |
| 16. Antyeshti | (Funeral: last rites of the dead) |

Garbhadhana (literally, gifting the womb), is the act of conception. This is the first sacrament which followed immediately on every matrimonial union. There are a number of rites performed before conception.

Pumsavana is a ritual conducted in the third month of pregnancy. If it is the first pregnancy, it can be in the fourth month also. The pregnant woman consumes one bead of barley and two beads of black grain, along with a little curd.

Simantonayana sacrament is performed in the fourth month of a woman's first pregnancy. Simantonayana is conducted for the protection of the mother at the critical period of gestation. This samskara is performed to both invoke protection of the mother and unborn child from demons and spirits that might want to cause harm to the mother and child, as well as to ensure good health, success and prosperity for the unborn child.

Fragrant oil is poured on the head of pregnant woman. A line of parting is drawn three times through her hair from the forehead upwards with three stalks of 'Kusa' grass bound together. The Pranava mantram "OM" and the sacred words called Vyahritis (Bhur, Buva, Sva) are chanted during each operation.

Jatakarman (literally, natal rites) is meant for the development of the intellect of the child. When a male child is born, the ritual connected with birth is performed immediately (within 90 Naazhika). A small portion of a mixture of gold, ghee and honey is given to the new born infant. This rite symbolizes good fortune. (Cited in Manusmrti 2.27)

Namakarana (literally, naming) ceremony is performed to name the child.

Nishkramana (literally, first outing) is taking the child for the first time outside the house. The child is usually taken out into the open only in the fourth month after birth.

Annaprashana (literally, feeding food) ritual, which takes place when a child is six months old, is the first time the child eats solid food, in India - Rice. A few grains of rice mixed with ghee are fed to the infant. This is an important ritual among all sections of Hindus. (Cited in Manusmriti 2.34)

Chudakarana (literally, arrangement of the hair tuft), also known as *choulam* or *mundana* (literally, tonsure) is the ceremony of cutting child's hair for first time. (Cited in Mn.2.27,35)

Karnavedha (literally, ear-piercing) is piercing the ears. This is done with a particular thorn. Butter is applied to the wound. It is applicable to both male and female children. (MW cites Purāna-Sarvasva.)

Vidyarambha (or *Aksharabhyasa*) (literally, commencement of studies) is done either when the child attains three or five years. On the tongue of the child the letters "Hari Sri Ganapataye Namah Avignamastu" and all the alphabets are written with a piece of gold. The child is made to write the same letters from "Hari Sri" onwards with its index finger on raw rice in a bell metal vessel and the child is made to utter each word when it is written. Either the father of the child or an eminent teacher officiates at this ritual. (Citation Mn.2.69)

Upanayana is the ceremony of wearing the sacred thread called Yajnopaveetam. When the child attains eight years, the wearing of the sacred thread "Yajnopavita", is ceremoniously done. This is only in the case of the boys. It is taking the child to the teacher for initiation of formal education. The upanayanam ceremony is followed by brahmopadesam - teaching Gayatri mantra to the boy. (Cited in Manusmṛti 2.27)

Praishartha (or Vedarambha) is the learning of Vedas and Upanishads in 'Gurukulam' or 'Patasala'. In the beginning of each academic period there is a ceremony called Upakarma (Mn.2.71)

Keshanta and Ritusuddhi: Keshanta (literally, getting rid of hairs) is the first shave. It is ceremoniously performed for a boy at his age of 16. (Citation: Mn.2.65)

Ritusuddhi is a ceremony associated with a girl's coming of age.

Samavartana (literally, graduation) is the ceremony associated with the end of formal education of Vedas in 'Gurukula' or 'Patasala'. This ceremony marks the end of student hood. This also marks the end of Brahmacharyaasrama of life. (Citation: Mn.3.4)

Vivaha (Marriage) (Citation: Mn.3.4) - The Ritual of marriage.

Antyeshti (literally, last rites), sometimes referred to as *Antim Sanskar*, are the rituals associated with funeral.

Controversy in the total number of samskaras

Since ancient times there has remained a dispute between experts on the total number of samskaras that exist. As written in *Gautamsmṛiti* 8.8 there are 40 of them, *Maharshi Agnirane* directed 25 of them, but according to the Puranas, 12 or 16 of them are main and necessary.

What we need to understand is Samskaram makes the act official and it is an opportunity for the family and friends to get together and celebrate stages of Life.

1.13 Different forms of prayer/worship (upasanas)

Prayer can be done in several different ways: We have the following senses Vision, Sound, Feel, Smell and Taste. They are all inputs to the brain. Finally the brain gets the inputs and processes the signals and gives one the understanding and the peace of mind. The biggest fight is the fight within oneself. All the forms of prayers are giving the desired effect to our mind.

Prayer by sound – Chanting - Japa – We chant slokas with meaning. We learn about Vedangas on how to chant Vedas. The phonetics and the rhythm with which we chant give the feeling of oneness. We can chant OM continuously and have the same effect.

Prayer by Sound – Bhajan – We sing melodious songs to pray to God and the melody brings the same effect to the mind.

Prayer by Discussion – Sath Sang – Meeting to discuss on Ultimate Truth - Groups get together and discuss topics of interest. By doing so brains interact to bring the different aspects of truth as one sees it. This helps the mind in understanding others position and also understanding there are several ways to reach God.

Prayer by Meditation – One can sit in one place and meditate to bring about peace to the mind. There are several techniques to bring the same desired effect.

Prayer by Social Service – As we have discussed before, God is everywhere. God is in every one of us. By doing a social service one helps the other who is in need of help. Serving living being is like serving God.

Gandhi, Mother Theresa and Swami Vivekananda have great quotes on service.

That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake. ____ Gandhi

Prayer by Charity – Charity is a form of giving. Some people have time some people have resources like money. The act of giving money is considered a great service to the humanity.

Prayer by performing duties – The biggest service is doing one's duty which is dharma. A dad or mom by going to work every day takes care of their children. A child when grown up and their parents are in need he/she takes care of them. These are all duties. By doing one's duties he is praying God and attaining peace of mind. One should never be unhappy when doing his duties. One should always think they are praying God by doing his duties. This understanding gives one, happiness all the time. Happiness gives peace of mind. Peace of mind helps one focus on finding the inner self, the God within.

Prayer by Yoga – Eight limbed Yoga – The practice of yoga is an art and science dedicated to creating union between body, mind and spirit. Its objective is to assist the practitioner in using the breath and body to foster an awareness of ourselves as individualized beings intimately connected to the unified whole of creation. In short it is about making balance and creating equanimity so as to live in peace, good health and harmony with the greater whole. This art of right living was perfected and practiced in India thousands of years ago and the foundations of yoga philosophy were written down in *The Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, approximately 200 AD. This sacred text describes the inner workings of the mind and provides an eight-step blueprint for controlling its restlessness so as to enjoying lasting peace. The eight steps are:

1. **Yama** : Universal morality like non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, absence of greed
2. **Niyama** : Personal observances like purity, contentment, austerities, study of scriptures, devotion to God
3. **Asanas** : Body postures
4. **Pranayama** : Breathing exercises, and control of prana
5. **Pratyahara** : Control of the senses
6. **Dharana** : Concentration and cultivating inner perceptual awareness
7. **Dhyana** : Devotion, Meditation on the Divine
8. **Samadhi** : Union with the Divine

Prayer by Pooja – using 16 Steps - People sit in one place and install a temporary deity in front of them and summon God to their place and pray to God. This is called Pooja. There are 16 steps in a small pooja process. Some of the common Poojas done at home are Ganesha Pooja, Saraswathi Pooja and many more at the time of festivals. Some people do Satyanarayana Pooja reading few stories that explains the glory of the Lord.

Prayer by Havan - One performs Havan based on how it is prescribed in Vedas.

Prayer by fine arts - People worship the God and the Goddess by singing, Dancing and enacting Dramas. This gives an understanding of the stories and the morals taught by them.

Prayer by fasting – Some people fast on few festival days or fast weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. By fasting one is controlling the taste aspect of life and tries to reign in the mind.

Prayer by Idol Worship – As we have seen in Indian architecture, the Vighraha is made to science and installed in the Temple. The Vighraha, consecrated and installed according to established norms by people who are steeped in devotion to God, is a venerable representative of the One. The God figure is not just a statue, but a form of all that is Good and Godly in universe. According to Pancharata Agama Shastra God has declared he assumes whatever form his devotees give him. By praying to the Idol we practice our

mind to focus on oneness with God. In India the Yogis who are in a much more advanced level are able to meditate sitting in any place and feel the oneness to God.

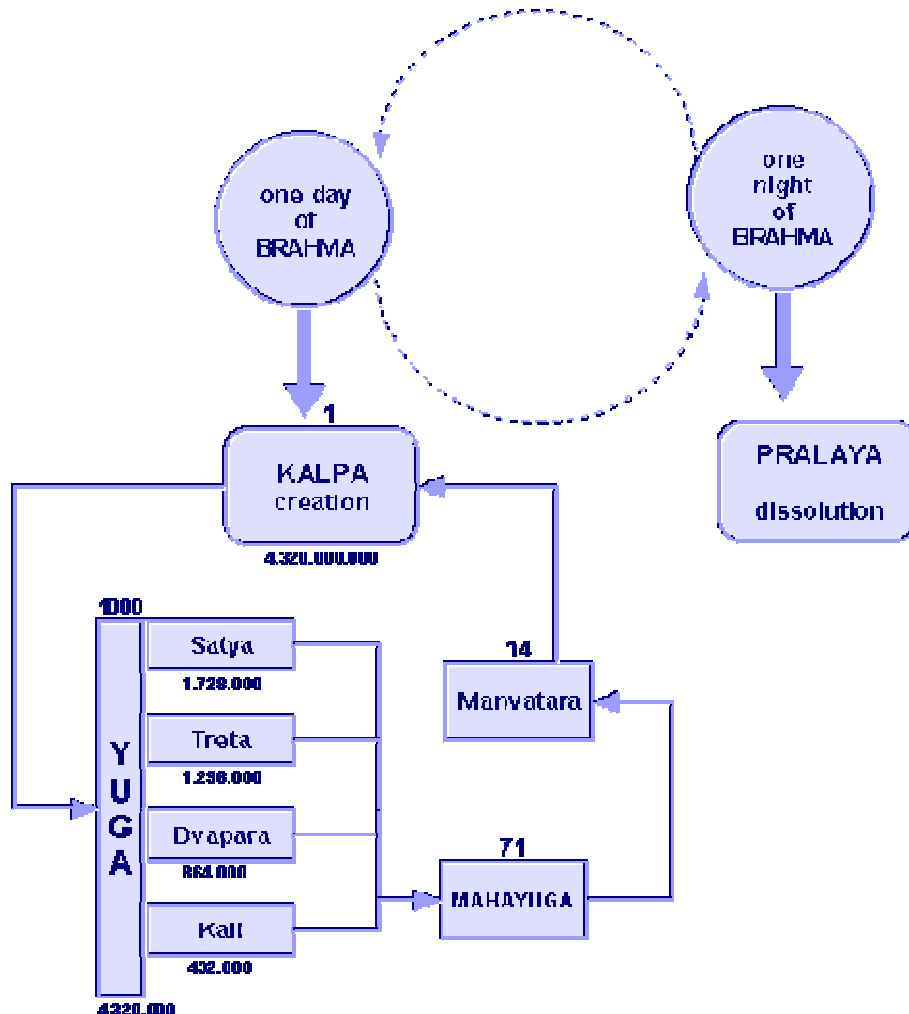
Prayer by pilgrimage - People travel to different holy places (rivers and Temples) and FEEL the oneness with God. People who go to Varanasi and Manasarover would always tell that how they felt life is unique how they could understand God and feel the happiness and oneness to God. This is explained more by the feel and the words.

Since the Lord is not separate from the creation, we worship Him in any given name or form - we have the custom of worshipping tulasi plants, cows, trees, hills, and rivers.

Term: Upasana mean spiritual practices, especially worship of the Deity. Upasana literally means 'to sit near'. Thus upasana refers to all those activities by which one approaches the Lord in order to offer worship.

1.14 KALPA or Creation

LORD BRAHMA'S DAY & NIGHT



One **Kalpa** or creation coincides with one Daytime of Brahma's life that corresponds to 4,320,000,000 earthly years. Similarly, one night of Brahma's life also corresponds to 4,320,000,000 earthly years when this Universe will be reabsorbed (*Pralaya*) in his divine sleep. The Hindu cosmological time cycles are described in verses 11–23 of Chapter 1, Surya Siddhanta.

Indeed earthly time is divided in **Yuga or Ages (Eras)**, which are:

- **Krita (or Satya)-Yuga / Golden Age** = 1,728,000 human years
 - **Treta-Yuga / Silver Age - (Rama avatara)** = 1,296,000 human years
 - **Dwapara-Yuga / Bronze Age - (Krishna avatara)** = 864,000 human years
 - **Kali-Yuga / Iron Age - (Present age)** = 432,000 human years
- Total of four Yugas = 1 Mahayuga = 4,320,000 human years**

Each Yuga's length decreases progressively in relation to moral and physical decadence in each age. Throughout the Satya Yuga virtue prevails and evil was unknown; in the Treta Yuga virtue falls by a fourth; in the Dwapara Yuga virtue has diminished by half; in the Kali Yuga, the current age, only a fourth of virtue remains.

1. Every Kalpa has **1000 cycles of four Yugas** which is,
 $4,320,000 \times 1,000 = 4,320,000,000$ human years.
2. Each Kalpa is divided into **14 Manvantara** or periods, each lasting for 71 cycles of the four yugas (Mahayuga) which is,
 $4,320,000 \times 71 \times 14 = 4,294,080,000$ human years.

Necessary to have 1000 Mahayugas, the remaining 25,920,000 years (4,320,000,000-4,294,080,000) are variously divided among the last six Manvantara. That is, $25,920,000/6 = 4,320,000 = 1$ Mahayuga. So out of 14 Manvantara, the last six Manvantara have 72 cycles of Mahayuga instead of 71 Mahayugas. ($8*71 + 6*72 = 568+432 = 1000$).

The name of the present Kalpa (creation) is called **SWETHA VARAAHA KALPA**.
 The name of the present manvantaara (7th) is called **VAIVASWATHA MANVANTAARA**.
FOUR YUGAS – Krita or Satya yuga, Tretaa yuga, Dwaapara yuga, Kali yuga (present).

1.15 Hindu Calendar (Panchaang)

What is Panchaang/Panchaangam?

Panchaangam / Almanac is a calendar based on the ancient science of jyotisha and vedic astrology. It is a Vedic Hindu Calendar. Panchanga, a Sanskrit word, means "**five limbs**," which refers to the fact that every panchangam includes the five basic elements

- 1) **tithi** (lunar day or the phase of the moon),
- 2) **nakshatra** (the constellation or the star, the moon is aligned or transiting with),
- 3) **karana** (half-day or half a tithi),
- 4) **yoga** (a particular angle of the sun and moon) and
- 5) **vaara** or vaasara (solar weekday or day of the week).

What is the purpose of using Panchang?

It forecasts the occurrence of daily celestial phenomena such as

1. tithis and nakshatras
2. dates and times religious festivals are to be observed
3. auspicious moments for other socio religious functions such as wedding, upanayanam etc, based on the duration of tithis and nakshatras and on planetary positions.
4. the time of sunrise and sunset for various longitudes.

Name of the VARSH (Year) according to panchang

In northern India, some people call the year as **Vikramachakam** whereas in Southern India some people call sixty years by different names which repeat again and again. For example, the English year 2010-11 is called as **Vikruti** in Tamil.

The sixty Tamil years are the following:

Prabhava, Vibhava, Sukla, Pramodhoodha, Prajotpatthi, Aangirasa, Sreemukha, Bhava, Yuva, Dhaatu, Isvara, Vehudhaanya, Pramaathi, Vikrama, Vishu, Chitrabaanu, Subaanu, Taarana, Parthiba, Viya, Sarvajit, Sarvadhaari, Virodhi, Vikruti (2010-11), Kara, Nandana, Vijaya, Jaya, Manmatha, Dhurmuki, Hevilambi, Vilambi, Vikaari, Saarvari, Pilava, Subakritu, Sobakritu, Krodhi, Visuvaavas, Paraabhava, Plavanga, Keelaka, Saumya, Saadhaarana, Virodhikritu, Paridhaabi, Pramaadeesa, Aananda, Raakhasa, Nala, Pingala, Kaalayukti, Siddhaarathi, Raudri, Dunmati, Dundubhi, Rudhrodhgaari, Raktaakshi, Krodhana, Akshaya

ACTIVITY 1:

Discuss with someone at home about the years in our calendar and find out 1. If they call them by a different name, if yes, what it is? 2. On what occasions do they apply them? Write them down.

Names of MAASA/MAADAMS (MONTHS) in a year of HINDU CALENDAR in reference to starting from mid-April:

In Hindi/Telugu/Kannada

Chaitra
Vaisaakha
Jyeshtha
Aashaadha
Shraavana

In Tamil

Chitthirai
Vaikasi
Aani
Aadi
Aavani

In Sanskrit

Mesha
Rishabha
Miduna
Kataka
Simha

Bhaadrapadha	Purattaasi	Kanyaa
Aasveena	Ayppasi	Thulaa
Kaartheeka	Kaarthigai	Viruchika
Maargaseersha	Margazhi	Dhanur
Pausha	Thai	Makara
Maagha	Maasi	Kumba
Phaalguna	Panguni	Meena

The first day of the first month Chaitra/Chitthirai/Mesha is the New Year Day for many of us. Some people have it on Diwali day (falls on New moon day of Thulaa maasa, mid.Oct – mid.Nov).

ACTIVITY 2:

Discuss with someone at home about the months in our calendar and find out 1. If they call them by a different name, if yes, what it is? 2. On what occasions do they apply them? 3. When is the New Year day? Write them down.

VAARAMS (Days of the week)

In Sanskrit	In English	(Planets)	In Hindi	In Tamil
Bhanu vaasara	Sunday	(Sun)	Ravi vaar	Gnaayitru kizhamai
Indu/Soma vaasara	Monday	(Moon)	Soma vaar	Thingal kizhamai
Pauma vaasara	Tuesday	(Mars)	Mangal vaar	Sevvaai kizhamai
Sowmya vaasara	Wednesday	(Mercury)	Budha vaar	Budhan kizhamai
Guru vaasara	Thursday	(Jupiter)	Guru/Veera vaar	Viyaaazha kizhamai
Bhrigu vaasara	Friday	(Venus)	Sukra vaar	Velli kizhamai
Sthira vaasara	Saturday	(Saturn)	Sani vaar	Sani kizhamai

ACTIVITY 3:

Discuss with someone at home about the days of the week in our calendar and find out 1. If they call them by a different name, if yes, what it is? 2. On what occasions do they apply them? Write them down.

AYANS/AYANAMS in a year:

1. DAKSHINAAYANAM – For six months from mid-July till mid-January when the sun appears closer to the southern hemisphere.

2. UTTARAAYANAM – For six months from mid-January till mid-July when sun appears closer to the northern hemisphere.

RITUS in a year:

There are six Ritus in a year which are named after six seasons. They are:

1. **Vasanta Ritu (Spring)** – mid-April till mid-June
2. **Greeshma Ritu (Summer)** – mid-June till mid-August

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 3. Varsha Ritu (Monsoon) | – mid-August till mid-October |
| 4. Sharad Ritu (Autumn) | – mid-October till mid-December |
| 5. Hemantha Ritu (Autumn-Winter) | – mid-December till mid-February |
| 6. Shishira Ritu (Winter-Spring) | – mid-February till mid-April. |

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PAKSH/PAKSHAMS in a month:

- 1. KRISHNA PAKSH – For 15 days** from Poornima (Full moon day) till Amaavaasya (New moon day) which is the waning moon period.
- 2. SUKLA PAKSH is for 15 days** from Amaavaasya (New moon day) till Poornima (Full moon day) which is the waxing moon period.

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TITHIS (15) that appear in order twice a month:

Prathamaa – it is not preferable to begin any new or any auspicious activity this day.

Dwiteeyaa

Truteeyaa

Chaturthi – People worship Lord Ganesha on this holy day. This tithi that comes after Poornima is called Sankashti or Sankatahara Chaturthi.

Panchami

Shashti – People worship Lord Muruga on this day.

Saptami

Ashtami - People worship Goddess Durga on this day. Gokulashtami which is Lord Krishna's birthday comes on this tithi in Shraavan/Aavani month (mid-Aug. to mid-Sep.).

Navami- Lord Rama's birthday comes on this tithi in Phalguna month (mid-March to mid- April).

Dasami – Dusshera called Vijayadasami falls on this day in the month of Bhaadrapada/Purattaasi (mid-Sep. to mid-Oct).

Ekaadasi – People fast on this holy day called Sarva Ekadasi vrat.

Dwaadasi

Trayodasi

Chaturtasi

15th – Amaavaasyaa (dark half) – people do rituals for their forefathers on this day – it is also an auspicious day to begin any activity.

Or 15th - Poornima (Purnami-Bright half) – it is also an auspicious day and some people fast on this day called purnami vrat and worship Goddess Parvati.

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NAKSHATRAAS (27 STARS in a month):

In Sanskrit

Ashwini

Bharani

Krithikaa

Rohini - (Lord Krishna's birthday on this star, ashtami tithi & Krishna Paksh in Shraavan month – called Gokulashtami.)

Mruga Seersha

Aarudra (Tiruvaadirai in Tamil)

Punarvasu (Punarpoosam in Tamil) –

(Lord Rama's birthday on this star, navami tithi & Sukla Paksh in Phalguna maasam – called Ramanavami.)

Pushya (Poosam in Tamil)	Moola
Aashlesha (Aayilyam in Tamil)	Poorvaashaadha (Pooraadam in Tamil)
Magha	Uttiraashaadha (Uttiraadam in Tamil)
Poorva phalguni (Pooram in Tamil)	Shravana (Tiruvonam in Tamil)
Uttira phalguni (Uttiram in Tamil)	Dhanishta (Avittam in Tamil)
Hasta	Sadabhashak (Sadayam in Tamil)
Chitraa	Poorva Bhaadrapadha (Poorattaadi in Tamil)
Swaathi	Uttira Bhaadrapadha (Uttirattaadi in Tamil)
Vishaakha	Revathi
Anuraadhaa (Anusham in Tamil)	
Jyeshtha (Kettaai in Tamil)	

ACTIVITY 4:

Discuss with someone at home about the nakshatraas in our panchaang and find out 1. If they call them by a different name, if yes, what it is? 2. On what occasions do they apply them? Write them down.

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ACTIVITY 5:

Discuss with your parents and find out **your date of birth** according to our panchaang – which **varsh** (year), which **maasa** (month), which **vaar** (day), which **tithi**, which **paksh**, which **ayan**, which **ritu**, and in which **nakshatra** you are born. Write the names next to each category.

GOTRA

Gotra is not mentioned in our panchaang but while doing an archanaa to God on our names on a special occasion like birthday we usually mention our gotra to the priest along with our name and nakshatra we are born.

Gotra is the family name usually a name of a rishi (sage) in whose lineage we have come. For example, people in the lineage of Sage Kashyapa say their gotra as Kashyapa gotram. In Hindu matrimony, bride and the groom should belong to two different gotras.

ACTIVITY 6:

Discuss with parents if they have the custom of calling their gotra. If yes, please find out your Gotra and ask them when they apply it.

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AUSPICIOUS TIMES OF A DAY

Every day has auspicious times like **Kuligai** and **Siddha and Amirtha Yogams, etc**; as well as inauspicious times like **Marana Yogam** and **Rahu Kaal and Yama kand, etc**. We can find those timings from the panchaang or a daily Hindu calendar, to begin any important and constructive activity like travel, leaving for school test and job interview, puja, etc. on auspicious time, with the belief it will end up in success (not to forget Lord Ganesha who is the remover of obstacles before we begin).

ZODIAC CHART / VEDIC ASTROLOGY in our Panchaang

Panchaang also shows the twelve zodiac constellations called raasis (names in Sankrit- same as months- Mesha, Rishaba,...., Meena) in a chart.

Zodiac constellations and their positions in relation to other planets, sun and moon are said to influence our life and personalities; the study of which is called astrology -*Jyotisya*.

The chart displays the position of all the planets (Navagrahas) in a particular constellation every day and month. It is used to create the birth chart called horoscope for every person knowing their birth time, day, month and year.

Horoscope is used by astrologers to predict one’s personality and future and also to find the possible matrimonial matches.

MEENA	MESHA	VRISHA BA	MIDUNA
KUMBHA	RASI CHART		KATAKA
MAKARA			SIMHA
DHANUS Budha on 12/23/08	VRISCHI KA	TULA	KANYA

Panchaang also describes the 10 different matrimonial matches.

Navagrahas - sun, moon, mars, mercury (Budha), Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu, Kethu.

Why it is very important to know all about Panchangam?

1. We apply all the above information when we do any puja. That is, Panchang is primarily used for the sankalpa (declaration of intent, time and place) in religious ceremonies.
2. All our festivals and holy dates fall on a particular day which we will be able to find out only when we understand our calendar very well.
3. Any special occasion like house warming, wedding etc. is chosen to be on an auspicious day and time, with the help of our priest, using all the above information and much more in the Panchang.
4. Panchang is used to create a birth chart called horoscope in astrology.

ACTIVITY 7: With the help of parents try to see a real panchang and find out all the information we discussed on this topic in that calendar. Can you give more reasons why

you feel important to know all about our calendar? Write them down.

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1.16 Values

What are the values one can learn from Itihasas – Ramayana and Mahabharata and from Puranas?

ACTIVITY 8: Apart from the ones given below, develop your own list and try to explain the events that took place as said in Itihasas and Puranas to substantiate your answer.

1. Satya or truthfulness from Yudhishtira, Harischandra.
2. Bhakti or devotion to God from Sabari, Hanuman, Prahlada.
3. Devotion to Guru from Ekalavya - (**Aachaarya devo bhava** meaning may you be one for whom teacher is God).
4. Obedience to parents from Sri Rama, Pundalik - (Taittiriya Upanishad says, "**Maatru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava** meaning may you be one for whom mother is God, and may you be one for whom father is God").
5. Generosity from Karna.
6. Friendship from Sugriva & Rama, Krishna & Sudama, Karna & Duryodhan.
7. Sibling love from Pandavas, and Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata & Shatrughna.
8. Focus, firmness and patience from Dhruva.
9. Firmness from Bheeshma.
10. Loyalty – Karna, Vibheeshan.
11. Faith in God from Markandeya.
12. Reverance to guests from Vidura - (**Atithi devo bhava** meaning may you be one for whom guest is God).

What are the six-fold enemies within the mind which one should try to overcome?

They are: Desire, anger, greed, delusion (erroneous thinking), pride, and jealousy. They are also called as **Kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and maatsarya**.

ACTIVITY 9: Apart from the ones given below, develop your own list of characters from Itihaasaas and Bhaagavata Puraanaa who were destroyed because of any of the above six-fold enemies in them?

For example, Desire – Ravana, Anger and pride – Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, Greed and Jealousy – Duryodhana, Delusion – Arjuna but his delusion was eliminated by Lord Krishna.

ACTIVITY 10: Develop an alphabetical order of list of all characters from Ramayan, Mahabharat and Puranas including all of our gods and goddesses. For example, A for Abhimanyu, Agni (fire-god),..., B for Bheeshma, Bhima, Brahma,..., and so on till Z.

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