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The Sixteen
RITUALS OF AARYAS

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The Sixteen Rituals of Aaryas

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Translator's Note

The book that follows is a wholesome source of the rituals that are performed among the Aaryas. The custom of rituals is not based on mere whims and fancies but has a scientific approach. These practices seem vital to the development and progress of individuals and consequently a nation. The editor Aachaarya Shree Gyaaneshwaraaryaji has compiled the book meticulously and concisely. His vast knowledge and reference to authentic sources like Charak and Sushrut - the ancient books of medicine - leaves no point smudgy. The book is intended to effectively reach out to the scores of people who are unaware of these rituals and their purpose. I thank Aachaaryaji for lending me an opportunity to contribute in the unending effort of the spread of knowledge.

– Nivedita Prashant Shori

This booklet has been compiled with the aid of the following references :

‘Samskaar Vidhi’ by Swami Dayaanand Saraswati;
‘Samskaar Chandrika’ by Satyavrat Siddhaantalankaar;
‘Samskaar Vidhi Vimarsh’ by Atridev Vidyaalankaar.

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Introduction

(The Sixteen Rituals of Aaryas)

Rituals are the activities performed to elevate the body, mind and soul. They alter the nature of an object and give it a new shape. Just like a goldsmith burns the gold in fire to purify it, similarly in Vedic culture, an infant is put in a furnace of excellent impressions (samskara). His flaws are burnt out and attempts are made to incorporate virtues into him. This attempt takes the form of ritual.

According to Rishi Charak, “**samskaro hi gunaantaraa-dhaana-muchyate**” i.e. the replacement of existing bad traits by good qualities and virtues is called impression. When a child is born, he brings with himself two kinds of impressions. The first category comprises of those impressions that he has been carrying with him through several lives. The second type consists of those which he attains from his parents' impressions as part of his inherited legacy. These can either be good or bad. The remodeling of a human-being, vide the program of impressions involves enveloping a child in an atmosphere of potential opportunities for the development of good impressions. It also encompasses de-rooting of the bad impressions, whatever their source be i.e. previous births, inheritance from parents or their acquisition in the present life. Most of our pursuits are worldly but the program of impressions is spiritual.

The real purpose of Vedic culture is the spiritual development of man who is pre-occupied with building dams and digging streams. A nation that starts progressing develops a network of plans - five-year plans, ten-year plans etc, but since our vision is limited to the material world, the goal of all these plans fails to be any more than constructing dams, digging rivers, making roads and laying railway lines. Our materialistic viewpoint has led us

to consider the issue of 'daily bread' as the most important question to be addressed. Once the question of 'daily bread' has been answered, all the problems of the world are resolved. Once the dams and rivers have led to an increase in the yield, no other problem remains. As per the materialistic thinking, a human is no more than an image of hunger and thirst. The Vedic thought, on the other hand, does not assume human existence to be mere bodily existence. The plans of dam construction, river digging and road/rail-laying should also doubtlessly carry on. But from the spiritual point of view, these are extremely preliminary steps and are nowhere near the commencement of the program of remodeling of man on a spiritual grounding.

The actual purpose of the Vedic culture - the purpose for which the culture was born - is to remodel man by performing rituals. We build dams, dig out the streams, construct roads and lay railway lines. But where is the man for whom all this is done? Which kind of plan do we have for him - five-year or the ten-year one? If there exist established railway networks, if the convenience of motorcars reaches every household, if water reaches every corner of land, if the yield becomes unlimited and yet the man, the user of all these resources, fails to be truthful, honest, empathetic towards others, and is not virtuous, is corrupt and of adulterous conduct, then what is the use of these trains and cars, streams and dams? And is this not the situation today? Is the increasing dazzle of wealth and splendor not accompanied by the degradation of the very human being who is the master of this wealth? Where is man? Where is that human who has humanity - the man who casually throws aside the huge and complicated heaps of temptations that arise in his way? The biggest program of Vedic culture and the focus of this program is the reconstruction/remodeling of man by performing rituals.

The Vedic culture prepared a program for the modeling of man. For the success of this program, the custom of rituals was popularized. It is these rituals that make a man worthy. How many

innumerable processes has the soul crossed on its journey across several births? The true tale of this life lies in the casting of impressions upon the soul - whether good or bad - in each birth it takes. As a part of this culture, the purpose of human life is to purify and clean the soul through good impressions and to keep refining it. The question is: How to wipe out the existing impurities and how to colour the soul anew? This is possible through the activities of the present life. The soul can be worked upon as a result of being enclosed in the body. To clean a utensil, you hold it in your hand. To clean the soul, it has to be held within the body. Bound to the human body, it can be dyed with new impressions. The moment the soul enters the human body, the Vedic culture starts influencing it with supreme impressions and continues doing so until the soul once again, leaves body behind.

Whenever the soul enters the body, the practice of Vedic Culture ensures that a fencing of rituals is built around it which prevents any negative impressions from impinging on the soul. It is inevitable to escape impressions. If there is no carefully arranged practice, there will be scope for bad impressions instead of good ones, and instead of development, degradation of the human being will ensue. If, on the other hand, there is a carefully arranged plan, it will bring about a regularization of impressions, a controlled system of encouraging good impressions and avoiding bad ones and a continuous process of development of man, in which he uplifts himself as well as the society. According to Vedic thought, this birth, the previous ones and the ones to come are all an attempt towards soul-purification through casting of impressions - a process of cleansing the soul free of its impurity with the help of constant application of rituals.

The process of complete and wholesome transformation of an individual by means of Vedic Culture encompassed not a handful but sixteen rituals. Their names, in sequence, are as follows :

1. Garbhaadhaan sanskaar (The ritual of conception)

2. Punsavan sanskaar (The ritual performed for the physical health of the fetus) **3. Seemantonnayan sanskaar** (The ritual performed for the mental development of the fetus) **4. Jaatakarm sanskaar** (The ritual performed at the time of birth) **5. Naamakaran sanskaar** (The ritual of giving the child a name) **6. Nishkraman sanskaar** (The ritual of taking an infant out of the house for the first time) **7. Annapraashan sanskaar** (The ritual of giving solid grain to an infant for the first time) **8. Choodaakarm sanskaar** (The ritual of shaving the child's head for the first time) **9. Karnavedh sanskaar** (The ritual of piercing the ear) **10. Upanayan sanskaar** (The ritual of investiture with the sacred thread) **11. Vedaarambh sanskaar** (The ritual of initiating Vedic Study) **12. Samaavartan sanskaar** (The ritual of completion of Education) **13. Vivaah sanskaar** (The wedding ritual) **14. Vaanaprasth sanskaar** (The ritual of leaving household for a life of austerity) **15. Sanyaas sanskaar** (The ritual of renunciation) **16. Antyeshti sanskaar** (The last/ funeral rites)

1. Garbhaadhaan sanskaar
(The ritual of conception)

In Vedic culture, conception is considered to be a pure, sacred rite to beckon a new soul that possesses supreme qualities and characteristics. Just like a growing tree or a farm requires fertile land, seeds, manure, water, air and special protection, in the same manner, summoning a healthy soul having fine impressions on it requires preparation on the part of parents even prior to conception. According to Aayurveda, for conception, the minimum age of the man should be 25 years and that of the woman should be 18 years. It is considered even better if the age is even higher because prior to age 25, a man's semen and prior to age 18, a woman's ova and uterus, are underdeveloped. In this immature

state, conception cannot lead to the production of a superior offspring. By Vedic belief, a couple can willfully (obeying the directions given in the scriptures) acquire a strong, beautiful, intellectual, dignified, dispassionate offspring possessed with good impressions. For this, it is necessary to follow certain pre-requisites like continence, healthy and pure diet, regular study of scriptures and of self, excellent company, a strict routine, contemplation etc. Scriptures based on the subject of Aayurveda contain a detailed description of these things. One should have a look at them.

It is said that when, after marriage, Lord Krishna asked his wife Rukmani what she wanted, she replied that she longed for a child like him. Lord Krishna explained that for this, both he and Rukmani would have to practice continence for 12 years in isolation. They did so. And then was born the child, Pradyumn, who possessed qualities similar to Lord Krishna. Those 12 years had been spent for strengthening of the sexual fluids, development of excellent impressions and other such qualities. This clarifies that the physical as well as the mental condition of parents before conception and during fertilization has a profound effect on the impending soul. Keeping this in mind, saints have assigned several types of methodical directions. Besides the states mentioned above, the actual 10-month duration of pregnancy is also very important as the impressions incorporated in this tenure can diminish the impressions of several previous births.

For instance, if some grass twigs are kept next to a case of saffron, they too acquire the fragrance of saffron in a few days. On the other hand, if a box of saffron - containing sweets is placed inside a basket of onions for a few days, the sweets acquire the foul odor of onions. The impressions once cast upon the child in womb during pregnancy are very difficult to change later.

2. Punsavan sanskaar

(The ritual performed for the physical health of the foetus)

All conscious parents wish that the child in the womb - whether son or daughter - should be full of strength and vigor; should be healthy, disease-free, long-lived, intelligent and good-looking. The second ritual - the Punsavan sanskaar - is performed with this objective, two to three months after the foetus is placed in the mother's womb. Once pregnant, the mother has to take precautions for the protection, growth and development of the womb. The scripture 'Charak' in the Aayurveda contains detailed instruction on this topic.

For instance, certain things that could dehydrate the womb, flow it out or kill the fetus are: squatting with the feet flat on the ground, walking around on uneven land, sitting on a hard or rigid base, resisting the pressure of motion, urination or gas, laboring hard, consuming hot or strong food items and remaining too hungry. [Source: Charak Sanhita, ShaareerSthaan- 8/21] Getting hurt, the squeezing of the womb in any manner or looking at a deep pit, a well or the fearsome spots of mountains can result in miscarriage. Too much movement of the pregnant woman's body, a ride on bullock-cart or some such vehicle, loud noise or unpleasant words can also result in miscarriage. Always lying down straight on the back can cause the cord to wrap around the neck of the fetus, thus killing it. [Source: Charak Sanhita, ShaareerSthaan - 6/21].

If the pregnant woman sleeps nude or keeps roaming around, the ensuing offspring could be insane. An extremely quarrelsome pregnant woman could have an epileptic child. If she is too obsessed with sex, the offspring would be lustful and lascivious. If she is forever mournful, the child would be fearful, weak, short-lived. If she is desirous of others' wealth, she would produce a jealous, thievish, lazy, rebellious, wicked child. If she remains angry, the child would be ill-tempered, deceptive and a backbiter. If she is

too much of a sleeper, her offspring will be lazy and stupid having indigestion problems. If she drinks alcohol, her child would be restless. If she has too much of a sweet intake, the child would be diabetic; with excess of sour intake, the child would have dermatological problems; excess of salt intake would result in child's hair turning grey prematurely, wrinkling of face and balding; too much intake of spicy, pungent food could produce a weak, semifertile, infertile or a homosexual child. Extremely bitter intake could result in a child with a feeble, emaciated body. [Source: **Charak Sanhita, Shaareer Sthaan - 8/21**]

Right from the first day, a pregnant woman should remain happy, adorn herself with pure jewels, wear white clothes, have a peaceful mind, wish well for everyone and be devoted to the service of God and saints. She should abstain from touching soiled, distorted or inferior organs. She should stay away from stinking places and unpleasant sites. She should avoid listening to things that cause uneasiness or restlessness. She should not partake of dry, stale or rotten food. She should shun going outdoors, visiting an unoccupied house or cremation grounds, staying under a tree, getting cross or sulking, being untoward, yelling etc. She should avoid all those things that could harm her womb and its occupant [Source: **Charak Sanhita**]

She should not use any intoxicant, should not climb for a ride, should not eat meat, abandon the things which the senses are not desirous of and comply with the learned women of the neighborhood or family [Source: **Charak Sanhita**].

All that is written above implies that when the child is in the womb, everything that the mother does, contributes towards the child's constitution. Keeping in mind the physical development of the offspring, it is therefore, the mother's duty to regulate her eating-drinking habits, her lifestyle and behavior in such a manner that it leaves no adverse effect on the child. If any organ of the pregnant woman hurts owing to a physical defect, the womb-placed chills starts experiencing a hurting sensation in the same [Source: **Sushrut, Shaareer Sthaan - 3/16**].

3. Seemantonnayan sanskaar

(The ritual for the mental development of foetus)

‘Seemant’ - this vernacular word literally means brain, while ‘Utnayan’ literally means development. The word Seemantonnayan thus acquires the meaning of - a ritual in which the mother focuses her attention to brain development of the child. The previous ritual (**Punsavan sanskaar**) is for physical development while this Seemantonnayan sanskaar caters to mental development. Every physical and mental aspect of the foetus is taken care of by virtue of both these rituals. The book 'Sanskaar Vidhi' mentions that for Seemantonnayan sanskaar, the husband should himself oil the wife's hair with fragrant oil, comb the hair, remove the knots, tie the hair into a nice bun and take her to the temple or hall of Yajya (where the brahmanical fire sacrifice is performed). This implies that during this time both the husband and wife should concentrate on the mental development of the child; they should realize that the child's mental development depends entirely on them and that the way they lead their intellectual lives will leave its impression on the child.

The scripture-writers have considered the mother a mould in which the parents can cast the child exactly the way they want him/her to be. If care is not taken during this time, then after the child's birth, the good or bad external environment starts having a profound effect. The implication of Seemantonnayan sanskaar directs the parents' attention to the child's mental development. The best time for this ritual is when the brain-cells of the fetus start forming. Shaareer Sthaan of Sushrut mentions: In the fifth month, the mind is quite awake, in the sixth the intellect and in the seventh there is manifestation of organs. In the eighth month, the element of oj (one of the eight essential elements of the body) is not stably formed. A child born in the eighth month, often, does not survive. This makes it clear that according to **Sushrut**, the

child in a womb of five months develops a more aroused mind than in the fourth month when the brain only starts forming. This is the reason why the Seemantonnayan sanskaar is performed in the fourth month. The sole purpose of this ritual is that the mother should completely understand that from this point on, she owns responsibility for her child's mental development. Whatever she does from now on, should be done with the knowledge that every thought of hers is unconsciously affecting the child taking shape within her. If not performed in the fourth month, the ritual can be carried out in the sixth month or even eighth month. One of these three months (fourth, sixth, eighth) should be chosen for **Seemantonnayan sanskaar**. The fourth suits because during this month, the formation of brain cells begins. The sixth suits as during the sixth month, the first origin of intelligence can be traced and eighth is suitable because by that time, the body, mind, brain and heart of the foetus are all ready. This is the time when the woman is called 'twin-hearted' as two hearts work simultaneously. So in this situation, the mother should pay special attention to maintain the functionality of the child's body, mind, brain and heart as the child delivered in eighth month rarely survives.

The lack of desire for any particular thing on part of the pregnant woman leads to a disinclination of the child too for the same thing. Similarly, whatever the mother desires for, the child also starts desiring for the same. The framers of the system of rituals strongly held that the mother's impressions have an all-round effect on the child and therefore, Seemantonnayan sanskaar was given a significant place. **Manusmriti (Chapter 9, verse 9)** says: The kind of image a pregnant woman draws in her mind is similar to the kind of the child she bears. So, for an excellent offspring equipped with supreme impressions, the woman should be kept in a conducive environment.

4. Jaatakarm sanskaar

(The ritual performed at the time of birth)

The tasks performed upon childbirth fall under Jaatakarm. It has been addressed as a ritual because apart from the tasks done after birth, certain rituals are also performed which attempt at leaving some impressions on the child without his conscious knowledge about it.

Tasks performed at childbirth :

- ❑ Cleaning the newborn's mouth, nose etc. : Before birth, the child is in a very different environment in the womb. He does not take food by the mouth, nor does he take breath through the nostrils. His diet reaches to him directly from the mother through the navel. During pregnancy, he is enclosed in a bag full of fluid. To prevent the fluid from entering into his mouth or nose, nature keeps the mouth and nostrils covered by mucous. On entering the outer world, his mouth and nose have to be cleaned. With the physical contact between mother and child no longer existent, the automatic supply of nutritive material is cut off. Once the mouth is clean, he can drink milk; after the cleaning of nose, he can breathe. This cleaning can be carried out by a trained mid-wife with the help of a soft cloth. The child's nose and throat are also stuffed with mucous and therefore they have to be cleaned thoroughly. According to Aayurveda, a mixture of Sendhav salt and ghee clears up the nose and throat.
- ❑ Bathing the child: When the child is inside the fluid bag, his body is covered with a tender coating which prevents the fluid of the bag from affecting his skin. Once out of the bag, the need arises to wash off the coating - this necessitates bathing. Soap is used for this. The coating can be shed off by rubbing the soap onto one's hand and then gently rubbing it on the child's body. Instead of soap, a paste made of gram

flour and curd can also be applied. Lukewarm water should be used for bathing.

- ❑ Sounding stones near the ear: Even though the mucous of the nose and mouth has been cleaned with a soft cloth, it has to be made sure that the child can hear through the ears, for which the ear is cleaned up and then some sound is made close to it. According to **Charak** : Stones should be sounded in the base of the ear, so that on hearing the sound, the ears can perform their function.
- ❑ Placing a ghee-immersed wad of cotton on the head: A wad of cotton dipped in ghee should be placed on the child's head. The Aayurvedic doctor Atridevji writes in this regard: The palette of the child is a thin membrane that meets three bones of the head (two of the side and one of the forehead) at one spot. This palette reflects the health of the child.

Strengthening this palette makes the child healthy, so it is necessary to protect it and nourish it. Henceforth, Sushrut has suggested the placing of a ghee-dipped cotton wad on the child's head. The use of ghee or oil on the head keeps the child protected from cold, running nose etc.

Making the child lick ghee symbolizes making him dependent on cow's milk, curd, buttermilk, ghee etc. for a long time ahead.

Ghee sharpens the brain, memory and the capacity to grasp a topic; it is beneficial for digestive power, strength, long life and semen; lends brightness to eyes; is perfect for children, aged people as well as any ordinary man; is useful for those desirous of achieving beauty, tenderness and a sweet voice. Ghee is among the most supreme products, is of a cool nature, tends to keep life stable and if used in the right manner, it can serve thousands of purposes.

- ❑ In Jaatakarm, just like the child is administered a lick of ghee, he is also made to lick honey. For therapeutic purposes

honey is very significant. Diabetic people are advised to have honey in place of sugar. It is an extremely digestive and healthy product.

Honey increases the effectiveness of a medicine when taken along with it. It is by nature dry and cool; stimulates the digestive power, improves appearance and complexion, has a strengthening effect, is light, gentle, keeps the body slim, is good for heart, is a stimulator, strengthens the joints, acts as a cleanser and fills the wounds. It is an aphrodisiac, pleasant for the eyes, pure and is capable of reaching every pore of the body. It pacifies the troubles of bile, phlegm, obesity, diabetes, hiccoughs, breathing, coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, thirst, worms, toxins etc. It is a joy-causing substance that removes the problems of rheumatism, bile and mucous.

Seeing this immense usefulness of ghee and honey, Vedic culture provides for a newborn child's introduction to both these substances through 'Jaatakarm sanskaar'. There is another use of tasting ghee and honey. While in the mother's womb, the child's intestines are obstructed with a type of waste substance called Meconium. To remove this, doctors usually use castor oil but this can cause dysentery. To get rid of Meconium, ghee and honey are perfect. Moreover, the child licks ghee and honey more conveniently than castor oil.

- ❑ Use of a thin gold rod: The book 'Sanskaar Vidhi' mentions that the child should be made to lick ghee and honey with the help of a thin rod made of gold.

Sushrut even mentions the mixture of gold with both these substances. Using the ring finger, give the child a taste of honey, ghee and gold. Instead of gold leaf, gold ash can also be used. For health, gold had been considered extremely beneficial according to Aayurveda. Those who partake of gold even remain unaffected by poison.

Besides, 'Samskaar Vidhi' also advocates the writing of the word Aum on the child's tongue using the thin gold rod. This is done by the parents to leave impressions on the child in a disguised form. The act casts impressions on two sides - one, the parents themselves; second, the child. When parents write the word Aum on the tongue of the newborn child, they take great responsibility on themselves. The child will doubtlessly retain impressions corresponding to the environment provided by the parents. Psychologists believe that whatever a child learns during the first five years acts as a deposit for the whole of his life. During those five years, the child remains in the atmosphere maintained by the parents. The home is his environment. If the parents lead a clean, restrained life, the child learns the same. If they remain absorbed in the luridness of dances and shows, pleasure and play, the child's life will be dyed in the same colour.

When the father writes 'Aum' on the child's tongue, he takes the responsibility that instead of leaving him in the materialistic world; he will lead the child on the path of spiritualism. Along with this, the father also thrusts a responsibility on the kid at the same time. When the child grows up and learns that his father had pledged, amidst a huge gathering, that he will show his child the path of spirituality, then the child too starts feeling that he has to rise up to the expectations of his parents and the society. From this point of view, the scribbling of 'Aum' on the child's tongue with a gold rod is very important for the child's spiritual development. The purpose of performing the ritual is to give to the society supreme mankind and writing 'Aum' on the child's tongue with a gold rod is a step in this direction.

- ❑ Speaking 'Ved-o-asi' in the ear of the child: In the child's ear, the father utters 'Ved-o-asi' meaning 'You are a knowledgeable creature, not an ignorant one'. The practice

of giving a 'mantra' in one's ear is prevalent in a lot of places these days. Giving a mantra in the ear signifies a secret, a thing that has to be kept safe within one's heart. When a teacher gives a secret mantra to a disciple in his ear, then both the giver and the recipient understand that it has to be followed religiously and there would be no breach in the practice. The father blows the fact in the child's ear right when he is born that he has to live in the world like a wise, learned man and not as an ignorant one.

5. Naamakaran Sanskaar

(The ritual of giving the child a name)

Following the Jaatakarm sanskaar is the fifth ritual of Naamakaran under which the baby boy or girl is given a name. To identify an object and to refer to it in dealings with other people, it is essential to give it a name. But is it sufficient to only name it? As mentioned several times, the purpose of the system of rituals is to establish the highest and most supreme kind of human race. Viewed from this point, it is every parent's duty to give their offspring such a name that would forever remind him/her of a particular target, a particular goal of life.

- ❑ Not to use names of inanimate objects or plants and animals: It is often observed that children are named after inanimate objects or animals and plants. If a name itself signifies a lifeless object, how will it arouse inspiration to progress? Similarly, names related to animals and plants can also not provoke superior feelings in the child's heart.
- ❑ Names arousing feeling of excellence should be used: There are two purposes of giving a name - one, to address the person and secondly, to provoke resplendent feelings in his/her heart so that he/she can remember what to achieve in life. For instance, 'Veersen' means 'one who demonstrates valour in war'; 'Vedvrat' means 'one who resolves to read Vedas';

'**Satyavrat**' means 'one who is truthful in all his dealings in life'. These kinds of names arouse a certain sentiment. If the feeling with which the name was first given is not manifested in the person, it can be aroused through his name.

Charak says that a name should be such that it has a meaning. This is found only in Vedic culture, while the rest of the people indulge in keeping meaningless names. It has never been understood in the entire Western World that a name is given not only for identification but also to lay before the child a purpose of life.

- ❑ The name should be convenient, not difficult: While deciding a name, it is to be kept in mind that it should be convenient to pronounce. For example, if the name begins with a compounded letter or if joint letters fall in the middle of a name, it would make it hard to pronounce and the person would break the word while speaking. The main rule is that the name should be short, easy to pronounce and composed of sweet sounding letters.

According to '**Sanskaar Vidhi**', the child can be named on the 11th day after birth (the day of birth included), the 101st day or on the first birthday marking the beginning of the second year.

In the Western countries, there is prevalence of kissing (the child), but Vedic culture mentions smelling or feeling by touch. Kissing involves the risk of transmission of several types of communicable diseases like flu, cough etc. So, from the health point of view, kissing is not suitable. Touching by the hand or smelling the forehead serves the same purpose. Besides this, taking the baby in one's lap and touching the air crossing his/her nostrils automatically turns the baby's attention towards the person touching him/her.

6. Nishkraman sanskaar

(The ritual of taking an infant out of the house for the first time)

The sixth ritual is Nishkraman sanskaar. Nishkraman means - to move out. Until this point, the child was enclosed within the four walls of the house. But he is not supposed to continue staying inside the closed home environs, but has to move out. For physical and mental development, nothing is as important as the cool air and sunshine. Keeping this in mind, a righteous ritual has been formulated so as to allow the child to enjoy the cool fresh air and the life-giving rays of the sun. Since the kid is not yet fit to roam around on his own, it has been assigned in the duties of the parents to take him/her out of the house and subject him/her to the pure air and sunlight.

- ❑ The time for Nishkraman sanskaar : **According to Gobhil Grihyasutra**, the right time for performing Nishkraman Sanskaar is on the third day of the third month after birth i.e. after two months and three days. Paarasakar Grihyasutra postulated the performance of this ritual during the fourth month after birth. However, there is no basic difference between the two. The point is that if the child is weak then he should be subjected to the outer environs after three months and if he is healthy, he can be taken out to face the air and sunlight after two months. If taken out before this time, there is the risk that the child would catch the cold or the heat.

Following the **Naamakaran Sanskaar**, the light thrown on the child's dwelling, clothes, toys, protection and upbringing, is worth paying attention to, keeping in mind the child's development. As written in Shaareer Sthaan part:

- ❑ Kumaaragaar - the child's dwelling : Engineers adept in house construction should get the house constructed in an eminent, beautiful place having passage for air (not too airy, though) without any scope for the entry of dogs, rats,

mosquitoes, harmful insects etc. Inside the house, there should be specific places assigned for water, grinding, toilets, bathroom, and kitchen. There should be facilities corresponding to each season - sleeping, sitting, bedding should be present according to the weather. All means of security, all necessities for Havan (brahmanical fire sacrifice) and celebrations should be present in the child's dwelling. Aged Aayurvedic doctors harboring pure thoughts and people who love children should be present in the house. This is the child's dwelling and should contain arrangements for the upbringing of the child.

- ❑ Child's clothes : The bed, seat and spreadsheets should be soft, light, clean and fragrant. Clothing contaminated with sweat, waste, urine, lice etc should be removed and replaced with new ones. If new ones cannot be procured, the old ones should be thoroughly washed, steamed with Guggul (a fragrant resin), mustard, asafetida, sweet-flag etc. and then dried before putting to use.
- ❑ Child's toys : Children's toys should be of a kind that produce a unique sound, are pleasing in appearance, light, non-pointed, non-swallowable and not dangerous in any manner.
- ❑ Child's mental development : It is not advisable to intimidate or frighten the child. If for any reason, the child starts weeping, refuses to eat or does not pay attention, one should not refer to demons, fiends, devil etc.

7. Annapraashan Sanskaar

(The ritual of giving solid grain to an infant for the first time)

The seventh ritual is Annapraashan sanskaar. Annapraashan means 'intake of grain for the first time in life. Soon after birth, the child receives mother's milk because at that time he neither has teeth to chew nor the power to digest. God has arranged for the type of food that is suitable for him at that moment. Although,

in general, all parents do gradually bring the child from milk to a solid diet at some point of time, yet only the Vedic culture performs the task of making it a rule and including it as a part of the sixteen rituals.

When the child starts growing teeth, it should be assumed that it is time to stop breastfeeding. Teeth usually start appearing in the sixth month and therefore, the time for Annapraashan sanskaar is also the sixth month. Paaraskar Grihyasutra writes: Annapraashan sanskaar should be performed in the sixth month. Some poor mothers affectionately start feeding the child with a solid diet before the sixth month, which spoils his digestion. Similarly, some mothers keep giving the child milk even after teeth have come out, under the impression that as long as the child drinks milk, he stays healthy. This is not actually true. A child who remains only on a diet of milk becomes flabby and acquires a loose, sagging body structure. Keeping this in mind, the scripture-compilers have fixed a time to terminate milk-feeding so that neither the mother, nor the child is unknowingly harmed.

The method to terminate breastfeeding is that the mother should start substituting her feed with bottled milk on some occasions out of 24 hours. This gradual change goes easy on the child's stomach, else a sudden switch to external milk can lead to abdominal problems. Besides, the mother can also start experiencing breast pain due to full breasts if she stops feeding all of a sudden. Keeping both points in mind, it is best for both mother and the child to slowly taper milk-feeding.

For the first time when the child has to be fed with external milk and solid diet instead of the mother's feed, cow's milk should be used as it is most similar in composition to mother's milk in comparison with milk from other sources. To form this feed, 150 mg of cow's milk should be mixed with 60 mg of boiled water and 1 spoon of sugar should be added before dispensing it to the child. Continue the routine for a week. In the second week, increase the frequency of external milk to twice a day instead of once. Keep the schedule as follows: 6 a.m. - mother's milk, 10

a.m. - cow's milk, 2 p.m. - mother's milk, 6 p.m. - cow's milk, 10 p.m. - mother's milk. By the third week, give external milk thrice and mother's feed twice a day: 6 a.m. - mother's, 10 a.m., 2 p.m., 6 p.m. - cow's, 10 p.m. - mother's milk once again. During the fourth week, keeping the schedule the same as before, switch the 2 p.m. milk for a diet of vegetable soup, a little curd, some honey and some rice. By the fifth week, gradually replace the milk feeds by soup, vegetable, curd, honey etc. In this manner, the child should be brought slowly from the mother's milk towards a solid diet. A sudden termination of mother's milk or external milk and commencement of solid diet can lead to several abdominal diseases in the child.

8. Choodakarm sanskaar

(The ritual of shaving the child's head for the first time)

The eighth in series is Choodakarm sanskaar. Other terms used for this are: Mundan, Choodakaran, Kesh-Vapan, Kshaur etc. Choodakarm means 'the task related to the hair of the head'. This task of Mundan should be performed in the third year after birth or within the first year of birth. The reason for performing this ritual in the first and third year is that the child starts growing teeth from the age of 6-7 months and the process continues till 2 and a half to 3 years. Teeth appear twice in children - the first set is called milk teeth and once these break away, permanent teeth appear. Milk teeth are 32 in number. By the age of one, 8 teeth are usually visible - four upper and four lower. 12 teeth come out by the age of one and a half years, 16 during one and a half to 2 years and 20 by the time the child is three. After this, nature gives some time to relax before the appearance of the next set of teeth, so that the child doesn't have to bear the pain continuously.

Appearance of teeth is accompanied by heaviness in the head, swollen gums, watery mouth, dysentery, greenish-yellow heavy stools, watery eyes and an irritated temper. The greatest effect of teeth is on the head and therefore the purpose of

Choodakarm sanskaar is to remove the burden of the hair thus keeping the head light and cool.

After three years, the bones of the skull get joined, so the hairs of the time of pregnancy should be removed. These hair that had been protecting the skull and consequently the brain till this point, have to be removed for the following reasons.

- ❑ Removal of dirty hair: While in the womb, the baby's hairs remain in a foul fluid. It is essential to shave off these dirty hairs. This is why Mundan is performed. These hairs have utility until the conjugated bones of the skull get properly joined; this is accomplished in the third year and after that it is useless to keep these hairs.
- ❑ Safeguarding from itchiness, ringworm etc : Keeping hair on the head can lead to troubles like itchiness in the head, ringworms, lice etc. To protect the child against all this, it is suitable to remove the hair. Once the head is shaved, the child's head can be cleaned thoroughly.
- ❑ Protection against heaviness etc: The head remains heavy due to hair, which can further cause heat and itchiness in the child's head. This also necessitates the shaving of hair.
- ❑ Facilitates growing new hair: When hair is cut, new healthy hair grows. Once the hairs have been razed twice or thrice, the roots become strong and this facilitates the hair to become long and healthy.

9. Karnavedha sanskaar

(The ritual of piercing the ear)

The ninth ritual is Karnavedha Sanskaar. Karnavedha means 'piercing the ear'.

According to Sushrut, the child's ear is pierced to solve two purposes - firstly, to protect the child and secondly, to bejewel the kid's ear.

But how does ear-piercing protect the child - let's see. A

number of people have experienced that piercing the ear pierces a certain nerve which is connected to the intestines. This helps prevent Hernia. When a child is born, the testicles keep lying beneath the intestines in the abdomen. Later, after passing through a passage, they come to lie in the scrotum. If some part of the intestine extends into two of these passages, it is termed as a type of Hernia.

These days, a goldsmith or an expert of this task can perform ear-piercing. But Sushrut says: An Aayurvedic doctor should carefully stretch ear with his left hand and spot the point where sun rays glint; then pierce slowly straight through this natural pore. This suggests that ear-piercing is a task of not just anybody's but a doctor's for he is the one who can locate the right spot for piercing.

10. Upanayan Sanskaar

(The ritual of investiture with the sacred thread)

The main task in Upanayan Sanskaar is to don the Yajyopaveeta (the brahmanical sacred thread). According to **Grihyasutras**, the ritual of donning the brahmanical sacred thread should be performed during the eighth year after birth for Brahmins (intellectual community), eleventh year for **Kshatriyas** (warrior community) and twelfth year for **Vaishyas** (business community).

The implication of Upanayan sanskaar is that up to this point the parents were striving hard to impinge good impressions on the child's life, which would help him become an excellent human being. Now, they are about to commence his education with a Guru who - being involved in the task of moulding the children's life - gives a new direction to the child's life based on his/her inclinations.

The sacred thread comprising of three cords is put across the child's body. Wearing this signifies that the child has started formal education. Now a days when the child gets admission in the school his/her name is enrolled in the school register. Likewise,

wearing the sacred thread used to be considered a mark of commencement of education. In a country where this ritual was prevalent, how could any one remain uneducated? Every child was supposed to pass through this ceremony. If a child did not go through this ritual, he could be questioned for it by neighbours and relatives. Some people say that in the earlier times, the sacred thread used to be worn over the clothing so that it would be visible to all and people would be aware that the child goes to a teacher for education.

The three cords of the thread signify three types of debts :
1. Owed to saints 2. Owed to parents 3. Divine debt.

The first debt is cleared by adhering to continence and indulging in Vedic studies, the second one is cleared by entering the household with sincere devotion and producing offspring, while the third debt is cleared by later renouncing the household and preparing oneself to serve the nation. The three therefore symbolize Brahmacharya, Grihasth and Vaanaprasth aashrams respectively. This is why when a person is clear of all these debts and after he has traversed all the three aashrams, he is instructed to surrender the sacred thread to the sacred fire of Yajya. He is no longer required to wear it and is deemed ready to take up the life of an ascetic.

- ❑ Debt owed to saints: In the society, acquisition of knowledge started with saints who then passed it on to us. If they hadn't acquired knowledge, we would have continued being absolute ignorants. The sacred thread reminds us that we have to keep this stream of knowledge flowing ahead in the society. When we acquire knowledge we actually remember the debt we owe to the saints. This task is accomplished in the Brahmacharya Aashram and that's why this stage should remind us to pay off the debt.
- ❑ Debt owed to the parents: Our parents, at the end of the stipulated time period of Brahmacharya Aashram entered the household and produced us. Had they not entered the household, we would not have been born. Similarly on

completing Brahmacharya Aashram in our youth, we should enter the household (**Grihasth aashram**) and provide the society with excellent future generations to continue the tradition. When we progress from continence to the household, it is a time when we are actually remembering the debt we owe to our parents. Since we perform this task in the household, the second cord of the sacred thread reminds us of taking the household life and paying off the debt.

- ❑ The divine debt: The main purpose of the Aashram tradition is to abandon desirousness for a life devoid of all desires. We continue to be so engrossed in the worldly affairs that we stay tied to them. In the end one has to escape all ties. The elders of our nation and society dispelled all worldly attachment and once detached, tried to be independent. Completing household, they renounced it and set foot in the **Vaanaprasth Aashram**. This way, we should also not remain stuck in the household but fulfill its responsibilities and enter Vaanaprasth for the benefit and service of the society. To remind us of this the third cord of the sacred thread points towards the debt we owe to the divine humans of our society.

11. Vedaarambh Sanskaar

(The ritual of initiating Vedic Study)

Along with the Upanayan Sanskaar, there is another ritual called the Vedaarambh Sanskaar. Vedaarambh means the beginning of Vedic study. During the performance of this ritual, the student is told, “From this point on, you are a Brahmachari (a religious celibate student/a young ascetic). To stay pure, keep helping yourself with lots of water. Never sit idle, always remain busy with work. Don't be lethargic, don't sleep during the day. Never disobey the teacher under whose sub-ordination you gain education. Studying each Veda for a span of twelve years, aim to seek knowledge for a period of 48 years.

If even the teacher says something wrong, disregard it. Shun

anger and falsehood. Don't let the mind wander towards the eight types of sexual allurements. Sleep on hard floor. Dancing, singing, applying oil – these are restricted for you. Don't indulge in excess of anything: excessive bathing, excessive food, excessive sleep, excessive waking up. Quit abusive criticism, greed, attachment, fear, mourning etc. Wake up early morning, cleanse yourself and brush, take a bath, perform Sandhyaa, remember the Lord, pray and practice Yog. Don't shave. Don't partake of meat, stale food or liquor. Don't ride oxen, horse, elephant or camel. Don't live in a city and don't use shoes or umbrella. Don't allow the discharge of semen either wishfully or involuntarily; conserve it for your upliftment. Do not anoint yourself with oil or any bathing or cleansing paste, don't consume anything too sour, too spicy, pungent, alkaline or too salty. Limiting your diet and promenades, continue striving to gain knowledge. Be well-behaved, civilized and a minimal talker. Your routine tasks include - wearing the sacred thread, sporting a staff and a girdle, gathering food, performing Havan, bathing, praying and contemplating on God, obeying and respecting the teacher, greeting him in the morning and evening, collecting knowledge, restraining the senses.”

This is not mere instruction but the actual essence of Vedic culture. Looking at the increasing sensuousness among students these days and its consequences in the society, one is automatically led to bowing one's head in honor of those sages who placed such high ideals in front of students for education. Today, a child takes his lessons of behavior from other companions in his vicinity. Vedic culture has assigned the teacher the task of not only teaching but also of preparing a cultured individual.

12. Samaavartan Sanskaar

(The ritual of completion of education)

Samaavartan Sanskaar means coming home from school after proper acquisition of the resolutions of continence, entire Vedic knowledge and supreme education in order to enter the married household.

When the child returns home after completing his studies, the teacher bids him farewell with the following instruction :

- ❑ Always speak the truth: It's time for you to step out of the small world of this institute into the big arena of the society. There, people will tell you that you cannot deal with the world according to the rules of Gurukul (the ancient institution for education). They will guide you that even though you had resolved in the **Gurukul** to speak the truth in all circumstances, yet in actual practice falsehood works too and that if you stick too much to truth, you will land in trouble. But remember, falsehood works only till the time people consider it as truth. A fake coin remains approved only till it is thought to be genuine. Superficially, it will appear that falsehood works, but a deeper exploration will reveal that falsehood is short-lived while truth is eternal.
- ❑ Follow dharma : The teacher's second instruction is that you should abide with moral righteousness or dharma. Always perform your duty righteously keeping in mind the way you should behave in the society and what type of behaviour would ultimately be best for an individual, society and nation.

The rules that frame a society, the regulations on the basis of which a social set-up rests comprise Dharma. The Vedas describe those rules, regulations and behavioral patterns whose compliance holds the society together and whose violation shreds the society.

- ❑ Don't shirk from regular study (**Swadhyaya**) : The term 'Swadhyaya' has dual meaning - firstly, the study of the supreme scriptures that lead to worldly, mental and spiritual progress; secondly, study of the self.

Why did we come in this world? What are we to do here? How to make life meaningful? All this can never be understood without regular study of scriptures of the highest level. Therefore, never be careless in regular study.

At the same time, do not over-ride the second meaning of the word 'Swadhyaya'. The greatest problem with man is that he continues keeping track of the entire world but forgets to keep track of his own self; peeps into others' lives but not inside himself. What am I, what are my habits, what did I do throughout the day that I shouldn't have done and what was worth doing that I missed doing - all this can be answered only when one sits and talks to oneself in isolation. The teacher instructs the student saying: Regularly study the most excellent scriptures and keep looking within yourself simultaneously - this will prevent you from going astray.

- ❑ Get the teacher his wanted wealth and do not break the pattern of descendents: the teacher addresses the student and tells him that he should provide the teacher with his favorite wealth and maintain the tradition of teaching and learning. "The teacher's favorite wealth is not money, his wealth is his pupils. They are his subjects, his descendents. Just like you came to study, your children and grandchildren should also continue the tradition of education under a teacher."
- ❑ Give with faith, give without faith: When you start earning, donate for a cause in which you have faith. Even if you don't have enough faith in a particular cause, still donate, for it is possible that although you don't believe in it, the cause might be great. Besides, what is wealth and who does it belong to? Money can be called so only if it is benefiting somebody, else it is equivalent to dust. Until money is put to use, it can't be given its name. After using the required money, donate the rest - whether with faith or without faith - by all circumstances. Giving wealth glorifies it.
- ❑ The tenure of Brahmacharya (continence) - **Vaasu, Rudra, Aaditya** : A Vasu-Brahmachari is the name given to the one who remains a celibate for the age of 24 years, Rudra-Brahmachari for 36 years and an Aaditya-Brahmachari for 48 years. If one wishes so, one can practice celibacy for the entire life provided one is a perfectly learned man and a

master of senses, for Rishi Dayanand has said that it is an arduous task to control the fire of passion and restrain the senses.

13. Vivaah sanskaar (The wedding ritual)

Marriage is the establishment of a relationship between a woman and a man on completion of resolutions of continence and education. In a marriage, there has to be a perfect match of qualities, habits and temperaments, there has to be mutual affection and there has to be the aim of producing offsprings and performing duties in accordance with their respective castes.

The further apart the places of the marrying parties are, the better it is. Why don't weddings take place within the same sub-castes or among brothers and sisters? The trouble here is that these kinds of marriages are devoid of mutual love. The virtues and vices of childhood are also known, which dissipates humility etc. The second problem is that unless a relationship is established with a distantly placed community, the zenith of bodily health is also not reached. The third issue is that relationships across a distance enhance mutual affection, progress and wealth.

Before marrying, the bride and groom should test each other's virtues, habits and temperaments in the following manner :

Both should be of a similar character, matching brains, similar conduct, similar type of appearance etc, non-violent, truthful and soft-spoken, grateful, kind, willing for the nation's welfare and for receiving education, fearless in the spread of truth, enthusiastic, willing to renounce vices like egoism, envy, jealousy, passion, anger, cunningness, gambling, stealing, liquor, non-vegetarianism etc and should be clever at housekeeping. The woman's body should be slimmer than that of the groom and she should reach up in height to the man's shoulder. The examination of internal virtues should be accomplished by mutual conversation, behavior etc. The girl who does not belong to the last five

generations of the boy's maternal family and is not of the boy's paternal sub-caste is suitable for marriage.

The best age for marriage is 16-24 years for a girl and 25-48 years for a boy. Further, the marriage between a 16-year old girl and 25-year old boy is considered least appropriate, between a 18-20 year old woman and 30-35 year old man is intermediate while that of a 24-year old woman and 48-year old man is most superior. A country where this excellent manner of wedding, continence and educational practices are followed always remains happy while a nation where weddings are arranged between people who are uneducated, unsuitable, not of the right age or devoid of continence, remains immersed in troubles. The former types of marriages are the foundation for all-round development while the latter lead to degradation.

A mutually incompatible pair in terms of qualities, habits and characteristics should never be married, even at the cost of their remaining unmarried for the entire life. This proves that marriages are inappropriate either before the specific time mentioned above or between incompatible people.

It is best if the decision to marry is taken by the boy and girl themselves. If the parents ever think of their marriage, the girl and the boy should be satisfied with it because if they are happy with each other, there is very little chance of opposition and progeny is good too. Unhappy marriages breed constant arguments. The major involvements in any wedding are that of the groom and the bride, not the parents, for it is the pair's consent that will keep them happy and discontentment that will lead to problems.

The custom of Swayamvar (where a girl herself chooses a husband from several suitors) passed as tradition in India is excellent. When a man and woman wish to marry, the criteria of education, humility, behaviour, appearance, age, strength, dynasty, body etc should be suitable. Unless there is matching of these, there's no future in a marriage just as in the case of childhood marriages.

14. Vaanaprasth sanskaar (The ritual of leaving household for a life of austerity)

Vaanaprasth sanskaar implies that a man - after getting married, bearing children, marrying them in the right manner and having grandchildren - should go in a forest and lead a life of austerity and indulge in study of scriptures and of the self. The householders should take refuge in a forest as soon as they find their skin sagging, hair turning grey and after they have been bestowed with grandchildren.

The time to enter Vaanaprasth Aashram is after 50 years of age. After grandchildren are born, the man should educate his wife, sons, brothers, daughters-in-law etc regarding the household duties and get set for his journey into the forest. If the wife is willing, she can accompany the person, otherwise he should assign to the eldest son the duty of serving his mother with care. The departing man should instruct his wife to always educate children to follow the morally right path and to discard all wrongs.

Today, we are so trapped in our household lives that it pains to come out of it. Most of the people end their lives immersed in the household. When the word Aashram was first coined, it was done with a purpose. Household or Grihasth is an Aashram, a destination, a halt. In the Vedic era, the saints considered life as a journey which had four halts or encampments. The first halt was that of celibacy (Brahmacharya Aashram), then followed household (Grihasth Aashram) and then came the time for the householder to depart from the household and move ahead. Today we have forgotten the essence of the word Aashram. Once entering the household, we just never want to get out of there. We stay in the household with a strong determination as if life is eternal. The period of life insurance is 30-35 years but in our hearts we have such an insurance plan as if we were never to die. Immersed in the household we forget that we have to come out of it too. The household is such an army formation in which, like

Abhimanyu (of the great epic Mahabharata), one enters but is unable to withdraw from it. Till the very end we keep worrying about the world.

Believers of Vedic culture used to transfer their responsibilities to the future generations and set foot on the next path of the journey at the age of 50; the practice is in discontinuation these days. In an inn, one is allowed to stay for 5-6 days. One who stays for more than that, is first hinted gently by the innkeeper, then clearly told to leave if a stubborn one fails to get the hint, and if one still does not understand, one's belongings are thrown out. Life is a journey in which we have to move ahead, whether or not we like it. The gentlemen who abandon the household of their own accord succeed in maintaining the reputation and grace, while those who do not do so are shoved out by the innkeeper. Today, those who have attained the age when they should be saying goodbye to the house, should introspect and analyze whether they are being meted out a similar treatment as the innkeeper does. Their own sons and daughters-in-law curse them and think, "The old hag neither lives nor dies." Why don't daughters-in-law get along with mothers-in-law - because the latter wish to live in the house as if they themselves were the daughters-in-law. Why does the aged father not get along with his son - because a father on the verge of his last breaths starts seeming to be a burden to the sons.

The parents who brought us up should be dutifully served by the children even if they become a burden because after all, who can pay off the exorbitant debt of the parents? But it is the children who have to realize their own duty, for nobody likes to say to another, "Look, it's your duty to serve us." For this reason, the age-old saints gave another option for the children to clear off the debt owed to the parents. They did not sermonize that the aged parents should sit on a stool while the sons should worship them. They advised that the parents' duty was to renounce the household for Vaanaprasth and the children should pay off the debt by taking up the household and trying to leave behind spiritually superior

offsprings. By nature, man wants freedom. If parents continue staying in the house, the children do not get a chance to feel free to exercise their will. Resultantly, the world's best relationship gets so terribly spoilt that onlookers gather to watch the fun. Parents were masters of house during their time, now they need to give the opportunity to their children. But power is such a thing which nobody wishes to let go of. Snatching it away is plausible but why offer it on a plate? That's why these days, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters-in-law are quarreling all around. The ancient saints suggested a solution to this problem through Vaanaprastha. They were of the view that when eventually one has to leave the world why leave it disgracefully instead of renouncing it on one's own? Everybody wishes to indulge in worldly pleasures and the chance has been provided in the household. But a householder realizes by experience that there's nothing to gain from these pleasures and so he himself turns away from these. It is certain that materialistic pleasures, once partaken, will be taken away. This natural state of human mind was given a scientific basis by the saints and this tendency was termed Vaanaprastha.

15. Sanyaas sanskaar (The ritual of renunciation)

The literal meaning of the word Sanyaas is to keep aside, throw away, renounce and say goodbye to the burden of attachment from one's shoulders. This ritual harbingers a detached life led for the good of the rest of the people on Earth leaving behind all illusions of worldly infatuation and bias. There are three types of Sanyaas :

1. Sequential Sanyaas : When one finishes the period of celibacy, then enters household, followed by Vaanaprasth and finally takes renunciation, it is termed as sequential Sanyaas i.e. taking up all the four phases of life in order and eventually becoming an ascetic in old age.

2. Direct Sanyaas through household or Vaanaprasth : The day one attains freedom from all worldly desires, one can

renounce the world even if the period of Vaanaprasth is not yet over or even if one is still a householder and has not even embarked on Vaanaprasth. This is because the major reason for renunciation is a strong detachment and the right understanding.

3. Direct Sanyaas through Brahmacharya : On accomplishing total celibacy, a true detachment from desires and complete knowledge and understanding, when the desire of worldly pleasures vanishes, an unbiased feeling of helping others emanates and a strong determination exists to righteously practice Sanyaas till the very end of life, then a person can renounce everything right after Brahmacharya, even without indulging in the household and Vaanaprastha.

Sanyaas or renunciation is the name given to the quitting of love and hatred, affinity and attachment. After renouncing, the person is deemed dead for the family members. Sometimes the family does not even know where the bead of their thread is. Everyone has to die. A Sanyaasi (a wandering ascetic) is quite close to death. The world has to be abandoned after death, but an ascetic lays hands on the fun even while he's alive and is forever prepared to brush aside the world and depart. The saffron clothes he wears remind him constantly of the flames of fire which absolve everybody into the five elements after death. Sanyaas means burning in the fire even when alive.

The duties of an ascetic :

Neither should he find joy in living nor grief in death but, like a servant waiting for master's orders, should wait for death.

Concerned with the self and its relation to the Ultimate being and free of all expectations, he should have abandoned liquor, meat etc., should find solace in himself and should preach the truth.

From time to time, he should shave off all hair on his head, beard, and moustache and clip the nails. He should carry a small vessel, a stick and wear clothes dyed with safflower. Without hurting any living creature, he should forever remain a determined soul.

The ascetic, who restrains the senses from all wrongs, leaves behind love and hatred and works peacefully for the welfare of

others, reaches the communion with Lord.

Even if the foolish worldly people criticize or insult the ascetic, he should follow his dharma. This also holds true for those practicing celibacy etc. Being impartial for all, he should stay balanced in mind. Performing the most excellent tasks is the function of Sanyaas phase and not just donning the staff and such symbols.

An ascetic should fear worldly repute as poison and wish for insult as for immortal nectar, because he who fears insult and desires respect gradually becomes downtrodden and a liar. So, an ascetic should equanimously accept criticism or praise, respect or insult, life or death, loss or gain, love or hatred, heat or cold, availability or lack of food, water, clothing and shelter etc and should always oppose immorality and propagate morality.

He should always be peaceful and non-violent; be truthful in speech, belief and action; should not endeavor to obtain another's possession through mental, physical or oratorical injustice and neither should implore anyone else to do so; should refrain from eight types of sexual allurements with full restraint for conservation and protection of semen and henceforth live a long life for the welfare of others; should be devoid of the vices like pride etc and never get trapped in the worldly temptations of wealth etc. These are the five social ethics and he must abide by them without fail. Along with these, he should also abide by the five personal ethics: Cleanliness - internal and external; contentment - working hard and being neither joyous nor sad by positive negative results; austerity - impartially practicing justice and morality along with physical exercises etc; swadhyaya - forever thinking of the Lord's name by uttering it, contemplating on it and remembering its meaning; surrender - surrendering one's soul to the Lord as directed by the Vedas, experiencing the Absolute Bliss and eventually escaping from the body to reach the blissful communion.

16. Antyeshti sanskaar

(The last/funeral rites)

Antyeshti sanskaar is the ritual performed when the body

ends. Following this, there is no ritual for the body. Other names for this ritual are **Naramedha, Narayaaga, Purushyaag.**

The belief that the soul goes to Yamalok after death is just an illusion. The basis for this illusion is found in the Garud Puraan etc. but it originated due to the misunderstanding about the word 'Yama' mentioned in the Vedas. The Vedas use the word 'Yam' for several substances and due to lack of knowledge this was interpreted as 'Yamalok'. One meaning of Yam is: Regulatory source or one who disciplines.

After death, the soul escapes into the universe and at the appropriate time takes birth on the basis of Karma (the previous deeds performed).

All over the world people offer the dead body to one of the elements - Earth, water, fire or air. Those who bury submit it to Earth, those who dispose in river submit it to water, those who perform the funeral offer it to fire and those who leave the body in the open submit it to Air. The point to be pondered is which is the most scientific method of all the above :

- ❑ **Funeral law in Europe :** The parliamentary bill for funeral was first passed in England in 1902. In spite of the permission, only a handful of people used to be ready for funeral. Significant progress in this direction was made during the Second World War. The number of deaths was so large that there emerged a problem for burial due to lack of space. In England, it started being felt that burying the dead was like wasting the ground. This encouraged the tendency for funeral. In the later half of the twentieth century, the number of dead bodies burnt in the crematorium started rising by 0.3 million per year. This means that half of the people, who died in England, started being burnt. In the meantime the number of crematoria increased to 190.
- ❑ Influenced by funeral of bodies in England, the practice started catching up in other European countries. Thirty percent of the dead started being burnt in the Scandinavian countries, Australia and New Zealand. In America cremation

was inaugurated in 1876. According to the figures of the Cremation Association of America, in the late 20th century, there were 230 crematoria in America and the year 1970 alone saw the cremation of 88000 dead bodies. By 1976, each European and American country had its own National Cremation Association and for the purpose of their interaction and exchange of thoughts, an International Cremation Federation was founded with headquarters in London. This federation keeps holding conferences after every three years to discuss programmes for encouraging funerals.

Comparison of burial and funeral :

1. Funeral of dead body occupies very little space while graves take up a lot of ground space.
2. Graveyard often leads to contamination of atmosphere. This polluted air becomes a cause for the spread of various diseases. This can be avoided by cremation.
3. The water that flows in the vicinity of a graveyard becomes a source of diseases. This is not so for funerals.
4. Some animals peck away at the dead body. They can fall sick on consumption of the diseased body and further spread diseases in humans. This mishap is avoided through burning.
5. Some shroud-thieves dig out the grave and take off the shroud. This hurts the sentiments of the relatives of the dead. Burning the dead helps prevent this.
6. Lakhs of acres of land is occupied by graveyards. If cremation begins, this land can be used for agriculture and housing. There is scarcity of land for the living while the dead are occupying it.
7. Worship of shrines, graves, tombs of saints, dead bodies - all this hypocrisy will be over if the dead are burnt.
8. A lot of priests who, for a living, consume the offerings on graves and tombs, will find alternative work to do for the welfare of the society and thus prove themselves truly useful.
9. The crores of rupees wasted on worshipping the tombs,

making offerings and visiting them can be put to better use.

10. Hundreds of shrines and tombs have been specially created with an expenditure of not thousands, but lakhs of rupees. This huge sum of money being spent unnecessarily can be saved for education, healthcare and other useful tasks.

11. Many debased people have been caught indulging in unethical practices with dead bodies that have been dug out. These bodies will be saved from this fate (by cremation).

12. At some places of burial or entombment, alcohol and drugs like Charas, Ganja and Opium are consumed - this ill and corrupt behavior will be curbed.

Thus, from the point of view of healthcare, scarcity of land, saving of funds and righteous behavior, it is appropriate to burn the dead body instead of opting for burial.

Keeping this in mind, Rishi Dayaanand wrote a few words in question-answer form in his book Satyarth Prakaash (The Light of Truth) that throw light on these customs. He writes :

Question : Burning, burying, disposing in water and discarding in the forest - which of these four is the best ?

Answer : The worst is burial. A little less deleterious is disposal in water because the aquatic creatures immediately tear it off and consume it but the skeleton and waste that remains in water rots and leads to several problems. Lesser worse still is leaving in the forest because although the carnivores will fast eat it up, the bones and waste will create a foul odor on decay, which will emanate all over. The best is cremation, for all substances will get reduced and will escape in the air.

The body is made of the five elements - earth, water, fire, air and space. Henceforth, in compliance with the Vedic tradition, it is most suitable to convert the bodily elements into their minutest form and return them to their original state. Cremation in fire is the only means that can quickly return all the elements of the dead body into the original form.