

Introduction to Vedic Saàskāras



PRELIMINARY ACTIVITY

On a single sheet of paper, answer the following:

1. When you hear the word “samskara”, what first comes to mind?
2. What do you already think or know of samskaras?
3. On a scale of 0-10 (low to high) how much interest do you have for this topic? Why?
4. What are you hoping to learn in this unit?

Saàskära संस्कार Defined:

- Cleansing
- Consecration
- Making sacred
- Purification
- Mental Impression
- Training
- Forming well
- Making perfect
- Correction
- Education
- Forming the mind
- Putting together
- Accomplishment
- Embellishment
- Correct formation and use of words

Saàskära:

Vedic reformatory rituals performed one by one from the time of conception until death for purifying a human being.

>>> *Ref. VedaBase => Glossary*

Related words: saiskrti, asaaskåta, Sanskrit

Rite of Passage

n: A ritual or ceremony signifying an event in a person's life indicative of a transition from one stage to another, as from adolescence to adulthood.

(American Heritage Dictionary)













How do Vaisnava rites of passage differ from the other examples?



DAËA-VIDHA SAMSKARAS: THE TEN MAJOR SAMSKARAS

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|----|
| 1. Vivàha Karma | Marriage | |
| 2. Garbhàdhànam | Impregnation | |
| Puîsavana | Rite for making a male child | |
| Sámantonnyanam | Parting the wife's hair | |
| Ëoîyantá Homa | Rite for safe delivery | |
| 3. Jàta Karma | Birth ceremony | |
| 4. Nìkràmaêam | Taking the child outside for the first time | |
| 5. Nàma Karaêa | Name-giving ceremony | |
| 6. Pauìèika Karma | For continued health of the child | 7. |
| Anna Pràëana | First grains ceremony | |
| Putra Màrdhàbhighràêam | Smelling the son's head | |
| 8. Câèa Karaêam | Hair-cutting ceremony | |
| Karêavedha | Piercing the ears | |
| 9. Upanayanam | Reformatory rites of a bràhmaêa | |
| Vidyàrambha | Beginning education | |
| 10. Samàvartana | Graduation ceremony | |

Why Saàskāras?

janmanā jāyate çüdraù saàskārād dhi bhaved
dvijaù
veda-päöhäd bhaved vipro brahma jänätéti
brähmaëaù

Everyone is born a çüdra. By **reformatory practices** one can become a dvija. By cultivation of knowledge and culture, one becomes a vipra. But only one who knows Brahman is a first-class man, a brähmaëa.

Sat-kriyā-sāra-dēpikā

The Saîskāra Manual for Vaiṇavas



Srila Gopal Bhatta Goswami



“When Shri Chaitanya received the letter from Rupa and Sanatan. . . He began to elaborate on the good qualities of Gopal Bhatta Goswami and told them of His four month with Gopal Bhatta's family in Shri Rangam. . . He sent a package for Gopal Bhatta, which included His loincloth and other personal articles. . . . Gopal Bhatta was deeply grateful that Shri Chaitanya had sent His cloth, and he treasured the sacred paraphernalia for the remaining portion of his life. Further, as Shri Rupa Goswami read the letter, he found specific instructions for Gopal Bhatta—“Do not become dependent upon security or adopt a permanent residence. Please spend most of your time assisting Rupa and Sanatan in compiling transcendental literature, and thoroughly study this literature as well.” These instructions he took to heart, and he soon wrote a book entitled **Sat-kriya-sara-dipika**, a classic on the tenets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.”

-- *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan*, Satyaraja Das

From the Mangalacarana:

*paddhatià tää vivähädeù sat kriyâ sära dépiikäm
çrémad gopäla bhaööo ‘yaà sädhünäm-äjiayä
bhâçaà*

I, Gopäla Bhaööa, receiving the order from saintly,
exalted devotees, present a manual on vedic
saàskäras called “Sat Kriyâ Sära Dépikä”

From the Mangalacarana:

“For the devotees of Lord Govinda, inside or outside the varnasrama system, I will explain the process of performing Vedic samskaras taking evidences from the Vedas, Puranas, Manu and other Smrtis, avoiding injunctions which call for worship of the devatas and pitrs, as this would cause seva and namaparadha for the devotees.”

This book is only for householders dedicated solely to Lord Govinda!



In 1904 Çréla Bhaktivinoda Öhäkura published *Sat-kréyā-sāra-dépikā*, a Sanskrit work by Gopāla Bhaööa Gosvämé on the saàskāras (purificatory rites) and other practices pertinent to both Vaiñëava gāhasthas and renunciates. He gave his own Bengali translations as well. — *The Seventh Goswami*



pted as Vaiṇēava.

Non-Vaiṇēava rituals are not accepted as bona-fide by the Vaiṇēava world, and since this has been logically proven with *ĕàstric* evidence, those sense-enjoyers who are inimical to pure devotional service find this fact unpalatable.

However, there is no doubt that **the vain hopes and desires of the non-Vaiṇēavas will be uprooted by the re-publication of this book.** Those whose hearts feel pain as if pierced by a lance, by the spreading of Vaiṇēava *smāti*, will not be able to appreciate topics of devotional service. Nonetheless, **the customs of the society of pure Vaiṇēavas, being like the Pole Star, will shine forth brightly even in the darkness of the new moon.** Now, this is the third printing and we view this as an opportunity to propagate the Vaiṇēava faith and the rules, regulations and etiquette of devotional service. -- *SKSD Preface by by His Divine Grace Ērāla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatā Ēhākura*

Çré Gopäla Bhaööa Gosvämé, the author of Vaiñëava smätis, has written in his Sat-kriyä-sära-dépikä:
“Vaiñëavas should not perform this ceremony [Nandimukhi] out of fear of committing offenses against the holy names. **In order to satisfy one's forefathers one should remember Lord Viñëu, worship the spiritual master, and give cloth and foodstuffs in charity to the Vaiñëavas and brähmaëas according to one's ability. In this way one's forefathers will be satisfied.**”

Caitanya Bhagavat, Adi 15.110

IF NO SAMSKARAS... ?

asaàskâtäù kriyā-hénā rajasā tamasāvātäù
prajās te bhakñayiñyanti mlecchā
rājanya-rüpiëaù

Indeed, not purified by any Vedic rituals and
lacking in the practice of regulative principles,
they will be completely covered by the modes
of passion and ignorance. These barbarians in
the guise of kings will devour the citizenry. *SB*
12.1.40


Some Benefits of Samskaras

For the Child and Parents

- Focusing on Krsna in every aspect of life
- Learn to express gratitude & serve the devotees
- The strength of blessings
- Connection with the community
- Health, intelligence, purification, etc.

For the Community

- Rites of passage (samskaras) are a natural part of every society
- Creates deep bonds based on Krsna
- Allows for loving exchanges
- Fulfills need for social interaction in a Krsna conscious manner
- It's fun!



“The word anupurvyat in this verse indicates the system of samskaras, or purificatory rites, beginning with garbhadhana-samskara, or the purification of the sexual act. Generally, sudras and those who do not follow the Vedic system are not attracted to such purificatory ceremonies; therefore they remain ignorant of spiritual life and envious of the bona fide spiritual master. **Those whose character has been civilized by a systematic cleansing process give up the tendency to be argumentative and whimsical and instead become submissive and eager to learn in the presence of a bona fide spiritual master.**” -- *SB 11.17.22, Purport*



When the parents engage their minds in the lotus feet of the Lord and in such a state the child is born, naturally good devotee children come; when the society is full of such good population, there is no trouble from demoniac mentalities.

-- Purport, Srimad Bhagavatam 3.20.28

Components needed for a successful Samskara

Samskaras as a Krsna conscious festival



Welcoming & Honouring Sadhus

Hearing





Chanting





Yajna



Honouring Maha-prasadam









Receiving Blessings





Distributing Prasadam

Giving Gifts & Daksina





Six Loving Exchanges Between Devotees

- Offering gifts in charity.
- Receiving gifts in charity.
- Revealing one's mind in confidence.
- Inquiring confidentially.
- Accepting prasadam.
- Offering prasadam.



Yajña in tamo-guṇa:


**vidhi-hénam asaññānaà mantra-hénam
adakñiëam
çraddhā-virahitaà yajñaà tāmāsaà paricakñate**

Any sacrifice performed without:

1. regard for the directions of scripture
2. distribution of prasadam
3. chanting of Vedic hymns
4. remunerations to the priests
5. faith

is considered to be in the mode of ignorance --Bg 17.13





“How to help a child to become Krsna conscious? For a human being to become Krsna conscious in this material world, it requires immense blessings: blessings of Vaisnavas, and especially the blessings of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, which come through the Vaisnavas. So at every step, there are samskaras, there are mantras, there are purificatory practices, and most of all, there is an intent to invoke the Lord through his names, through specific rituals for that purpose at that time and to bring saintly people together on that occasion to offer their prayers and blessings for that child. **And yes, those blessings give the strength to help that special being to overcome the obstacles of Maya and reach the lotus feet of the Lord.**”

-- H. H. Radhanath Swami

“There is a need for a good and intelligent class of brahmanas who are expert in performing the **purificatory processes** prescribed in the system of varnasrama-dharma.” –

Srila Prabhupada, Srimad- Bhagavatam 1.12.13, purport



Homework Due Tomorrow

Email: atd@pamho.net

1. Define “rite of passage”.
2. Define “samskara”. Give as many definitions as you can recall.
3. Summarize the relevance of samskaras in your own words.
4. What components are needed for a KC samskara?
5. Find three INTERESING quotes from Srila Prabhupada about samskaras. (*Please take the time to study – not just the first three you find! Vanipedia or Vedabase are good resources*)
6. Write about a samskara you have personally undergone. What impressions has it left on you? (If you haven’t had any or can’t remember, think of any event that has influenced you either positively or negatively.)