

AUM

## UPANAYANAM

The word Upanayanam literally means 'leading closer'. The implication of this 'leading closer' is to place the person on the threshold of Knowledge, otherwise known as 'Brahman'.

The entire mankind is divided into four varnas based on the three gunas namely sattwa, rajo and tamo gunas. Those who have a great percentage of Sattwa guna were termed as Brahmana, those with more Rajo guna were Kshatriya and those with pronounced Rajo and Tamo gunas were called Vaisyas. In all the three Varnas, though Tamo guna exists, it is not dominant compared to the other gunas. If Tamo guna is dominant, the person becomes sluggish with little aptitude for learning as the intelligent quotient is very low. Such persons were termed as Sudras.

Of the various species. The human species is special in that they are endowed with a brain which can reason out, discriminate and decide. If the purpose for this special gift is analyzed, one comes to the conclusion that it is for the sake of knowing oneself. In other words, every human-being has a primary duty to think of Brahman and make efforts to attain it. However, only a few realize this aspect but the class of human beings have this chance.

The three Varnas, Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaisya are usually initiated to the pursuit of Brahman because the Tamo guna is dominated by the other two. These three varnas usually are found to think of Brahman. Even among the three varnas, there is discrimination with regard to the age at which the initiation to knowledge is made. Brahmana is to be initiated at the age of 7 years (in the 8<sup>th</sup> year), the Kshatriya at the age of 14 years and the Vaisya just before marriage.

The common feeling is that the sudras have a raw deal as they are barred from knowledge. The Chandogya Upanishad gives the story of Satyakama Jabala, who was given initiation to knowledge even though his birth did not allow.

Upanayanam is performed in two stages: In the first stage the boy, after a purification bath is allowed to eat a morsel with his sisters and Brahmacharis. Then his head is tonsured leaving five tufts of hair on four sides of the head and in the center of the head. Then he is again given a bath. After which his ears were pierced. He would then be ready for the second stage of the Upanayanam.

The purpose of eating with his sisters and the Brahmacharis is to say that if he had been sharing food from the same container or plate with his sisters then it is the last meal where he could share with them, and also to indicate that he has to share food with other Brahmacharis. After Upanayanam, the Brahmachari shall not eat from any other plate other than the one consecrated by himself. He should also learn to share his food with other Brahmacharis irrespective of the quantity he has.

The head is tonsured in order to tell that the vatu has humility and does not bother for physical adornments. The five tufts of hair left represent the four Vedas and the Panchama Veda, Mahabharata. Mahabharata is the compendium of Dharma on which everything else stands.

The second stage of the Upanayanam consists of a homam for purification of the Vatu ( the name by which the person whose upanayanam is celebrated) for all acts such as eating prohibited foods, telling untruth etc., followed by vesting of Yagnopavitha and initiation to “Gayatri Mantra” by the father. During this ceremony the vatu is given a danda (Staff).

After the ceremony, the vatu is made to beg food first from his mother, then father and then from all the elders. This practice of begging for food has to continue as long as the vatu stays as a student. He shall have no belongings save a couple of angavastrams, a staff through out the period of his studies.

At the time of Upanayanam, the vatu is vested with Yajnopavitam consisting of three strands with a knot called Brahnamudi. These three strands signify:

- 1.,the three lokas, Bhu Bhuvah and suvah and the Brahnamudi denoting the end of the path for the vatu , he having been guided by Gayatri through the three lokas. From this point the vatu, being matured would continue his ascent to the Brahman through the acquisition of vidya
- 2.Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara who merge into Brahman denoted by the Brahnamudi,
- 3.The three vedas, Rik, Yajur and Sama which again lead to the Brahnamudi indicating pure Brahman,
- 4.the three Purusharthas, Dharma, Artha, and Kama culminating in the Brahnamudi indicating the ultimate Moksha,
- 5.The annamayakosa, Pranamayakosa and Manonmayakosa and the Brahnamudi being Vijnanamayakosa.

The Gayatri Mantra consists of 24 letters arranged in 3 padas. The first pada is the essence of Rig Veda, the second pada is the essence of Yajur Veda and the third is the essence of Sama Veda. The one letter Aum is considered Brahman, the essence of all Vidya. One may wonder as to why the three padas of Gayatri Mantra are to be chanted by the vatu, when pada means one fourth ,and three padas constitute only three fourths of the Mantra. These three padas are meant to be chanted by people in the three stages namely vatu, householders and vanaprasthas. The complete Gayatri Mantra is to be chanted by Sanyasis. The fourth pada- pa ro ra ja se sa va da( Brhadaranyaka Upanishad- fourth Brahman) shall not be available unless one renounces and becomes a sanyasi.

After the Upanayanam, the individual is a dwija, a twice born.

The meaning of Gayatri Mantra:

"We meditate on the spiritual effulgence of the mighty savitr who illuminates the three worlds Bhu, Bhuvah and Suvah and may that God continue to illuminate our minds with that spiritual effulgence."

Every mantra attains its full power, when it is chanted 100,000 times of the number of letters it has. Thus Gayatri Mantra has to be chanted 24,00,000 times in order to get the full power, The vatu is expected to recite the mantra 1000 times every day. If this is practiced by the vatu daily. The vatu would be able to realize the knowledge by the time he completes his studies. Even otherwise, every dwija must recite Gayatri Mantra every morning at least.