

ORIGINS OF
THE YAGNA







Performed since *Vedic* times, a yagna and a havan are rituals of fire sacrifice that form a vital aspect of Hindu religious practices to this day. While all havans can be termed as yagnas, all yagnas need not necessarily be havans. A havan is the simple act of ritualistic sacrifice to the fire. It is believed that the offerings made to the fire are carried by the flames to the gods who are being propitiated.

A Vedic yagna is performed by an *adhvaryu* priest, assisted by other priests and acolytes, who keep chanting Vedic verses appropriate for that yagna. The duration of a yagna depends on the type of yagna being performed: some can last for a few minutes,

hours or days; some even last for years!

In the Rigveda, it says: “He who enkindles fire with a determination and performs the *Agnihotra* – the fire sacrifice – by offering twigs of special trees, gains excellent health and energy.” It is performed at sunrise or sunset – the two major periods in the 24-hour cycle of biorhythmic changes in plants, animals and all living entities in nature. The use of medicinal herbs, or wood from such trees is observed, in a fire sacrifice, to clean and purify the atmosphere and induce healing in the environment. This helps minimise the negative effects of pollution on *Prana* – the vital life force that pervades all existence. It is also conducted as the culmination of a long course of healing in Ayurveda. The sacred flames are regarded as the seal on the healing and ensure that the healing endures.

MANIFESTATIONS
OF THE DIVINE

