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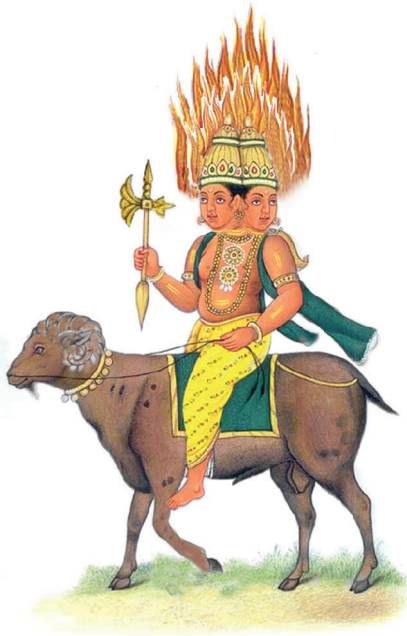
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Agni is the Vedic god of fire. Offerings made to him go to the deities because he is also a messenger from, and to, the other gods. As fire is relit every day, he remains forever young.

He is depicted as having two red faces signifying his destructive and beneficent qualities: one face looks towards humankind and the other towards the Divine. He has seven flaming tongues with which he licks the sacrificial ghee. He is the fiery link that allows prayers to rise and grace to descend.

The axe he wields cuts down the mind's forests of delusion before they are consumed in the fires of wisdom. The sturdy ram, symbol of male energy, is his vehicle. If this energy is controlled and guided by wisdom, it can be the source of magnificent creativity and great accomplishments.

AGNI







A *Mahamrityunjaya yagna* was performed by the author, Santosh Sachdeva, with 70,560 recitations of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra by 15 pandits, in the sacrificial enclosure of the temple dedicated to *Dhanwantari* – god of Ayurveda – at the The Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore.

FOREWORD

Since ancient times, *agni* i.e. fire, has played an important role in the Indian concepts of religion, rituals, spirituality, medicine, cooking and in the daily life of the people themselves. Anything performed in the presence of a properly lit fire yields auspicious and positive results. The creation and preservation of *agni*, in material and physiological forms, contributes to our unique fundamentals of science, philosophy and community living.

A havan is a ritualistic offering made to a fire specially lit to the accompaniment of sacred chants. *Agni*, being the ultimate purifier and processor, transcends the intention of this offering to a spiritually rewarding

level. Our great sages who narrated or scripted the classical texts, including that of Ayurveda, consider every usage of fire as a havan. This includes the physical acts of eating and digestion. The great sage Charaka, who is regarded as the father of Ayurveda, compares suitable food with *samit* (havan offering) and the *jatara agni* (digestive fire) with the *ahita agni* (havan fire).

Form and fire are inseparable because of their elemental congruity. It is *tejo maha bhuta* (fire element as per the popular translation) that makes these two happen. Visual perception of a form is possible for us because of *agni bhuta* in our eyes. Thus, focusing the mind to a single point of forms in sacred flames happens to be a most basic, and naturally compatible, type of meditation.

Coming from an Ayurvedic and spiritually inclined background, I wholeheartedly appreciate your successful efforts to simplify a significant ritual for the masses, without narrowing its spiritual perspective. I find this small book opening up larger possibilities for individual growth and peace which, collectively, will be useful for the whole world.

– Padmashri P. R. Krishna Kumar
Managing Director
The Arya Vaidya Pharmacy (CBE) Ltd.
Coimbatore

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.