FIVE DAILY DUTIES

All Hindus are enjoined to perform five daily duties known as the five "Maha Yajnaa" namely:

[i] Brahma Yajna, the duty to God;
[ii] Deva Yajna, duty to the celestials and Vedas;
[iii] Pitri Yajna, duty to the fore-fathers [departed];
[iv] Bhoota Yajna, duty to all creatures; and,
[v] Manushya Yajna, duty to mankind.

The "Pancha Maha Yajnas" enfold the four-fold responsibilities of man, viz., personal, household, social and national.

The performance of the five Yajnas is conducive to the spiritual evolution or growth of man. He gradually learns that he is not a separate entity or isolated creature or unit, but a part of a great whole. He obtains knowledge by studying the scriptures written by the great Rishis. He gets help from his friends, relatives and other fellow human beings. His parents gave him his physical body, which is nourished by milk of cows, grains, vegetables and fruits. The five elements [earth, water, fire, air and ether] help him. He cannot live without oxygen and water. The Devas and the Pitris bless him. Therefore, he owes a fivefold debt to Nature. He must pay back his debt by performing these five sacrifices daily.

"Yajna" is a Sanskrit word meaning a 'pious act' or a 'religious deed.' Any act that brings the maximum good and which cures the performer of his selfishness and helps to evolve the divine nature in man, is Yajna. It need not necessarily be a traditional ritual associated with the sacrificial fire or Pooja, the priest and the oblation. Self-effacement, glorifying God and the benefaction of people are the marks of a well-performed Yajna. All forms of Yajna resolve themselves into the adoration of the Almighty. "Maha Yajna" means 'great Yajna'.

Personal responsibilities are duties towards one’s own self and God. They are in the form of disciplines and practices for one’s physical, moral and spiritual evolution leading to a harmonious self-development, everlasting peace, supreme bliss and salvation. Man’s foremost duty is to elevate his ‘self’ so that he can become the expression of the divine.

Household responsibilities are duties towards parents, brothers, sisters, husband, wife, children and other family members. One must serve one’s parents, who have given him his physical body, with great devotion. Parents must be worshipped as visible representatives of God. If one cannot serve one’s mother and father, then one cannot serve God. For a Hindu, therefore, his parents are his first God. Likewise, parents must ensure that their children are properly trained. They must be given the highest education - technical, moral and spiritual. Wife and husband must be truthful and devoted to each other. The Hindu scriptures say:- "blessed are the homes in which parents are worshipped and obeyed; where husbands and wives are faithful to each other; where young and old dwell in perfect understanding, harmony, unity and peace."

National responsibilities are duties the country in which we are born or live. One must always be loyal and obey the laws of the land. Social responsibilities are duties towards society and fellow man. One must serve the society with a disinterested spirit, according to one’s own temperament, taste and capacity.
One must not engage oneself in any act or deed which may bring or cause disadvantage or mar the harmonious progress of society. One must always be kind, generous towards all, giving a helping hand to those in need.

**Brahma Yajna:**
Brahma Yajna is the studying and teaching of scriptures, sciences and arts, and the communion with God through meditation and prayer. This is the duty one owes to the scriptures, the sages and to one's self - to cultivate one's intelligence and to share that knowledge with others. The study of the scriptures is the prerogative of man. The seers, sages and saints have left them as an invaluable legacy. This is the healthiest of all as it rids man superstition and guides him Godward. Every day a Hindu should devote a portion of his time to study, prayers and meditation. Brahma Yajna, therefore, ranks as the first of the Maha Yajnas.

**Deva Yajna:**
Deva Yajna is the company and services of saints, sages, yogis, and men of wisdom and knowledge. A Hindu should always have 'satsangha', or association of highly elevated persons as this in turn elevates him, brings him knowledge and purifies him. He must perform "havan" or "pooja" regularly. Lord Krishna says in the Gita: "Having in ancient times created mankind with sacrifice [Yajna], the Lord of Creation said, 'by this shall you propagate; be this to you the fulfiller of desires. With this nourish you the shining ones [Devata]; and may the shining ones nourish thee. Thus, nourishing one another, you shall reap the highest good. For, nourished by sacrifice, the shining ones shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire."

**Pitri Yajna:**
Pitri Yajna is the offering of libation, etc., to the forefathers. This Yajna teaches man to remember the immense debt he owes to his ancestors, and to regard with loving gratitude those whose labours have bequeathed to him the accumulated stores of wealth, learning and civilisation.

**Bhoota Yajna:**
The distribution of food to cows, dogs, birds, fish, etc.

**Manushya Yajna:** is feeding the poor and hungry; clothing the naked; giving shelter to the homeless; comforting the distressed, etc. In fact, any kind of service to suffering humanity is Manushya Yajna.

**PURAANA YAJNA, BHAGAWATA YAJNA, VEDA YAJNA, RAMAAYANA YAJNA, GEETA YAJNA.**

These are ceremonial reading and expounding of the Scriptures bearing the same name in communal assemblies for a short time. Prayers and kirtan singing are also rendered.

By performing 'yajnas' of this nature, we help to mould the mind and character of people, by encouraging them in the cultivation of virtuous habits and abstaining from evil ones. Moreover, this practice engages all and sundry in a soul-searching and purifying act in a community spirit of dedication, love and understanding. In such communal assemblies, the reading of the scriptures serves as a tremendous inspiration whereby one may gain enormous strength and enlightenment to successfully fight the battle of life, and at the same time not losing sight of the final goal of perfection or God-realization. Also, these 'Yajnas' help to keep the religious spirit alive among the Hindus.

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*Note: the above is the work of Pandit R. Balbadar of Guyana, SA. I take no credit in any of these beautiful writings.*

*You can find more topics from Pandit Balbadar ji on his blog [@http://understanding-hindu-rituals.blogspot.blogspot.com/](http://understanding-hindu-rituals.blogspot.blogspot.com/)*

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