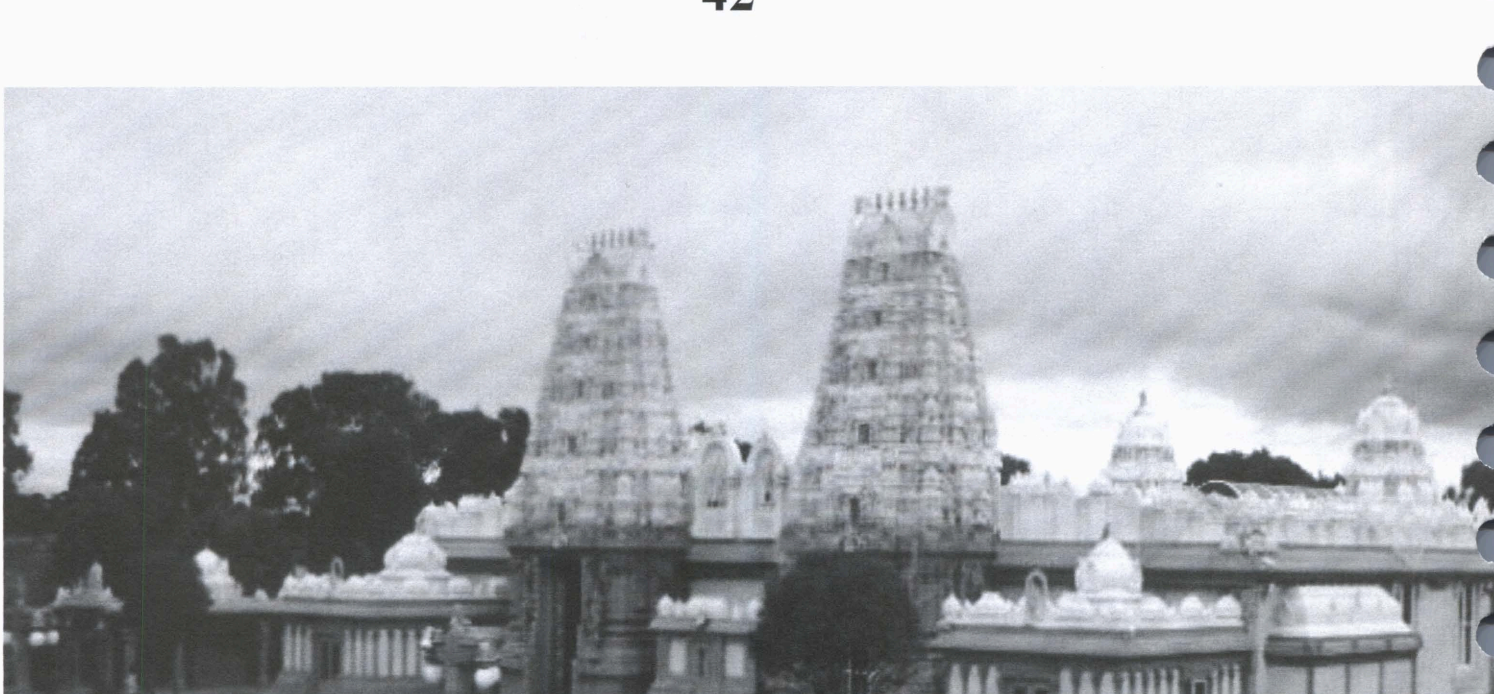
Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி

42



Shri Shiva-Vishnu Temple,Carrum Downs,Victoria

Sri Sankar Publications

க்ஷேத்திர (வயல்) விநாயக ஆலயம்,

ஸ்ரீ முன்னேஸ்வரம், சிலாபம், ஸ்ரீ லங்கா.

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June 2011 ஜூன் (வைகாசி/ஆனி)

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Contents

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1. Is concept of Karma found in any other religion? What are the significance of it in Hinduism?
2. What is really an astral body with reference to Hinduism?
3. What is meant by Brahma muhurtha?
4. What is meant by Upanishad? Give a brief account of the important Upanishads?
   - Artharvasikha Upanishad
   - Aruneya Upanishad
   - Brihadaranyaka Upanishad
   - Chandogya Upanishad
   - Ganapati Upanishad
   - Isa Upanishad
   - Jabala Upanishad
   - Jaiminiya Brahman Upanishad
   - Kaivalya Upanishad
   - Katha Upanishad
   - Kaushitaki Upanishad
   - Kena Upanishad
   - Mahanarayana Upanishad
   - Maitri Upanishad
   - Mandukya Upanishad
   - Mukti Upanishad
   - Mundaka Upanishad
   - Paingala Upanishad
   - Pranagnihotra Upanishad
   - Prasana Upanishad
   - Sandilya Upanishad
   - Sanyasa Upanishad
   - Subala Upanishad
   - Svetasvatara Upanishad
   - Taittirya Upanishad
   - Yajnavalkya Upanishad
   - Yogatattva Upanishad
5. What are the important aspects of Hindu traditional Vedic vivaaha (marriage) and the most essential rituals in this wedding ceremony?

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Editorial.

The monthly publication 'Path to Darma', by Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 42nd number this month.

The most vital enterprise of this monthly is to pass on the vision related to Hindu dharma fundamentally by responds to the questions put forward by the concerned readers.

The comments and analysis of the readers are appreciated.

B.S.Sarma,
Kshethra Vinayaka Temple,
Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka. June, 2011

Suggestions from the readers

Mr.B.S.Sarma, 'Path to Dharma'

I am honestly delighted about the subject area discussed, and the approach that these areas are dealt with.

I have sent you some queries for which I expect the answers in an elaborate manner without using bombastic technical words or Sanskrit words.

With kind regards,

S.K.Mahendra, Sydney, Australia 14th May 2011

Dear Mr.Sarma,
Thanks for sending me the monthly magazine 'Path to Dharma' each month. Some of the explanations for the inquiries are very short and snappy.
If comprehensive elucidations and descriptions are given where ever necessary it will be really helpful.
Please give in detail about the meaning of some major mantras, recited during the ceremonies at the temples.
K.H.Mohan 17th May 2011

Quatations

"To Rudra,Lord of sacrifice,of hymns and balmy medicines,we pray for joy, health and strength.He shines in splendor like the sun,refulgent as bright gold is He,the good,the best amoung the Gods".

Rig Veda

"Instill in us a wholesome,happy mind,with goodwill and understanding.Then shall we ever delight in your friendship like cows who gladly rejoice in meadows green.This is my joyful message".

Rig Veda

"He the Self is not this.He is ungraspable,for He is not grasped.He is indestructible,for He cannot be destroyed,He is unattached,for He does not cling to anything.He is unbound,He does not suffer,nor is He injured".

Yajur Veda

"Gods is,in truth,the whole universe;what was,what is and what beyond shall ever be.He is the God of life immortal and of all life that lives by food.His hands and feet are everwhere.He has heads and mouths everywhere.He sees all.Hehears all.Heis is in all,ans He Is".

Yajur Veda

"Thia atman is the Lord of all beings,the King of all beings.Just as the spokes are fixed in the hub and the rim of a chariot wheel,in the same way all these beings,all the Gods,all the worlds,all life breaths,all these selves,are fixed in the atman".

Yajur Veda

"Aum.One should mediate on this syllable as the Udgitha chant,for every chant starts with Aum.Of this the explanation is as follows;The essence of all beings is the earth;the essence of the earth is water;the essence of water is plants;the essence of plants is man; the essence of man is speech; the essence of speech is the Rig Veda;the essence of Rig Veda is the Sama Veda; and the essence of the Sama Veda is the Udgitha chant".

Sama Veda

"As one not knowing that a golden treasure lies buried beneath his feet may walk over it again and again yet never find it-so all beings live every moment in the city of Brahman yet never find Him,because of the veil of illusion by which He is concealed".

Sama Veda

"He who knows the fine-drawn thread of which the creatures that we aee are spun,who knows the thread of that same thread- he also knows Brahman,the Ultimate".

Atharva Veda

"Sin of the mind,depart away!Why do you utter improper suggestions?Depart from the place!Ido not want you!Go to the trees and the forests!My mind will remain here along with our homes and our cattle".

Athava Veda

1. Is concept of Karma found in any other religion? What are the significance of it in Hinduism?

Karma is a concept found in the philosophy of Hinduism and also in Jainism and Buddhism. For the people of Jainism and Buddhism the concept of Karma is understood rather differently. The word 'Karma' plainly gives the meaning, 'action'. It is the expression used for the process by which actions are considered to have consequences for the person who carries out them.These consequences are not mearly the practical and obvious results of action but are regarded as spiritual,in that they influence the passage of an Atman through the world of samsara.Further Hindus belive that actions done in one lifetime will influence what will happen to that person beyond death.Based on the facts that the consequences that have yet to mature from earlier karma must work themselves out in the future lives.As popularly conceived,obedience to the Dharma(reality,or the Eternal Law)here and now will bring about a better rebirth.

2. What is really an astral body with reference to Hinduism?

Astral body is explained in Hindu scripts as the subtle, nonphysical bodywhich is termed *'sukshma saririra'* in which the soul functions in the astral plane, termed '*antharloka'*. The astral body comprises the pranic sheath (pranamaya kosa), the instinctive, intellectual sheath (manomaya kosa) and the cognitive sheath(vijnanamaya kosa) with the pranic sheath plunging off at the time of death of the physical body.

3. What is meant by Brahma muhurtha?

Brahma muhurthaThe term Muhurtha is defined as a duration of time or a certain division of a day or night.The extent of Muhurthas vary slightly in length of time as the length of days and nights change through the year.There are three muhurtha systems that are followed widely.The first defines one muhurtha as $1/8^{th}$ of a day or night(=1.5 hours in a 12-hour night),the second as$1/15^{th}$ of a day or night(=48 minutes) and the third as $1/16^{th}$ of a day or night(=45 minutes)
Brahma muhurtha is defined as roughly 1.5 hours,the last muhurtha of the night in the eight-muhurtha system.It is understood as comprising the final three muhurthas of the night in fifteen or sixteen muhurtha systems equaling 144 minutes or 135 minutes respectively.

4. What is meant by Upanishad? Give a brief account of the important Upanishads?

The empherical meaning of the term Upanishad is'Sitting near devotedly'. Factually Upanishads form the fourth and final portion of the Vedas, clarifying the devine secret, philosophical significance of the Vedic hymns.The Upanishads are a compilation of philosophical texts which are the resource of Vedanta.These texts have dominated Hindu ideas for thousands of years.They are idealistic chronicals of rishis illuminating and explaining the nature of God, soul and cosmos, exquisite interpreting of the deepest thought of Hindus. The Upanishads are generally dated later than the Samhitas and Brahmanas, though some are actually portions of the Brahmanas.It is considered that most of the Upanishads were written between the period 1500 and 600 BCE. Conventionally,the number of Upanishads is given as 108.Ten to sixteen are classified as 'major' (principal) Upanishads being those considered paramount important which philosophical schlors have commented on through the centuries. In content and concept all these Upanishadic texts deal around the identity of the soul and God the doctrines of reincarnation, the principle of karma and of liberation through renunciation and meditation.

Artharvasikha Upanishad
Artharvasikha Upanishad is a philosophical Upanishad.This Upanishad describes importance and perception and the interpretation of the pranava mantra 'Aum'.

Aruneya Upanishad
Aruneya Upanishad is considered an important Upanishad which deals with the concept and the duties of sanyasa.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is one of the most important Upanishads which is a part of the Satapatha Brahmana of the Yajur Veda, attributed to Sage Yajnavalkya. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad explains the methods of worship,types of meditation and the identity of the individual self with the Supreme Self.

Chandogya Upanishad
Chandogya Upanishad is considered as one of the major Upanishads. Chandogya Upanishad consists of eight chapters of the Chandogya Brahmana of the Sama Veda.It instructs the origin and significance of the mantra 'Aum' the importances of the Sama Veda, the Self, meditation and life after death.

Ganapati Upanishad
Ganapati Upanishad is normally considered as one belongs to a later period, but a very popular Upanishad on Lord Ganesha. This Ganapati Upanishad is not connected with any Veda.The date of composition of this Ganapati Upanishad is unknown.It is a major scripture for thr Ganapatians.

Isa Upanishad
Isa Upanishad is the last of the forty chapters of Vajasaneyi Samhita of the Yajur Veda, Isa Upanishad deals with life which is a short and considered highly mystical and spiritual scripture

Jabala Upanishad
Jabala Upanishad is considered to belong to the Athra Veda. Jabala Upanishad is a scripture which explains the of knowledge to attain renunciation.

Jaiminiya Brahman Upanishad
Jaiminiya Brahman Upanishad is a philosophical discourse of the Sama Veda. This Jaiminiya Brahman Upanishad explicates the death, passage of life after death to other worlds and reincarnation.

Kaivalya Upanishad
Kaivalya Upanishad is a philosophical text of the Atharva Veda.This Kaivalya Upanishadic exposition explains the ways and methods of reaching Siva through meditation

Katha Upanishad
Katha Upanishad is considerd as one of the major Upanishads. Katha Upanishad belongs to the

Taittiriya Bahmana of the Yajur Veda. Katha Upanishad includes the well-known narration of Nachiketas who extracts from Yama, Lord of Death, the knowledge of liberation to realize of the supreme.

Kaushitaki Upanishad
Kaushitaki Upanishad is one of the major Upanishads belongs to the Rig Veda. Kaushitaki Upanishad converses the important concepts of the course of souls after death, the doctrine of prana (vital energy or life principle) as releated to the atman and the realization of moksha.

Kena Upanishad
Kena Upanishad belongs to the Talavakara Brahmana of the Sama Veda. Kena Upanishad is important script as it is a discourse upon Brahman, Absolute Reality and His worship as personal God.

Mahanarayana Upanishad
Mahanarayana Upanishad is believed an important philosophical script of the Krishna Yajur Veda.

Maitri Upanishad
Maitri Upanishad is regard as a script belongs to to Maitrayaniya branch of the Krishna Yajur Veda. Maitri Upanishad is one of the later Upanishad explain Covering Aum,outer nature,the Self,control of the mind

Mandukya Upanishad
Mandukya Upanishad is one of the principal Upanishads .This Upanishad belongs to Atharva Veda consisting of twelve brief verses. Mandukya Upanishad elucidate the meaning of the pranava mantra 'Aum' and the four states (avastha) of awareness; walking (viswa), dreaming (taijasa) dreamless sleep (prajna) and transcendent, spiritual consciousnesss (tyriya)

Mukti Upanishad
Mukti Upanishad explains in length about yoga practice.It is supposed to have been written in the 14^{th} centuary.

Mundaka Upanishad
Mundaka Upanishad belongs to the Athava Veda and clarifies the different between the intellectual study of the Veda and their supplementary texts. Mundaka Upanishad throws light on the perceptive knowledge by which God is known.

Paingala Upanishad
Paingala Upanishad belongs to the Sukla Yajur Veda.This Upanishad comprises of a twelve verse conversation between Sage Yajnavalkya and his dseciple Paingala conversing a wide range of themes, including liberation and the five sheath of man.

Pranagnihotra Upanishad
Pranagnihotra Upanishad is a minor Upanishad.This Upanishad explains the ways and means of the transforming the external ritual of the fire sacrifice into 'pran- agnihotra' the saceifice offered in the 'prana fire' of a person.

Prasana Upanishad
Prasana Upanishad is belived to belong to the Atharva Veda. Prasana Upanishad is divided into six segments addressing six questions raised to the sage Pippalada by his disciples, in relation to life, Realization and the meaning of the pranava mantra Aum.

Sandilya Upanishad
Sandilya Upanishad is an essential Upanishad belongs to the Atharva Veda. Sandilya Upanishad gives the details of eight forms of yoga, restraints, observances, breath control, meditation and the nature of Truth.

Sanyasa Upanishad
Sanyasa Upanishad is a vital Upanishad of the Athava Veda. Sanyasa Upanishad deals in detail the transition from the grihastha to the vanaprastha and sanyasa asramas.

Subala Upanishad
Subala Upanishad is considered to belong to the Sukla Yajur Veda. Subala Upanishad gives the famous dialog between sage Subala and Brahma about the Suprme Being as Narayana.

Svetasvatara Upanishad
Svetasvatara Upanishad It is a major Upanishad, among the greatest monistic writings especially valued by Saivite schools and belongs to the Yajur Veda.This Svetasvatara Upanishad describes about personal God, devotion, unity of God, soul and world.

Taittirya Upanishad
Taittirya Upanishad belongs to the Taittiriya Brahmana of the Yajur Veda and is divided inti three sections known as vallis.The first valli deals with phonetics and pronunciation,the second valli and third valli deals with Brahman and the attainment of bliss.

Yajnavalkya Upanishad
Yajnavalkya Upanishad A musical descriptiona; type of script rendering of the Jabala Upanishad,which expounds on sannyasa,renunciation of wordly life in the quest for liberation.

Yogatattva Upanishad
Yogatattva Upanishad scripture consists of 142 verses. This Yogatattva Upanishad gives a detailed account on Advaita Vedanta and yoga practices.

5. What are the important aspects of Hindu traditional Vedic vivaaha (marriage) and the most essential rituals in this wedding ceremony?

The Vedas, supplemented by the Dharma Sastras, advocate a number of samskaras or sacraments to be undergone by people at various stages of life. The Hinduism lays down a comprehensive scheme for the spiritual development of the human being. The ultimate goal of human life is liberation from the repeated cycle of births and deaths. These samskaras or sacraments show the ways purifying the mind to attain the final objective, by preparing the person fit for spiritual progress and ultimate liberation.All the rites laid down in the Vedas have, as their ultimate purpose, the attainment of this goal.

Marriage or wedding is the most important of all the sacraments. Dharma Sastras accord a prominent status to the Grihastha (householder). The Brahmachaari, after completing his studies under a guru is enjoined to enter Grihastha-asrama in the normal course.
Manusmriti says:" Just as every creature lives by air, so the other orders of life are sustained by the householder". Those belonging to all the other three orders, (Brahmachaaris, Vaanaprasthas and Sannyaasins), depend on the householder for their sustenance.Only a Grihastha is entitled to perform the rituals prescribed in the Vedas.

In Hindu culture, marriage is not merely bringing about the relationship of husband and wife between a man and a woman. It is the merging of the two families.Marriage is considered to be the gifting of a virgin girl by her father or guardian to a deserving boy, called Kanyaadaana.
Marriage ceremony is not merely a joyous occasion, but, more than that, it is essentially a religious ritual function with great sanctity attached to it by the chant of religious hymns.
The various items of the marriage ceremony are as follows;
On the evening of the day preceding the marriage the bridegroom's party performs a puja to Lord Ganesa and sets out for the marriage hall.

Jaanuvaasam:
On the evening proceeding the day of the marriage, the bride and bridegroom and the members of their families go to a temple and offer worship in a procession.In the Sanskrit term 'Jaanuvaasam', "Jaanu" means, 'knee' and 'vaasa' means 'cloth'. A Brahmachari is, expected to wear only a single cloth (vetti or dhoti) which is up to his knees. When Brahmachari turns to a Grihastha, he has to wear a long cloth ('panchakaccham') and an upper cloth.The occasion on which he wears the single cloth (veti or dhoti) up to the knees for the last time is known by the term 'Jaanuvaasam'.

Samaavartanam:
The main rite preceding the actual marriage is Samaavartanam. This represents graduation on the completion of studies by the Brahmachaari under a guru and is the prelude to the marriage. In ancient times this was performed by the Brahmachaari while leaving the gurukulam on completionof studies. This is normally performed on the morning of the day of the marriage.
Thefollowing items form part of this rite:--

a). Ankuraarpanam: The seeds of certain grains are sown in five earthen pots chanting appropriate mantras. Four of these pots are placed in the four cardinal directions and the fifth in the centre. The pot at the centre represents Brahma, and the other four pots represent Indra, Yama, Varuna and Soma.These are kept in a safe place till the completion of the marriage ceremony. Finally they are immersed in water in a temple tank or other water source.

b).Naandi (Abhyudaya sraadham): The term 'abhyudaya' stands for the first three Purusharthas, namely Dharma, Artha and Kaama. By this rite the blessingof the manes is prayed for, for the attainment of these Purushaarthas.

c). Pratisarakarma: A thread dipped in sacred turmeric powder and tied around the wrist of the right hand for males and the left hand for females, with the chanting of hymns from Veda mantraswhich confirms that the person has taken a vow to complete the religious rites with faith and devotion.

d).Snaanakarma: The bridegroom has a shave take a bath and wears brown coloured cloth ('panchakaccha').

e).Kaasiyaatra: The bridegroom is asked to enter grihasthasramainstead of becoming an ascetic, so that he can discharge the three debts to the gods, Rishis and ancestors. Every one is born with these three debts. The debt to the Rishis is discharged by the study of theVedas; the debt to the gods by the performance of sacrifices and the debt to the ancestors by performing Vedic rituals and begetting a son.The last two are possible only in the grihasthasrama. The bride's father tells the bridegroom: "Please do not goto Kaasi. I shall give my daughter in marriage to you. Please accept her hand and attain all welfare and prosperity".

Exchange of garlands and 'oonjal' (swing):

The bride and bridegroom exchange garlands. This symbolises the free exchange of ideas between the two after marriage. They then sit on the swing. The swing is said to ymbolise the ups and downs of life, which the couple have to face unitedly with confidence and full faithin each other. This is an occasion for ladies to sing songs in liltingtunes.The actual marriage ceremony now begins. The bridegroom prays to the assembled priests and all elders to bless him and make him fit to go through the marriage ceremony. Later a puja ritual is performed to Lord Ganesa chanting mantra which says that he is marrying in order to beget virtuous progeny.

Varapreshanam:

Asstated earlier, this is reminiscent of the marriage of Soma andSooryaa. The bridegroom requests two or four of the Brahmanas present to find a suitable bride for him from a
good family. The Brahmanas request the bride's father to give his daughter in marriage to the bridegroom for begetting virtuous progeny. The bride's father gives his consent by saying three times, "I shall give". All this is done through appropriate Vedic hymns.

Punyaaha-vaachanam:

This is a ritual for purification, is known as punyaaha-vaachanam ceremony.

Varapooja:

This is worship of the bridegroom by the bride's father, looking upon him as Lord Mahavishnu Himself.

Kanyaadaanam:

Thebride's father sits facing east on a raised seat. The bride sits on his lap or on a seat. The bridegroom stands facing them. The 'Pravara' (lineage) of both the families is then recited by the priest and repeated by the father of the bride.

The mantra further says: "I being desirous of attaining Brahmaloka give my daughter, adorned with gold ornaments, to you, Mahavishnu. May all the gods and goddesses and all the beings who support the universe be the witnesses. I am giving thisdaughter so that my ancestors may attain salvation. May I attain moksha by gifting my daughter to you. I give this daughter of mine to you for begetting virtuous progeny and for performing religious rites." He then places the hands of the bride in the hands of the bridegroom. The bridegroom clasps the right hand of the bride and both sit down for further rituals.

Purification of the bride:

A miniature yoke made of wood is placed on the head of the bride. The thirumangalyam (thaali) is placed near the hole in the yoke and a few drops of water are poured through the hole on the bride. The bridegroom then gives a sari (Koorapudavai) to the bride. She goesout from the wedding hall to a room, wears it and returns. The bridegroom's sister is asked to help the bride to wear this sari.

Maangalyadhaaranam:
Thethirumangalyam (or Mangalasutra) is first taken round to get the blessings of the elders present in the marriage hall. Then the bridegroom invokes Maangalya Devataa on the thirumangalyam and performs puja with the 16 upachaaras (shodasopachaara).The bride's father sits on the raised seat, facing east. The bride sits on his lap or on a seat. The bridegroom places the thirumangalyam around the bride's neck and ties one knot, chanting a mantra the meaning of "Oh auspicious damsel, I tie this auspicious thread, which ensures long life for me, around your neck. May you live for a hundred years". Thebride-groom's sister then ties two knots.

Paanigrahanam - Taking the hand of the bride by the bridegroom:
The bridegroom clasps with his right palm the right palm of the bride,including the thumb and recites mantras meaning: "I take your handso that we may beget virtuous progeny and live till a ripe old age. The gods Bhaga, Aryamaa, Savita, Indra and others have given you to me to be the mistress of my house. O Goddess Saraswati, we sing your praise in the presence of all living beings. Please confer your blessings onus. May all the gods make you (the bride) always favourably inclined towards me.

Saptapadi - The seven steps:
This is the most important aspect in the marriage ritual. The bridegroom holds the joined palms of the bride with his left hand and with his right hand he lifts the right foot of the bride and moves it over seven steps, chanting mantras for each step. The mantras chanted by the bridegroom at each step mean: "Oh dear damsel, by the first step may Lord Vishnu bless us with plenty of food, by the second step with bodily strength, by the third step success in the performance of all vows, by the fourth step happiness, by the fifth step cattle and all other wealth, by the sixth step may all the seasons be favourable to us, by the seventh step may Lord Vishnu bless that we may together perform all the ordained Vedic rites successfully. By taking seven steps with me you have become my most intimate friend and well-wisher. I shall never swerve from this relationship. God has united us. We shall perform all our activities together with mutual love and full faith in each other. We shall always be of one mind. We shall perform all our religious duties together. We are complementary to each other. May we have good progeny andprosperity".

Now the bridegroom pours oblations of ghee into the sacred homa (fire). The bride sits by his side, touching him with her righthand, to indicate that the two are performing this rite together.Vedic mantras are chanted to propitiate the various gods, with the following prayers: "May Indra bless the bride to become attached to her husband'shouse and family, to beget good children and to be prosperous. May Agni bless her children with long life. May she have happiness from her children. May she never have to shed tears. May she be protected on allsides by all the gods. May Varuna guard our lives.

Asmaarohanam:
Agrinding stone is kept to the west of the homa-kunda. The bridegroom holds the joined palms of the bride with his left hand and, lifting the right foot of the bride with his right hand, places it on the grinding stone, chanting Veda- mantra. The meaning of the mantra is "Get up on this stone. Be firm like this stone in carrying out your vows. Resist those who oppose you (in carrying out your vows). Do not succumb to them." Here the stone is a symbol of firmness.

Laajahoma - Offering of parched rice into the fire as oblation:
The bride's brother stands to the right of the bride, facing north. The bride's mother stands nearby, holding a vessel containing parched rice.The bride's brother takes a handful of grains from the vessel and places it in the palms of the bride and the grains are then offered into the fire in the homakunda. While offering the grains the bridegroom chants a mantra the meaning of which is:

"This lady is offering these grains as oblation into the fire, saying, 'may my husband live for a hundred years, may my race prosper'". Parched rise is a symbol of prosperity.Then the bridegroom holds the right hand of the bride and goes round the fire, chanting a mantra.Thereafter the groom again lifts the right foot of the bride and places it on the grinding stone as before,chanting the same mantra as before. Then again, going back to the homakunda, parched rice is offered as oblation as before. This is followed by going round the fire and lifting the right foot of the bride and placing it on the grinding stone for the third time. Parchedrice is again offered into the fire.

Grihapravesam:

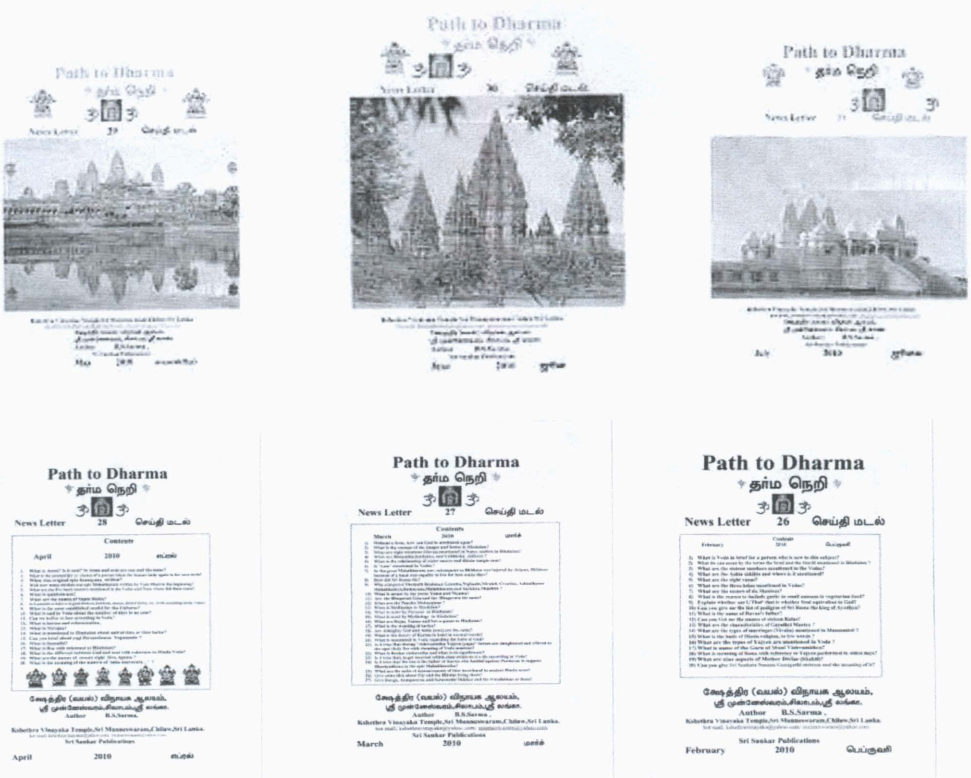
The bride and bridegroom go to the bridegroom's house accompanied by the members of their families. A ceremony with chanting mantras, addressed to the bride, say: "Be like an empress in this house. May you be like a queen to your father-in-law, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and others. By your affectionate conduct towards all those in your husband's house, may you win them over".

Pravesa homam:

This ceremony is performed by the bridegroom. The mantras chanted pray for longlife, prosperity and virtuous children for the couple.

Seeing the Dhruva nakshatra and the Arundhati nakshsatra by the bridegroom and the bride.

After the stars rise in the horizon, the bridegroom points out these stars to the bride, chanting some mantras. Dhruva stands for firmness. It is prayed that in their married life this couple should be as firm as Dhruva and they should never swerve from the path of Dharma.



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