

Agnihotra – A Vedic solution to purify mind, body and environment

What is *Agnihotra*? It is a Sanskrit word formed by combining two words—*Agni* (Fire) and *hotra* (sacrifice) or offering of oblation. *Agnihotra* is, therefore, a ritual which can be described universal and followed by any one. In the very first chapter (*mandala*) of the Rig Veda, *Agnihotra* has been prescribed as an obligatory ritual for the entire humanity.

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Scientific Base

Though, on the face of it, *Agnihotra* appears to be a religious mandate, it possesses both spiritual and scientific base. The rationality of the ritual is established by a combined effect of both psychological and para-psychological fields.

Agnihotra, which has scientific, psychological and para-psychological implications, needs to be performed only in a stipulated way and at stipulated times.

The shape of the pot (*kunda*) for the ritual is most important. Oblations have to be offered in that pot over the fire generated out of dry cow-dung cake, at sunset and sunrise. The material to be used as oblations is specified.

The hymns to be uttered during the ritual create certain beneficial vibrations.

The cumulative effect of these steps of performance makes one believe that *Agnihotra* should be something more than a mere religious rite. An analytical approach is, therefore, set into motion to find out the scientific basis and the principle behind all these specifications and the sequence thereof.

Pot – a Pyramid

The shape of the pot is a narrow square at the bottom and wide square on the top, both of specific dimensions. Fire has to be kindled in its centre. Etymologically, pyramid means a container, having fire in the middle (*pyr*-fire and *mid*-middle).

One will have, thus, to study the *Agnihotra* pot, which is a *pyramid* from the etymological angle, to co-relate the multi-sided effects it contributes.

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The *Agnihotra* pot, because of its shape, helps to diffuse the generated energy in all directions.

Agnihotra has to be performed during the transitional moments of night and day, when rapid change or turbulence takes place in the environment. This, in turn, makes an impact, minute though it may be, on the natural metabolic balance.

A Stress Reliever

The cost of stress in terms of physical disorder is well known to the medical world. The highest stress for man is the fear of death. The *Vedas* have recommended a ritual to counteract this stress. Oblations have to be offered to *Agni* after reciting the “*Tryambaka mantra*”, which broadly means: “We offer oblations to Lord *Tryambaka* (the Almighty Father) who spreads fragrance and bestows boundless nourishment. May we be relieved from the clutches of death, just as a cucumber gets itself free from its stem. May we never be separated from immortality.”

Scientific Reactions

When oblations are offered into fire, which has a temperature ranging between 300 degrees Celsius and 500 degrees Celsius and over fams. as high as 1,300 degrees Celsius, the process of fumigation starts, thereby decomposing the oblation into simpler compounds.

The temperature and wind direction play an important role in parting the diffusion of the released gases.

There is a partial oxidation of hydrocarbons, decomposition of many complex organic substances and the generation of

formaldehyde. The aromatic compounds that are released have also some antiseptic effect. Thus, in this process, a representative imitation of nature takes place.

Para-psychological Basis

The other effect of *Agnihotra* is both psychological and para-psychological. The *mantras* recited while offering oblations have an effect in moulding the overall bent of mind.

The chain of thoughts that starts on reciting the *mantras* reduces affinity and develops detachment. The latter can be called as the para-psychological effect on the mind of the ritualist.

Pleasant State of Mind

Agnihotra performed in the evening grants a pleasant state of mind till the next morning, while that done in the morning helps in obtaining a similar effect till evening, *Saumanasya*, which is cheerfulness, will not be possible unless one is relieved of both physical and mental anxieties and the stress therefrom. The dynamic energy of mind is, thus, set into action.

Such an effect remains for about 12 hours and when *Agnihotra* is performed both in the evening and morning, it remains for 24 hours.

The ritual of *Agnihotra*, which has an impact both on intellect and emotion of the performer, can be termed as insight-oriented psychotherapy. It brings a permanent intrapsychic change, whereby an ability to understand the inner nature of things is developed. In the present day life a lot of adjustment has become obligatory.

Vital Forces Invoked

It is interesting to study the significance of the *Agnihotra* oblations which are offered to *Prajapati*, *Surya* and *Agni*.

When oblations are offered to *Prajapati*, the Almighty Father, one is expressing gratitude to the Cosmic Energy responsible for the creation of the universe. When oblations are offered to the Sun, they are to the *Suryajyothi*, solar light, and *Suryavarcas*, solar energy, in the absence of which no life would have been possible on this planet. When oblations are offered to *Agni*, they are to *Agnirjyothi*, Promethean light, and *Agnivarcas*, Promethean energy, 'Man-made-fire'.

The ritual, especially the prayer part, creates a need for self-actualisation, which relates to the opportunity for personal growth and development. This need contributes to a person's higher level aspirations and a process of re-designing and restyling of life starts.

The three mystical words, *Bhur*, *Bhuvah*, *Svah*, establish a link between the earth, the environment and the sun and, thus, finally with the cosmic energy. This is the return process which man is supposed to establish to reset nature's working, by performing *Vyabrti homa*, a sacrifice for the mystical energies. *Agnihotra* has to be performed only during sunset and sunrise.

Support to Nature's Working

When *Agnihotra* performed, a medicinal effect is created by the gases released and a psychic effect by the impact of the mantra.

The ingredients used for oblations release, at a particular temperature, gases with specific

properties of atmospheric purification. Wind currents diffuse these gases in a wide area.

The *mantric* vibrations, including the special thrust of *svaha* at the end of every *mantra*, as also utterances, such as *vausat*, *ausai*, *vasat*, generate primary and secondary waves. The inhaling and powerful exhaling help in the diffusion of gases and inhaling them immediately thereafter.

Having seen that *Agnihotra* acts as an aid for resetting metabolic equilibrium or, as a curing force, it is realized that it acts as a *Vedic* 'bio-physic' or as a healing power in a natural way. One comes across this reference at the very beginning of the *Rig Veda*.

Here, we see a reference to the positive effect of *Agnihotra*:

"O sacrificial Fire! He who kindles fire with a determination and performs *Agnihotra* by offering twigs of special trees, gains excellent health and energy."

Antidote for Pollutants

The effect of *Agnihotra*, as has been seen so far, is basically the purification of atmosphere. *Yajnas*, thus, act as an anti-dote in the case of certain pollutants that are injurious to life. The release of nutrient gases out of oblations back into air in a more potentiated form, is another effect. References in this regard are ample in *Vedic* literature.

Eradicating Diseases

The medicated air inhaled enters the body, purifies the blood and thus resets the metabolic equilibrium, contributing to building a happy and peaceful mind.

Out of it, both directly and indirectly, a mode of treatment is evolving. It is *Agni chikitsa*, fire therapy, or *yajna chikitsa*. It is *Homa* therapy, as is known all over the world.

Five different therapies – Air therapy (*Vayuchikitsa*); Electro therapy (*Vidyut chikitsa*); Solar therapy (*Surya chikitsa*), Water therapy (*Jala chikitsa*) and Sound therapy (*Nada chikitsa*) appear to have emerged out of *Homa* therapy.

“O *Agni!* Pray, accept the oblations of twigs of special trees, which are capable of killing the micro-organisms thirst of flesh and blood. Let them transform their bodies in your flames.”

With the offering of medicinal herbs into fire, air currents are flooded with medicinal properties. One, sitting near the fire, inhales such air having medicinal properties and thus protects oneself from the impact of the micro-organisms.

Effect of Purified Atmosphere

A person performing *Agnihotra* at sunrise comes in contact with the rays of the rising sun. The effect of the purified atmosphere and sun's rays, which can be called aerotherapeutic is mentioned thus:

“O Rising Sun! With your rays of the rising moment, pray, remove his headache and soothe down his pains of skin disease.”

Panchagaya Effect

The stipulation that only dry cow-dung and cow-ghee must be used in *Agnihotra* or occasional *yajnas*, has a scientific background.

The *Vedic* sages attached importance not only to these two products but also to other

nutrients, such as milk, yogurt and urine. The five products are known as Panchagavya. Priests performing *yajnas* were given gifts in the form of cows, for they used to feel that wealth in the form of cows was more valuable than gold or silver.

Even if the claims would appear exaggerated, one can at least say that organosulphurous compounds present in cow-dung might prove instrumental in minimizing internal radiation.

In *Srisukta*, the Mother Goddess is called *Karisini*, dry cow-dung. It can be interpreted that She bestows both material and spiritual prosperity through the medium of cow's dung, giving the best fertilizer for the soil, and pure air for meditation.

Occasional Yajnas

As environmental forces upset metabolic equilibrium and do so more actually during the change of seasons, medicinal *yajnas* are recommended as a counter-measure. Besides, specific oblations during daily *Agnihotras* stipulated oblation material during periods of change in the seasons is recommended by the *Atharva Veda*.

The occasional *yajnas*, wherein specific ingredients for specific fevers or epidemics have been recommended, were regularly and extensively performed both for prevention and cure of epidemics.

Para-psychological Effect

The *Vedas* mention that in a living organism, besides organic parts and nerves, there is the residence of soul.

Medicines appear to be aids to healing but there is some other healing power that recoups

losses and heals. This is described in a number of ways in the *Vedas*. While enkindling *Agni* for a ritual, one has to invoke the cosmic energy, *paramatmagni*, residing inside the body, which finally is the real healing power.

The preventive and curative effects of both *Agnihotra* and occasional *yajns*, thus, support nature's working of maintaining homeostasis. "*Atma vajanena kalpatam*" further shows that besides homeostasis, the internal working leads man towards perfection.

During the ritual of *Agnihotra*, products such as fumes, heat, energy, moisture, gases, ash and sound waves with vibrations of certain frequency, are created. These products have a definite beneficial effect both from individual and collective angles.

It is observed that plants grown under *Agnihotra* atmosphere are generally free from

diseases and healthier than identical plants grown in non-*Agnihotra* atmosphere.

The atmosphere in the area of *Agnihotra* will not only get sterilized but also enriched with plant nutrients. Chlorophyll content in plants growing in such an atmosphere is more than that of other similar plants. Also the size and number of vascular elements in these plants exhibit a large scale increase.

Effect of Ash

Ash produced by burning ingredients of *Agnihotra* can be a rich source of plant nutrition. It is penetrating and powerful. It has insecticidal effect.

It is claimed in the scriptures that the ash produced during *Agnihotra* is somewhat energized.

In recent times, *Agnihotra* ash is being used as an important ingredient in the *Homa-therapy*.

Microbial Count Reduced

Dr. A.G. Mondkar, a practicing microbiologist of Mumbai, studied the effect of *Agnihotra* atmosphere on bacterial population. Two rooms of identical dimensions were selected and Basal reading of microbial colony count was done in both these rooms after exposure of agar plates for 10 minutes.

In one room, *Agnihotra* was performed and in the control room a controlled fire was produced with the same material. Dr. Mondkar observed that the microbial count where *Agnihotra* was performed revealed 91.4 per cent reduction and the control room did not show any appreciable change.

Germination of seeds

Dr. B.G. Bhujbal of Pune M.J.P. Agriculture University conducted some experiments in 1999 on germination of grape seeds and cuttings in *Agnihotra* atmosphere.

He observed that despite use of modern technology in the form of hormones, scarification, stratification, etc., germination of grape vines was very low – only 20 per cent taking as many as 300 days to sprout. He selected seeds of popular varieties and unrooted cuttings and kept them in *Agnihotra* environment and also treated them with *Agnihotra* ash.

Surprisingly, the first sprouting took place within 21 days of sowing.