

Importance of Achamana

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From ages, our ancestors have been giving great prominence to saucha or purity – both external as well as internal. Achamana is a simple and effective process prescribed in our scriptures for internal purification.

This is necessary while performing any religious act.

yA kR^iyAH kurute mohAt anAcamya ca nAstikaH |

bhavanti vyarthAstasya kR^iyAH sarvA na saMshayaH | - hArIta smR^iti

According to hArIta smR^iti any religious act performed without doing Achamana is futile.

bhavanti saphalAH sarve samAcamati yo dvijaH |

All the acts of a dvija who performs the achamana will be fruitful.

One must look at the episode of uttanka from mahabharata to understand the significance of purity achieved through Achamana.

The story runs thus: After completing his studies at the gurukul, uttanka wants to offer gurudakshina to his guru. But his guru is reluctant to specify anything and asks him to request his wife if she has any desire to be fulfilled. Uttanka asks his guru patni but she is also initially reluctant. But after repeated persuasion, she expresses her desire to wear the ornament of the queen while serving the Brahmins in an upcoming religious function. Uttanka sets out for the palace of king paushya to fulfill the wish of his guru's wife. En route, with an intention to test him, indra deva appears and asks him to eat cow dung because his guru has also done so. Uttanka believes him and partakes the cowdung and urine. He proceeds to the king's palace without doing Achamana. He meets king paushya and tells him about his need to fulfill his guru dakshina. The king asks him to see the queen who is inside the palace. But amazingly the queen is invisible to uttanka. He returns to the king and says "I cannot find the queen inside". To this the king replies – "surely you are impure. The queen being a devoted wife (a pativrata) cannot be seen by impure persons". Uttanka realizes his mistake. He says to himself - "Oh! I did not perform Achamana after partaking the cowdung". Immediately, he sits facing east and performs the Achamana as prescribed in the scriptures. He goes inside the palace. To his surprise he finds the queen there.

Look at the profound effect of sipping three drops of water and the greatness of pAtivratya! In this age we cannot totally comprehend the level of purity our ancestors used to maintain. At the least, we get an idea of how low we are in terms of purity when compared to our ancestors.