

# WATER & HINDUISM

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Within the religious world water is understood to be a part of creation, a gift to humanity, not just as economic capital which only needs to be administered. All of this has definite consequences for the administration and the economics of water.

## 1. Water is Holy



Water in Hinduism has a special place because it is believed to have spiritually cleansing powers. To Hindus all water is sacred, especially rivers, and there are seven sacred rivers, namely the Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri. Although Hinduism encompasses so many different beliefs among those that most Hindus do share is the importance of striving to attain purity and avoiding pollution. This relates to both physical cleanliness and spiritual well-being. Water is an essential element in nearly all rites and ceremonies.

Pilgrimage is very important to Hindus. Holy places are usually located on the banks of rivers, coasts, seashores and mountains. Sites of convergence, between land and river or two, or even better three, rivers, carry special significance and are especially sacred. Sacred rivers are thought to be a great equalizer. In the Ganges the pure are made even more pure and the impure have their pollution removed if only temporarily. In the sacred water distinctions of caste are supposed to count for nothing, as all sins fall away. Kumbhamela is a pilgrimage of Hindu devotees and is held every three years at four different places in turn - Hardwar, Nasik, Prayaga and Ujjain. These places are believed to be where drops of amrita - the nectar of immortality - fell to earth during a heavenly conflict.

Funeral grounds are always located near a river. Sometimes at the funeral a small hole is drilled in an earthen pot, which is then filled with water. As the son of the deceased walks around the burning funeral pyre with the pot, dripping water forms a limiting line to prevent the soul from escaping back into the earth as a ghost.

When the heat of the pyre cracks the skull of the corpse, the mourners bathe in the river and return home. On the third day after the cremation the ashes are collected and, on or after the tenth day they are cast into a holy river.

## 2. Cleanliness

For Hindus, morning cleansing with water is a basic obligation. Tarpana is the point at which the worshipper makes a cup with his hands and pours the water back into the river reciting mantras. After sipping some water, he may then apply the distinguishing mark of his sampradaya (tradition), and say the morning prayer, samdhya. Sodhana is Hindu purification and is necessary for different reasons and at different levels. Physical purification is a part of daily ritual which may, in the case of sadhus (Hindu holy people who renounce the world seeking Brahman), be very elaborate. Sodhana is also necessary if caste rules have been broken, for example if someone drinks from the same vessel as a member of a lower caste, and before puja. Every temple has a pond near it and devotees are supposed to take a bath before entering the temple.

## 3. Health



Drinking warm water helps in promoting healthy appetite, boosts digestion and metabolism. It also promotes healthy weight loss, relieves abdominal bloating, pain and constipation. Warm water is also one of the best remedies for people who suffer from Rheumatoid arthritis which is caused due to accumulation of undigested toxic metabolites in the body.

Water, when properly absorbed by the body, has several healing qualities:

1. Helps to remove fatigue (Shramnashana)
2. Enhances glow of skin
3. Prevents constipation
4. Increases stamina
5. Provides satisfaction
6. Helps the heart by pacifying Sadhaka Pitta
7. Helps digestion
8. Cooling
9. Always helpful to the body
10. Easy to assimilate

11. Life-giving
12. Antioxidant

Except in summer and October heat water should be used sparingly. Drinking water (best one hour) before a meal leads to lessening of appetite and loss of weight. Water drunk during the meal sparingly can help passage and digestion of food. Water after the meal, leads to obesity.

Charaka Samhita mentions that all types of fluids in the body are made up of Jala Mahabhuta. (Water element) Hence the water we use is of life giving principle and a detailed knowledge of water is very important.

#### 4. Place in the Creation



Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego - all together these eight constitute My separated material energies. (Bhagavad Gita 7.4)

O Supreme Lord, You are actually the air, the earth, fire, sky and water. You are the objects of sense perception, the life airs, the five senses, the mind, consciousness and false ego. Indeed, You are everything, subtle and gross. The material elements and anything expressed, either by the words or by the mind, are nothing but You. (SB 7.9.48)

The construction of the whole material world is prominently made by three elements, namely earth, water and fire. But the living force is

produced by sky, air and water. So water is the common element in both the gross and subtle forms of the material creation. Water is the most prominent element and is therefore the principle element of all the five. (SB 2.10.31 purport)

The elementary creation of the sixteen items of matter:

- |          |           |          |
|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1) earth | 1) nose   | 1) smell |
| 2) water | 2) tongue | 2) taste |
| 3) fire  | 3) eyes   | 3) sight |
| 4) air   | 4) skin   | 4) touch |
| 5) ether | 5) ear    | 5) sound |
|          | 6) mind   |          |

The five gross elements, the five senses, the five sense objects and the mind make up the sixteen items of matter. The creation of these elementary manifestations is a result of the energies of Maha Visnu. All this is called creation or sarga.

The interaction of the modes of nature is called visarga, recreation or secondary creation. The secondary creation is a result of the original ingredients and is performed by Brahma. (SB 2.10.3) After manifesting the universes from the pores of His skin, Maha Visnu expands as Garbhodakasayi Visnu and enters into each and every universe which is half filled with water made from the perspiration from His transcendental body. Because He is the Supreme Person or Nara and the water from His body is called Nara, because he lies on this water He is called Narayana. While lying on His bed of mystic slumber the Lord desired to manifest varieties of living entities from Himself alone.

### The nine kinds of creation-SB 3.10.15-29:

1) The first creation is of the Mahat-tattva (by Mahavisnu)

In the first creation the modes of nature mix and give rise to false ego.

2) False ego or identification of the body, along with the material ingredients, material knowledge and material activities arise (working senses and knowledge acquiring senses).

3) The sense perceptions are created and from these the material elements are generated.

i) sound - sky

ii) touch - air

iii) sight - fire

**iv) taste - water**

v) smell - earth

4) The creation of knowledge and working capacity.

5) The controlling deities become manifest by the interaction of the mode of goodness.

6) The sixth creation is the ignorant darkness of the living entity, by which the master acts as a fool.

7) The seventh creation is that of immovable living beings - plants and trees.

8) The eighth creation brings into existence animal species comprising twenty eight groups.

9) The ninth creation gives rise to the human beings which belong to only one species. They are predominantly under the influence of passion.

## 5. Home for living entities



"There are 900,000 species living in the water. There are also 2,000,000 nonmoving entities such as trees and plants. There are 1.100,000 species of insects and reptiles and there are 1,000,000 species of birds. As far as animals are concerned there are 3,000,000 varieties and there are 400,000 human species." (Padma Purana)

## 6. Teacher

There is a wise man who names his teachers: I learned forgiveness from earth, purity from the sky, **holiness and cleanliness from the water**, innocence and renunciation from the fire; indifference from the air, to remain unaffected by circumstances from moon, abdication from the Sun, incoherence from the pigeon, dependence upon fate and remain effortless from the python, to remain always happy and serious from the sea, to be under the control of sense organs and hence meet total destruction from the grasshopper, acquiring of virtues from bumblebee, fault in cumulating from honey bee, to abstain sensuous talks from the deer, to eliminate greed from the fish, sorrow in hope and happiness in desperation from the prostitute, to feel happy in uncertainty from osprey, dispute among many from the girls, concentration from the arrow-maker, to roam alone and detachment from a particular place from the snake, virtues of the creator Lord from the spider, and I learned similarity from the wasp."

## 7. The Power of water



As the annihilation approaches there will be no rain on the earth for one hundred years. Drought will lead to famine and the starving populace will consume one another. Thus they will gradually be destroyed. The sun will then drink the water of the oceans, of the living bodies and of the earth itself. But the devastating sun will not give rain in return. Next the fire of annihilation will flare up from the mouth of Lord Sankarsana. Carried by the mighty wind, this fire will burn throughout the universe, scorching the lifeless cosmic shell. Burned from all sides, from above by the blazing sun and from below by the fire of Lord Sankarsana, the universal sphere will glow like a burning ball of cow dung. A great and terrible wind of destruction will begin to blow for more than one hundred years, and the sky, covered with dust, will turn grey. After that, groups of multicolored clouds will gather, roaring terribly with thunder, and will pour down floods of rain for one hundred years. At that time, the shell of the universe will fill up with water, forming a single cosmic ocean. As the entire universe is flooded, the water will rob the earth of its unique quality of fragrance, and the element earth, deprived of its distinguishing quality, will be dissolved. The element fire then seizes the taste from water and water merges into fire. Air seizes form from fire and fire merges into air. Ether then seizes the quality of touch from air and air merges into ether. False ego in ignorance seizes sound from ether. False ego in passion seizes the senses and false ego in goodness seizes the demigods. The mahat-tattva seizes false ego and thus everything is wound up. (SB 12.4.7-19)

Water is a tangible form of Lord Vishnu. Even the earth was born out of water.

## 8. Nectar on Earth



One who drinks caranamrta (water emanated from washing the body of the Lord) he becomes free from all kinds of diseases, and all kinds of obstacles and the fear of ferocious cobras and ferocious beasts.

Caranamrta is obtained in the morning while the Lord is being washed before dressing. Scented with perfumes and flowers, the water comes gliding down through His lotus feet and is collected and mixed with yogurt. In this way this caranamrta not only becomes

very tastefully flavored, but also has tremendous spiritual value. As described in Padma Purana, even a person who has never been able to give in charity, who has never been able to perform a great sacrifice, who has never been able to study the Vedas, who has never been able to worship the Lord - or, in other words, even one who has never done any pious activities - will become eligible to enter into the kingdom of God if he simply drinks the caranamrta which is kept in the temple.

In the temple it is the custom that caranamrta be kept in a big pot. The devotees who come to visit and offer respects to the Deity take three drops of caranamrta very submissively and feel themselves happy in transcendental bliss. (The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 9)

Caranamrta should not be taken together with prasadam (as it is not a food); ideally it is served by pujari in the temple.

It has actually been seen that anyone who regularly worships mother Ganges simply by bathing in her water keeps very good health and gradually becomes a devotee of the Lord. This is the effect of bathing in the water of the Ganges. Bathing in the Ganges is recommended in all Vedic sastras, and one who takes to this path will certainly be completely freed from all sinful reactions. The practical example of this is that the sons of Maharaja Sagara went to the heavenly planets when water from the Ganges merely touched the ashes of their burnt bodies.

### Bhagavad-gita

God says: O son of Kunti [Arjuna], I am the taste of water, the light of the sun and the moon, the syllable om in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether and ability in man.

And He says: Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego — all together these eight constitute My separated material energies.

### Srimad Bhagavatam

SB 4.21.31: "By the inclination to serve the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, suffering humanity can immediately cleanse the dirt which has accumulated in their minds during innumerable births. Like the Ganges water, which emanates from the toes of the lotus feet of the Lord, such a process immediately cleanses the mind, and thus spiritual or Krsna consciousness gradually increases."

Purport: "In India, one can actually see that a person who takes a bath in the Ganges waters daily is almost free from all kinds of diseases. A very respectable brahmana in Calcutta never took a doctor's

medicine. Even though he sometimes felt sick, he would not accept medicine from the physician but would simply drink Ganges water, and he was always cured within a very short time. The glories of Ganges water are known to Indians and to ourselves also. The River Ganges flows by Calcutta. Sometimes within the water there are many stools and other dirty things which are washed away from neighboring mills and factories, but still thousands of men take baths in the Ganges water, and they are very healthy as well as spiritually inclined. That is the effect of Ganges water. The Ganges is glorified because it emanates from the toes of the lotus feet of the Lord."

### **Hari-Bhakti Vilasa**

(Hari-bhakti-vilasa 9.27-30, from Padma Purana, conversation between Pulastya and Bhagiratha)

Water from the Narmada purifies after one week, but Ganges water immediately purifies. Just by taking darsan of the Yamuna, one becomes purified. These rivers all purify one by seeing them, bathing in them or by chanting their names, but in Kali-yuga, one becomes purified just by remembering the water which has washed the lotus feet of Lord Sri Hari. Therefore, if someone drinks the water which has washed the lotus feet of Lord Hari, he gets more than 100,000 times more merit than by worshiping ten million Siva lingas. If a person is impure, has unlimited bad habits, or is implicated with previous sins, simply by touching the water which comes from the lotus feet of Lord Visnu, he becomes purified. If somebody at the time of death touches to their head or other parts of the body the water which has washed the lotus feet of Lord Hari, even if he is implicated with millions of sins, he does not go to the hellish planets, the abode of Yamaraja.

### **Caitanya Caritamrta**

Caitanya Caritamrta 2.15.134-135: Caitanya Mahaprabhu said, "In this Age of Kali, Krsna is manifest in two forms — wood and water. Thus, by enabling the conditioned souls to see the wood and bathe in the water, He helps them become liberated.

Lord Jagannatha is the Supreme Lord Himself in the form of wood, and the river Ganges is the Supreme Lord Himself in the form of water.

The moon nourishes the plant kingdom. The moon influences the tides of the ocean (which is the cosmic mental substance) and thereby provides a supply of water that is transformable to pure, non-salty taste by evaporation to make rain clouds.