

Sanskars

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How many religious ceremonies do Hindus have? Name the rites of passages or religious ceremonies of Sanskars or sacraments?

There are sixteen religious ceremonies known as Sanskars, sacraments in life of a person (Manu2/2, 2/4, 2/5-8, 2/9, 2/35, 2/11-43, 2/44-224, 2/40, 3/1-3, 3/4-62, 3/67-286, 5/167, 6/1-32, 6/33-97, 12/82-125).

The Sanskars are performed for the physical, social, and spiritual development of a person.

In these ceremonies Agnihotra plays a very important part. These ceremonies are indicative of an individual's development and the acceptance of that stage of development by the family and society. The acknowledgment of this unique individualization process at every step of growth helps enrich the life of the person. **Sanskars prepare one for the next stage of growth.** It promotes potential and progress in all aspects of life, including the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual. Sequentially, these ceremonies are outlined to fulfill one's role from the beginning to the end of life.

1. **Garbhadhana** - Conception acceptance ceremony. (After solemnizing marriage ceremony.)
2. **Punsavana** - Ceremony of graceful care of the embryo to the development of the fetus. Usually it is undertaken during the second or third month of pregnancy, the first trimester
3. **Simantonnayana** - Inviting God's blessings for the development of the fetus to full birth. Usually it is conducted from the fourth month of pregnancy, and, onwards, into the second, and the third trimester of pregnancy, similar to the ladies shower in the west.
4. **Jatakarma** - Accepting and identifying the newborn as an individual.
5. **Namakarana** - Naming ceremony which is usually on the eleventh day, usually from birth to the twelve days.
6. **Niskramana** - Ceremony of invoking God's blessings to expose the new comer to the outside world and to pray for the well being of the baby. Usually this ceremony is conducted when the child is two to four months old.
7. **Annaprāsana** - Offering of solid food to the toddler, usually undertaken from four to six months of age.
8. **Chudakarma** - Self-awareness ceremony. (One year and onwards.)
9. **Karnavedha** - Self-esteem development ceremony, to help improve one's image and self-respect. It further enhances one's responsibility. (Usually three to five years).
10. **Upanayana** - School entrance initiation. To help control the fear of separation from parents, and to help overcome the anxiety of entering a strange place such as school. It is also called **Yajnopaveet Sanskar**. It is usually conducted at the age of five years and onwards.
11. **Vedarambha** - The education enrichment ceremony which is undertaken when the child is five years of age.
12. **Samavartana** - It is a welcoming ceremony to accept the grown-up as a qualified individual. It is undertaken after completion of studies, to return home, and to prepare for the next stage of life
13. **Vivaha** - Marriage ceremony. To select an appropriate spouse and to start the second phase, as house-hold life or nuclear familial life. It is usually undertaken at twenty-five years of age which is the beginning of **Grihastha Asram**.
14. **Vanaprastha Asram** - After enjoying and fulfilling all desires, Kama; by earning money, Artha, through righteous means and undertaking benevolent deeds such as Dharma, one is now ready to march ahead in life to conquer all the remaining gratification. Vanaprastha Asram is the name of that stage of life. It is usually undertaken from fifty to seventy five years of age; and this stage is

similar to a retirement planning state. Thus the stage is set for introspection and reassessment of the goals of life. The next stage is for complete renunciation.

15. **Samnyasa Asram** -Samnyasa is the selfless service to mankind that is attained by spiritual awakening. When someone dedicates his or her life for societal upliftment without any personal gain, the person has entered the Samnyasa Asram, and the ceremony confers the title of Samnyasa. A Samnyasa is one who devotes oneself to the service of mankind. A Samnyasa, usually, wears an orange robe to symbolize the self-less service to humanity. The orange color is a symbolic representative of blood. In other words a Samnyasa is ready to sacrifice his or her life for the societal upliftment. **Thus a Samnyasa is dedicated to serve society selflessly.** One may directly choose this phase of life from Brahmacharya Asram if one is so inclined. It is usually undertaken at the age of seventy-five years, onward. Note: The flag of the Vaidic-Hindu society is of an orange color. **The orange color is representative of the dedication, or Yajna, in order to undertake altruistic efforts to serve society selflessly.**

16. **Antyesti** - This is the last ceremony. When the soul has left the mortal body, the remains are cremated. This ceremony is called Antyesti. **Naramedha or Purusmedha are other terms used for Antyesti.** The body elements are consumed by fire, and the remains are disposed to nature, Prakrti. The body disintegrates to the five primary elements: earth, water, air, dynamic energy, and space, and the cycle starts all over again.

Practical significance: If any-one does not wish to learn any skill, nor to complete education, nor to follow the Sanskars of Brahmcharya Asram, then, one has failed himself or herself to be self-sufficient, and one has not prepared for righteous living. Now, can one imagine what kind of societal structure humanity is going to bare? Lack of Sanskars has been linked to innumerable consequences such as: child abuse, domestic violence, spread of venereal diseases, teenage pregnancy, increased infants mortality, broken families, fraud, and other criminal ills. **Anthropologists have verified the destruction of those cultures who do not initiate their youths.**

Sanskars are the community events that mark the process of ending childhood with dependencies on parents. One attains a new social status. There is a new level of social responsibility which is conferred through rituals and initiation. Thus, it is a rite of passage, indeed, welcoming the young person into the larger community of adults.

Sanskars are essential parts of life to deal with the crisis in transition from adolescence to adulthood and, then, into midlife. Sanskars allay the anxiety, develop the social support system, instill coping skills that adopt to new frontiers of life, and provide the social cohesion that is so important to survive. After all, human beings are social beings, and the Sanskars make better human beings.

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