

Vivāha-samskāra - Marriage Ceremony

1. The couple should wear newly bought clothes.
2. A cloth is held up between bride and groom. The bride sits to the right of the groom. The cloth is lowered and garlands are offered to the priest and couple. Incense is lit and placed around the spot where the sacrificial fire is to be lit.
3. The priest says the first line of the *Gāyatrī* mantra.
4. *Ācamana* (purification) - The priest demonstrates how to take water in a spoon from a goblet. The couple follow him in the procedure. They have each an *ācamana* cup with spoon in front of them.

Holding the spoon in his right hand, he puts a few drops of water in his left and right palm for purification and then throws it to the side.

Holding the spoon in his left hand, he pours three drops of water into his right palm and chants:

om keśavaya namaḥ (“I pay homage to *Keśava*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa*”).

He then sips the water and throws the rest to the side. He puts a few drops of water into his right palm to clean it and then throws it to the side. This procedure is performed three times altogether while the following mantras are repeated after the priest:

om nārāyaṇāya namaḥ (“I pay homage to *Nārāyaṇa*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa*”).

om mādhavāya namaḥ (“I pay homage to *Mādhava*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa*”).

Then the priest leads responsive chanting of the following mantra 3 times (repeat between the vertical strokes | |):

*om apavitraḥ | pavitra vā | sarvāvasthām | gato 'pi vā
yaḥ smaret | puṇḍarikākṣam | sa bāhyābhyantaraḥ | śuciḥ
śrī-viṣṇu | śrī-viṣṇu | śrī-viṣṇu*

(“Unpurified or purified, or even having passed through all situations, one who remembers the lotus-eyed Supreme Personality of Godhead is cleansed without and within.”)

apavitraḥ – contaminated, impure; *pavitra* – liberated, pure; *vā* – either; *sarva* – all; *avasthām* – condition; *vā* – either; *yaḥ* – anyone; *smaret* – remembers; *puṇḍarikākṣam* – lotus-eyed, whose eyes are just like lotus petals; *bāhya* – externally, body; *abhyantaram* – internally, spirit (either in the bodily concept of life or in the spiritual concept of life, either contaminated or

liberated); *śuciḥ* – pure, no material contamination; *śrī viṣṇu* – Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

5. The priest lectures on the importance of marriage.
6. **Vows:** The bride's father says: "(name of bride) has been in my charge for so long, and now I am giving her unto your care. Do you accept her as your wife?"
7. The bridegroom says: "Yes, I accept (name of bride) as my wife, and I shall take care of her throughout both of our lives. We shall live together peacefully in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and there will never be any separation."
8. The priest says to the bride, "Will you accept (name of groom) as your life's companion, caring for him always, and help him to execute his spiritual activities?"
9. The bride says, "Yes, I accept (name of groom) as my husband throughout my life. There shall never be any separation between us, either in happiness or distress. I shall love him always, and we shall live together peacefully according to spiritual principles."
10. The groom places the *mangalsutra* around the bride's neck. Garlands are exchanged by the couple. The couple exchanges sitting places. Now the bride sits to the **left** of the groom. The groom covers the bride's head with her sari cloth or shawl. He places a red dot on her forehead. Bride and groom feed each other sweets.
 - ❖ The red dot on the bride's forehead is an auspicious sign for a married woman. It diverts spiteful looks. It is in the place of the 3rd eye and thus produces positive vibrations. It symbolizes the love of the wife for her husband, who applied this protective mark to her forehead. It also lets one know that this woman is married and should not therefore be desired by other men.
11. *agni sthāpana* – installation of the sacred fire (*avahayami, sthāpayami* mudra). The priest lights the fire.
 - ❖ Although God is omnipresent He is not necessarily visible to all. This ceremony is to ask Him to become manifest in the fire, the most subtle material element we can perceive. In this way He will accept the offerings poured into the flames of the sacred fire, i.e. food grains and *ghee*, or clarified butter. Each hymn or mantra ends with the word *svāhā*, which means 'I testify'. The Lord is witness to the union which thus becomes sacred.
12. The *maṅgalā-carāṇa* prayers (*vande 'haṁ śrī-guroḥ ...*) and the prayers to the spiritual master (*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya ...*) and/or the *Brahma-saṁhitā* prayers are chanted and the couple repeat "govindam adi puruṣham tam aham bhajami.". When the priest says *svāhā*, after each prayer is completed, the couple throw grains into the fire (*go mudra* and underhand throwing), and the priest spoons in ghee and chants *idam kṛṣṇayā idam na mama* (this is for Kṛṣṇa, this is not for me). The prayers are chanted responsively, including the *svāhā*.

13. Everyone stands up, and the married couple, holding bananas before them in their folded hands, stands by the fire. The following prayer is said responsively three times:

*namo brahmaṇya-devāya | go-brāhmaṇa-hitāya ca
jagat-hitāya kṛṣṇāya | govindāya namo namaḥ
svāhā | svāhā | svāhā.*

“My Lord, You are the well-wisher of the cows and the brāhmaṇas, and You are the well-wisher of the entire human society and world.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.19.65)

14. The bananas are placed into the fire, and the priest pours any extra seeds from the plate(s) into the fire.

15. Everyone responsively repeats 3 times:

*Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.*

16. *Pradakṣiṇa* – It is a sign of respect to circumambulate the sacred fire, which is considered the mouth of Lord Viṣṇu. The couple circumambulates the sacred fire 7 times. The bride leads the groom 3 times around the fire and the groom leads the bride 4 times around. The sacred fire is thus the supreme witness of the sacred marriage.

17. Now is the time to confirm the marriage with the 'Seven Steps' called *Saptapadi*. The bride's sari or shawl is tied to the groom's *kurta* or shawl. The garments should stay tied for one week. The groom leads, her little finger or hand linked with his little finger or hand, in seven steps around the fire, as the priest chants the seven blessings or vows for a strong union. By walking around the sacred fire they are agreeing to these. With each step, they throw some *yajña* grains into the fire, representing prosperity in their new life together. This is considered the most important part of the ceremony, it seals the bond forever.

Priest: I ask you, (name of bride) and (name of groom), to concentrate upon these 7 vows as you take the 7 final steps:

1. May this couple be blessed with an abundance of resources and comforts, and be helpful to one another in all ways.
2. May this couple be strong and complement one another.
3. May this couple be blessed with prosperity and riches on all levels.
4. May this couple be eternally happy.
5. May this couple be blessed with a happy family life.
6. May this couple live in perfect harmony ... true to their personal values and their joint promises.

7. May this couple always be the best of friends.

18. With the completion of the *sapta padī gamana* the bride and groom are considered married.

Priest: With the 7 final steps completed I pronounce you both, (name of groom) and (name of bride), as husband and wife!) ... clapping ... kiss.

19. As a blessing the priest mixes ashes from the sacred fire with a little *ghee*, and a mark is placed on everyone's forehead, whoever wants it. As a further blessing sacred *Puja* string is distributed and tied around the wrist, whoever wants it, women on the left and men on the right hand.

20. *Prasādam* is served.

Notes:

❖ Wedding Date: Venue:

Contacts:

❖ Further Details:

❖ Exchange of rings during the *yajña* or not, because this may have already been done at an earlier civil ceremony. The procedure is flexible and can be adapted to a wide range of circumstances and situations.