

## Celebrating Thanksgiving - The Vedic Way

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Americans look forward to the Thanksgiving. It is a day to express gratitude for most Americans, and a day of national mourning and protest for the Native Americans, reminder of centuries of oppression and genocide that followed the arrival of settlers in North America.

Traditionally most American families gather, some travelling from distant parts of the country, to celebrate Thanksgiving around a sumptuous meal, after which each person expresses who or what he/she is grateful for.

### Thanksgiving for the Indian diaspora in America - Why, How, to Whom, When?

Drawing on the *jnāna*, knowledge from the Vedas, the root scriptures of Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma and the source of infinite true knowledge, the Acharyas explained: We need to always be grateful to *Paramātmā*, Almighty God as ups and downs both form part of life. Gratitude brings humility, helps us become happier and more contented with life, and enables us to be resilient during downturns. Given the innumerable things we have been and continue to be blessed with, we need to live in a continual spirit of thankfulness.

Guided by the Acharyas, volunteers at Arya Samaj of Greater Houston (ASGH), chalked an innovative plan: “Celebrating Thanksgiving - the Vedic Way”, regrouping relatives and friends of members, and well-wishers around a Four-Day *Chatur-Veda Shatak Yajna* (Thursday November 24 to Sunday November 27). Acharya Suryananda ji and Bramdeo ji interjected commentary after some of the mantras, explaining the practical applications in daily life. At the start of the Yajna, Acharya Bramdeo Mokoonlall invited all to join in Thanksgiving to *Paramātmā /Ishvar* (God) for all the blessings in our life, Mother Nature for its bounty, Parents for caring about our development, and Gurus, teachers and mentors for the gift of knowledge

*Chatur Veda Shatak Yajna* was performed with the recitation of a hundred selected mantras from the four Vedas -the Rigveda on Thursday, Yajurveda on Friday, Samveda on Saturday and Atharvaveda for *Poornahuti*, the concluding session on Sunday from. The Sunday session was from 9.30am to noon and ended with Bhajans. Daily, *Prasad* (lunch) was served by ladies ‘with a smile and a sense of gratitude’ exulting thankfulness through *Sewa*, community service.

Six eco-friendly Havan Kunds (fire pits) were constructed on site with bricks and red for this *bahukundiya* (multi-Kund) Yajna. Lady volunteers added a vibrant decoration to the Havan Kunds The colors of the *Agni* from the multiple fires, continuously fed with the oblations of

ghee and *samagri* (mixture of medicinal, fragrant, nutritious & sweet herbs), the chanting of the mantras mesmerized the audience and transformed the compound into *tapobhoomi*, a place where they could envision the era of Rishis permeating the ethos.

16 havan kunds were in place for the *Poornahuti*, to cater for a sharp increase in number of people who joined as *Yajmāns*. Remarkably, young children performed Havan sitting through the two hours, fully engaged. The feeling of “gratitude” was palpable in the calm, serene atmosphere. Thereafter, the eco-friendly Havan Kunds were dismantled and safely kept for future use.

It is our earnest wish that ASGH holds the *Chatur Veda Shatak Yajna* as an annual event to celebrate Thanksgiving, the Vedic way.

For further information on activities/events at Arya Samaj please visit [aryasamajhouston.org](http://aryasamajhouston.org) or email [acharya@aryasamajhouston.org](mailto:acharya@aryasamajhouston.org) or [achbramdeo@aryasamajhouston.org](mailto:achbramdeo@aryasamajhouston.org)