

# Sanatan Hindu Sanskar Kendra

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## Significance of Ratha Saptami

"arka mandala madhyastham sūryakōti samaprabham |

brahmādi sēvya pādābjam naumi brahma ramā sakham" ||

"I salute to Lord Narayana who resides in the center of sun orb, who is the equivalent the brilliance of thousands times this sun, whose lotus feet are worshipped by Brahma."

### What is the purpose of observing Ratha Saptami?

The scriptures proclaim that the word "ratha" is symbolic of the mind. The mind is the chariot. Innumerable thoughts arise in the mind. These thoughts are like different horses, which pull the mind in many different directions. To enable the mind to progress toward the divine, the right set of horses should pull it in the right direction. This, indeed, is the spiritual insight and the deeper meaning of Ratha Saptami.

Ratha Saptami festival is celebrated on the seventh day of the bright half of the lunar month, Magha. The Sun's northerly movement according to Hindu astrological reckoning is called Makara Sankranti. The seventh day is the time when the Sun starts gaining momentum in the zodiac after the culmination into Capricorn. This Northernly movement, Uttarayana, is "brahma mārga"--the direction towards the Divine. It is said that we should pull the ratha, which is our "mind", to follow the brahma marga. It is also the wish of paramātma the Supreme.

Lord Narayana is worshipped as Surya. In this form, the sun as Narayana is "ūpasya" - worshipped, "and "ūpāsana dvara", meaning the Sun's outer orb is the entry point to Narayana at the center.

### How do we observe Ratha Saptami?

- Early morning snanam (bath)
- Worship and offering
- Experience the divine presence by going to the temple. Witness pulling of a chariot, if there is one.

### snānam

"ārunōdaya vēla thasyā snānam maha phalam" - Vishnu smriti

The month of Magha is precious for early morning bath and highly rewarding. It is believed that all bad deeds will be washed off. Using the leaves of the "arka" plant and doing snāna on ratha saptami, wards off sins done in the previous 7 births and are pardoned by the grace of Surya Narayana. When taking bath in the flowing waters, it is advised to do so in the early morning hours, before anyone else starts using the stream. It is a practice to use sesame oil and light a lamp made in clay. While keeping a container on top with the "arka" leaf on the head, recite the snāna mantra given below and pray to Surya Narayana. The light is then set afloat in water.

The light of the lamp represents the divine who is splendid and has the brilliance of thousands of suns. The head - śiras also called sahasrār - is the culmination point, which connect with the supreme. The lamp is like śātāri- the lord's feet which bless us. Keeping this lamp on the head connects us with the divine. It is said that arka leaf has the effect of expanding the nerve centers, enabling us to perceive and receive divine ordinance.

### snāna mantram

"yada janma krutam pāpam mayā janmasu janmasul

tanmēy rōgam ca śōkam ca mākarihantu saptami||"

"yētātjanmakrutam pāpam yacca janmāntarārjitam|

manōvākkāyajam yacca jnātājnātēy ca yē punah||"

"iti sapta vidham pāpam snānmēy sapta saptikēy|

sapta vyādhi samāyuktam hara mākari saptami||"

"May the entirety of my sins accumulated in my present and previous births, on account of conscious and unconscious acts or those perpetrated by my vocal or mental roots, be dissolved on this makhara saptami and may this sacred snānam with my earnest and heartfelt supplications and obeisance to you, Surya Dēva!, in the form of seven kinds of sins and seven types of diseases be destroyed forever!"

### arghya mantram

"sapta satpēvāhaprīta, saptalōka pradīpan |

saptami sahitō dēva! grihāNarghyam divākara ||"

"May you, Divākara!, who is fond of the number seven, riding on the chariot drawn by seven horses with seven names, bestow splendor to seven worlds, O Dēva! May I have the privilege of offering 'arghya' on this saptami tithi - seventh day - to mark my reverence!"

### What is offered for worship?

Sesame seeds have the ability to absorb and emit high amounts of "sattva" - virtuous frequencies. This seed is a favorite of sun and therefore sweet made out of sesame seeds are offered as naivedyam. In addition, the lamp is lit using sesame seed oil. The food grain associated with sun god is the wholesome wheat. This pudding is prepared using wheat or pounded rice - avalakki

"The sun - Surya- is the visible presence, the vision of the divine, lord of excellence and wisdom, and the cosmic symbol of the Supreme. He is the divine light and presence that fills all the worlds" - RgVeda. As we know, physically there is no other brilliance equivalent to Sun. He is also the source of inner enlightenment as the famous gāyatri mantra suggests. He is the renewal of life on earth.

The Ratha Saptami worship procedure is designed to imbue us with gnaana (knowledge of the Divine) and launch us towards the divine.

### surya dhyāna mantram

"japā kusuma-sankāṣam kāṣyapēyam mahā-dyutim |

tamōgnam sarva-pāpaghnam pranatōṣmi divākaram ||"

"Let us chant the glories of the Sun god, whose beauty rivals that of a flower. I bow to him, the greatly effulgence son of Kaśyapa, who is the enemy of darkness and destroyer of all sins".

A common hymn that are used to worship the sun is the āditya hridhayam (In the rāmayana yuddha kānda, Sage Agastya advises SriRama to recite āditya hridhayam before the battle). Additionally, there are the twelve names of āditya that correspond to the twelve months and twelve zodiac signs that he is seen as passing through. Chanting these verses is supposed to invoke the benevolence of the Lord in all actions one does for the rest of the year.

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