



# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2009

## The five-fold path of light worship

**T**HE young girl is worshipping a small fire at sunrise. She's ignited it in a compact copper vessel with a couple of cow-dung cakes and daub of clarified butter made from cow's milk along with some uncooked rice. The worship consists of a two simple Sanskrit mantras one which salutes the Sun, our ultimate source of power and light and the other which disconnects our personal egoistic sense from phenomena.

She repeats the ritual at sunset with an equally simple salutation to the creator. She belongs to the reformist movement of Agnihotra that was originally created as the five-fold way in 1944 by the mystic master of the Dattatreya sect, Sri Gajanan Maharaj. He lived at Shivpuri, near Akkalkot, Maharashtra.

The five-fold way includes daily observance of ritual fire (*yajnya*); charity (*daana*); meditation (*tapa*); right action (*karma*) and enquiry into the self (*swadhyaya*). Agnihotra is the smallest yet most effective form of the splendid ancient Vedic ritual known as *yajnya*, the seeker explains. It's also the first most important part of the five-fold path of worship of light. "Fire opened the gates of eternal evolution for the entire humankind not just for those on the Indian sub-continent," she

adds. "Everybody, regardless of gender, race or creed is free to follow the path of light. As the Master himself has said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near at hand/ Blessed are they who have seen the light/fortunate are those who walk in the light/ for they will enter the kingdom of light.'"

What is significant, science too has joined the mystics in celebrating the primacy of fire in the evolution of humanity. The theory was first proposed in the 19th century. Now, in *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*, Harvard anthropologist Richard Wrangham challenges the view that tool-making and meat-eating turned apes into humans.

Rather it was cooking and taming of fire 1.8 million years ago, he says. Our ancestors were able to evolve because cooked foods were richer, healthier and required less eating time. Communal fire, cooking and a higher-calorie diet also had a far-reaching social impact.

"We had to be able to look each other in the eye. We couldn't react with impulsivity. Once you are sitting around the fire, you need to suppress reactive emotions that would otherwise lead to social chaos. Around that fire, we became tamer, smarter," Wrangham muses. So? Hail fire!

■ VITHAL C NADKARNI



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