

We may have heard of many rituals extant in Hinduism, but thanks to the abundant Hindi movies and serials, we know that taking a dip in the holy river Ganga may be one of the most important. To most of us non-Hindus, this may just be another ritual that is beautiful without acknowledging the level of significance.

FACT FILE

Rituals for atonement

Here is a sneak peek.

On the promising days of Kumbh Mela (a sacred pilgrimage that happens every third year) and Magh Mela (a holy fair in the month of Magh), the Ganga Snaan becomes widespread, with Hindus in droves taking the holy dip to wash off their sins. The ritual is performed to achieve liberation, or in another words, Moksha, from the cycle of life and death.

There is an interesting story that validates the process. According to the Puranas, Vishnu appeared as Vaman in one of his incarnations. He immediately felt the need to measure the universe and see how big it was, and so he extended his left foot and pierced a hole through the universe. It is said that through this hole the divine Brahma-Water splurged in, as the Ganges River.

Having washed the feet of the Lord, which were covered with saffron, the river water eventually turned a beautiful pinkish hue. Since the water washed off the feet of the Lord Vishnu before settling in Bhumi Devi (Mother Earth), it became divine – a celestial chaperon!

This is just one scripture that sources

the importance of the sacred river. In other legends, it is said that Raja Himavat or 'the king of snow' fathered Ganges, the river goddess and Parvati, wife of Lord Shiva.

That maybe the legend, but is it so easy to be chaste and sinless with just a dip?

There is another story that leads up to the answers. The scriptures depict that once Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati were travelling through earth and they saw thousands of Hindus taking the holy bath. Parvati, on witnessing the scene, asked the Lord whether everyone would be able to attain Moksha?

Shiva laughed and explained: only a dozen amongst the thousands would get the desired liberation from sins. And he construed further by saying, "Those who have not come to perform the ritual without any quality of goodness or Sattva will never be able to get rid of sins, but those who come to the Ganges to actually feel the Supreme Being with sincere devotion and ask for salvation – only they will be able to achieve emancipation."

By Antiquarian



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