Homam, Havis, Yajña and Yaga

Yajña in the broadest sense has been defined as a sacrificial rite or spiritual offering made generally in fire. Grhasthas are expected to observe the following daily yajñas:

1. Bhūta Yajña: an oblation or offering to all of the created beings with whom we share this earth.

2. Pitr Yajña: Obesquial offerings in the form of libations of water to the deceased ancestors.

3. Deva Yajña: Sacrifice to Sudarśana, Laksmi Narasimha, and others through oblations offered in fire with Veda mantras or bijāksarams. This is commonly called homa.

4. Manusya Yajña: Athitī Satkāram or hospitality to guests or strangers, who visit one.

5. Brahma Yajña: Teaching and recitation of the Vedas

In Bhagavad Gītā, Bhagavān declares that He is of the japa yajña among the various yajñas. Here reference is to the mantra japa of one’s iṣṭa devata or upāsana mūrtī or the sacred aṣṭāksāra mahā-mantram.

Yaga is generally associated with elaborate performance of fire sacrifices on a large scale (Vajapeyam, Paundarikam, Aśvamedham etc) Special priests with expertise in Vedic injunctions (vidhīs) such as advhāryu (officiating priest), hoṭṛ (for Rg Vedic recitation), udgāta (Sāma Vedic passage reciter) and brahma (presiding priest, often employed at a Soma Yaga) are involved in the successful conductance of these Yagas. The Number of priests can go as high as16 in complicated sacrifices.

Homa is generally a small scale "yaga" and is performed at home as opposed to yagas, which take place in a public place with attendance of a large group of people. Some times the scriptural passages are recited in the format of a homa. Examples of such homas are the Puruṣa Sukta Homa and Bhagavat Gītā Homam. Agni is involved and sacrificial offerings are made to propitiate the Lord or the sacred passages associated with the Vedas or Viśnu.

Havis is the term used for the oblations offered to the Lord, which are offered with reverence into the Fire. Havis generally is an oblation of burnt offering. It can be clarified butter also. Agni is the medium, which carries the havis.
Havyapâka: is the oblation cooked with butter and milk.

Pûrva Mimâmsa Sûtras of Jaimini go into great detail about the various aspects (the vessels to be used, the different priests, et al) of the yagas,

The Visnu Sahasra-nâma (971-982) deal with the yajña swarûpam of Lord Nârâyana. The nâmâs and the meanings as intrepreted by Parâsara Bhaṭṭar are as follows:

971: om yajñâya namah - He is Himself the sacrifice (japa-yajña) for those who wish to attain Him. But who do not have the wherewithall to acquire the dharma to worship Him.

972: Yajña pathi - He gives the fruit of the sacrifice done to please Him.

973: Yajvâ- He who performs the sacrifice for those, who are unable to do a yajña. In the Vaiṣṇava Dharma in the Asvamedha Parva, Lord Krsna says: "O Yudhishtira, for the purification of those (who are unable to observe the daily rites), I am myself doing the yajña at both dawn and dusk every day. I never fail in carrying out this vow of Mine."

974: Yajnângah - He who has the sacrifices of others as an accessory to what He is doing.

975: Yajña-vâhana - He helps those, who perform the sacrifices by investing them with the necessary power, faith and equipment to perform them.

976: Yajña bhrt - He, who brings about the completion of the sacrifice.

977: Yajña krt – He who created the sacrifice.

978: Yajnî - He for whose sake the sacrifices are done.

979: Yajña bhuk - The enjoyer or the protector of the sacrifice.

980: Yajña sâdhana - He who is an accessory to the sacrifice.

981 : Yajnânta krt - He who produces the fruits of the sacrifice.

982: Yajña guhyam - He, who is the secret of the sacrifice.

The Nâmâ "Yajña Guhyam" is very elaborately commented upon by Parâsara Bhaṭṭar this way:
" Though Bhagavân is not in wants, He accepts the offerings made in a sacrifice as though He has been long expecting them and enjoys them. Thus, He feels satisfied and also satisfies those who do sacrifices. This is understood only by the wise, who know the injunctions, the means and the fruit of sacrifices, but not by those who have only a superficial knowledge. Hence the name of Him as the Secret of the
sacrifice."

"All the Vedas and all that has to be learnt, all the Sastras and all sacrifices, and all worship--All are Sri Krṣna. O Kings! Those, who know Krṣna correctly in this way, may be considered to have completed successfully all sacrifices."

"All the shining luminaries in the world, the three worlds and three guardians of the Worlds, the three fires and the five offerings in them and all the Gods--All are Sri Krṣna, the son of Devaki."

**Yajña Varāha Mūrti and Srīmad Bhāgavatam**

The relation between Bhagavān and the yajñas is described by Srīmad Bhāgavatam.

The third Canto of Bhāgavatam in the verses 13 to 35 describe the body of the Lord as made up of the various utensils used in the yajñas, the ceremonies and all the havis. In this description, the havis known as purodasam is seen as the stomach of the Lord, Prācityam (Brahmā's havis) as the mouth of Yajña Varāha-mūrti. Bhāgavatam also describes the 7 Soma yajñas(Agnistomam, Atyagnistomam, Uktiyam, Sodasī, Vājapeyam, Atirātram, Abyārāmam) as taking the parts of skin, flesh, medhas, bones, majjai, blood and sukra. The total view of the Yajña Varahāmūrti is that of a yajña without the affiliation of the soma creeper (lata).

Blessed indeed are those, who can do homa in one form or other, while understanding the significance of them and their intimate relationship to the Lord.