

Garuda Purana on Children's Last Rites



Recently I was asked by quite a few people what should be done if a little child dies. There was some confusion because when they consulted some priests, different things were stated. This article is an offering to stop this confusion by quoting the Garuda Purana (Preta Khanda). This is what Lord Vishnu says and is final.

Verse 36/37 (if there is **“Still born or abortion”**, the impurity is for as many days as the number of months of conception. Nothing else need be done.)

Verse 37/38 (If the child dies **“after birth but before Munda -hair cutting- Samskara”** the dead body is merely buried. Milk should be distributed according to one's capacity amongst children in order to please them)

NB:- Munda Samskara or the hair cutting ceremony is performed in the 3rd year of a child.

Verse 38/39 (After the **“Munda Samskara and up to 5 years”**, if the child dies, cremation should be performed duly. Milk should be distributed to children and they may be fed also)

Verse 39 (the **“Rites of children up to 5 years”** milk puddings – sweet rice - should be distributed)

Verse 41-43 (When **“a child dies at a tender age”**. Gifts are given. If gifts are not given, he will be born in an indigent and poor house. So sumptuous food should also be given).

NB:- so what consists of gifts mentioned above. Well grains, sesame seeds, salt, some fruits and vegetables can be given as charity.

Chapter 25 verse 4 (If there's **“miscarriage”**, there's no obsequial rites. Milk is distributed when **“infants”** die. Due to mishap to **“children”**, if death occurs, water pots, milk puddings (i.e. sweet rice), and so forth are given as gifts.)

Verse 7(Till the **“second year of a child”**, the dead body is merely buried)

Verse 9-10 (from the time of conception until he is:-

16 months {infant})

16 months to 27months {boy})

27months to 5years {Kumara})

5 years to 9 years {Pauganda})

9 years – 16 years {Kishora})

After the 16th year he attains maturity)

Verse 11-12 (A **“boy's”** death occurring at the **“5th year”** whether normally or due to accident, all rites should be carried out including the ten pindas. The rites are not many since contact with the worldly objects is of short duration and since the body too is of small stature, the obsequial rites also are not elaborate)

Verse 13 (If a **“Child dies before the 5th year”**, the articles of diet and daily necessities to which it is accustomed can be made over as gifts.)

Verse 18 (From **“birth to the 5th year”**, uncooked things should be gifted to the Brahmana.)

Verse 19 (If there is accidental death **“after the 5th year”**, Vrshotsarga and other rites are performed but Sapindi is not necessary.)

Vrshotsarga ceremony is a rite where a bull is released. This ceremony is rarely practiced even in India so what to speak of South Africa.

Sapindi is a ceremony that is performed on the 13th day after the cremation of a person.

Verse 21 (In the case of **“all persons beyond the age of 5”** at death Brahmins should be fed and major gifts offered according to one's capacity. The gift of an earthen lamp should be made.

Srimad Bhagavatam Chapter 16: King Citraketu Meets the Supreme Lord

The son of Vyasa said: 'The devarishi oh King, then brought the deceased son of the king [who was called Harshas'oka, or 'jubilation and lamentation'] before the mind's eye of the lamenting relatives and addressed him. Narada Muni said: 'Oh living soul, all good fortune to you, behold your mother, father, friends and relatives who, lamenting over you, are greatly distressed. To complete your life you may reenter your body and in the midst of your kin enjoy all pleasures of life in accepting the award of your father's royal throne.' The individual soul said: 'In which of all those births wherein I because of my karma have been wandering among the gods, the animals and the human beings, were these people here my father and mother? In the course of time eventually all people become each other's friends, family members, enemies, neutrals, well-wishers, indifferent or envious ones. Just as means of exchange like gold pass from one person to the other, the same way the individual soul passes through different species of life by different fathers. One always sees that the ties one has in human society with matters [like money or the other sex] are temporary; as long as one relates to it one claims ownership. So too the eternal, individual soul identifies himself in a certain birth with his body for as long as he is situated in it, even though he actually has no specific material identity. This living entity is [factually] eternal, imperishable and most subtle, it constitutes the self-effulgence of all the different embodiments, the master who manifests himself as this material world by means of the gunas. It is not of like and dislike or of mine and thine. It is the one witness to the different sorts of intelligence and performers of good and bad deeds. The original soul is not of the happiness and harm resulting from fruitive actions; perfectly neutral residing in the heart he is the Lord overseeing cause and effect.' The son of Vyasa continued: 'Thus having spoken the living soul went away. His relatives, astonished about what he had said, then cut the bond of their affection for him and gave up their lamentation. The difficult to forsake affection that leads to lamentation, illusion, fear and distress, was by the family of the son given up when they with the performance of the proper rites removed the body. Oh King Parikshit, those who had killed the child were, bereft of their bodily luster, very ashamed of

having murdered the boy. Remembering what the brahmin [Angira] had stated, they performed according to the directions of the priests at the river the Yamuna the atonement for having killed the baby.

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