

## How did Shraddha Originate?



In the Vedic culture there are sixteen Samskaras (purificatory rites) from the conception (Garbhaadhana Samskara) up to the final rites (Antyesthi), all of which are to be observed as prescribed duties. Their observance will spiritualize life and purify our existence. The final rites are called Antyesthi, during which the corpse is cremated. The ceremonies performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12/13<sup>th</sup> day followed by monthly observances until the yearly ceremony are called **Shraddha** (meaning faith and deep devotion). The performer of the shraddha must not only have the correct attitude but must be purified by good discipline and austerities. It must be stressed that the shraddha is a memorial service in respect of the departed Atma as well as a spiritual act, which benefits the performer and his family. The annual Shraddha performed during Pitr Paksa falls in the same category of rituals.

The original concept of performing the ritual of Shraddha was conceived by Atri Rishi, one of the 10 sons of Lord Brahma. Atri Rishi narrated the ritual of Shraddha as laid down by Lord Brahma to his son Nimi Rishi. Nimi Rishi in turn also had a son who was renowned for having performed penances for 1000 years. Soon after achieving this feat, he passed on. His sudden death came as a great shock to his father who was so traumatized with grief that no matter how hard he tried he was unable to reconcile himself to this tragic loss. Accordingly on Dwadashi (12<sup>th</sup> day) of the month of Magha, he collected all the vegetables, fruits and foods which his son enjoyed and prepared them himself. He invited and fed several hold Brahmins, while simultaneously thinking of his deceased son and reciting the latter's name, Gotra (family name) and Kula (linage).

While all this was taking place, Narada Muni arrived and was received by Nimi Rishi, who accorded him all due honour and hospitality. Nimi Rishi however, embarrassed by his attachment to his son broke down in tears and said, "O great Muni! You must think me such a fool for attempting to feed my beloved son, who is no more. Will I ever be forgiven for such an act". Narada Muni then replied,

“Dear Rishi, do not despair. You have committed no wrong nor have you performed any unrighteous action. Take refuge in the ancestors. Invoke your ancestors and they will guide and protect you”.

Encouraged thus by Narada Muni's advice, Nimi Rishi began to meditate upon his ancestors, who soon appeared before him and said, “Nimi, your son has already taken his place amongst the Pitr devas. Since you have performed this act of feeding and worship in honour of the soul of your departed son, it is same as if you had performed Pitri Yajna. Lord Brahma, himself, had blessed this ceremony in the past and granted it to the merits of any other kratu (sacrifice). So fear no more, my son, for you have been blessed on account of your deeds. Since that time the shraddha ceremony has formed a vital part of Sanathan Dharma (Hinduism).

This established ritual has continued even till to today. Manu deva was the first person to perform the ritual of Shraddha. Hence he is called the Deity of Shraddha.

After Lord Raam, Mother Sita and Lord Lakshman left for Their stay in forest, Shree Bharat met Them in the forest and apprised Them about the death of Their father. The Ramayana mentions that Lord Rama later performed the ritual of Shraddha for His deceased father at an appropriate time.

The process for Pinda-daan is mentioned in the Yajurveda, Bramhane, ShROUT and Guhya sutra. The ritual of Pinda-daan was put into practice during the period of Guhya sutra. The information regarding the time period when the worship of Pinda originated is documented in the Mahabharata (Shantiparva 12.3.345) – Varahadeva, the Boar incarnation of Lord Krishna, introduced Shraddha to the entire world. He created three Pindas from His molar tooth and placed it on a Darbha/Kusha grass (dried grass twig) towards the southern direction. Lord Varaha advised 'Let the 3 Pindas be considered as a representation of the father, grandfather and great grandfather' and then He vanished after performing the ritualistic worship of the Pindas using sesame seeds in a scientific manner. Thus began the worship of Pinda for deceased ancestors as per the guidance of Lord Varaha.

**QUESTION:- Is it true that Lord Raam and Mother Sita performed Shraddha puja?**

**ANSWER: -** Yes in the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 10.31-51 “O Garuda, I shall tell you how once Sita saw in the body of a brahmana Her ancestors, Her father-in-law, Her grandfather-in-law and Her great-grand-father-in-law. At the behest of His father, Rama went to the forest. When He reached Pushkara, together with His consort Sita He performed Shraddha with the ripe fruits Sita collected from the trees. When the sun reached the middle of the sky the sages who had been invited by Rama presented themselves. When Sita saw the sages She was extremely delighted. By the instructions of Rama She served them with the food. Then, all of a sudden, She got away from among the brahmanas. Covering Herself behind the bushes She hid Herself. Then having learnt that Sita had gone all-alone, Rama was anxious and lost in thought. He wondered why She had gone away so soon without feasting the

brahmanas. He thought to Himself "Maybe She felt shy, I shall search for Her." Thinking this way He himself feasted the brahmanas. When the brahmanas went away Sita returned. Then Lord Rama spoke to Her: " Why did you leave when the sages came here to the forest. Let Me know the reason of Your abrupt departure" then addressed by the Lord, Sita stood with Her face cast down. With tears flowing down from Her eyes She spoke thus to Her Lord. "Lord, hear, I saw a wonder here. I saw Your father, in front of the brahmanas dressed in royal costume. I saw two elderly folk donning the similar garb. On seeing Your father I moved away from his presence. Attired in bark and hide, how could I serve him with food? How could I offer him food in a vessel of grass in which even slaves would not eat from? How could I, full of perspiration and dirt, go before him knowing that he had never seen me before in that miserable state? I felt shy and moved away from his presence, O Rama." Thus, O Garuda I have told you how Sita saw Rama's ancestors.

It is also said that all the Deva's and Devi's came to Chitrakoot when Lord Raam performed His *Shraddha* ceremony of His father to partake of the shuddhi (i.e. a feast given to all the relatives and friends on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the a death in the family). According to the Ramayana Lord Raam performed His fathers; shraddha puja on the banks of the Phalgu River in Gaya.

### Valmiki Ramayana - Ayodhya Kanda in Prose Sarga 77

After having passed the tenth day of the death of Maharaja Dasaratha, Maharaja Bharata having Himself purified, performed Shraddha rites on the arrival of the twelfth day. On the occasion of Shraddha rites, Bharata gave precious stones, money, a lot of cooked rice, very valuable clothes and various other kinds of presents to Brahmanas. In that ceremony performed in honor of the dead king, Bharata the son of Dasaratha gave multitudes of white goats, hundreds of cows, servants and servant maids, vehicles and very big houses to Brahmanas.

Then, at the time of dawn on the thirteenth day, the mighty armed Bharata who came for clearing up bones and ashes, wept in grief, his throat being choked of sound (because of crying) and spoke in great distress the following words, having reached the foot of his father's funeral pile (to collect the bones and ashes for their immersion in Sarayu River). "O, father! My brother Rama to whose care I was entrusted by you, having gone on exile to the forest, I now become abandoned wholly alone, by you. Where have you gone, leaving Kausalya the mother whose son Rama, her support, has been sent away from home to the forest?"

Seeing that spot of collection (of bones), which became reddish brown in colour because of ashes, with bones consumed by fire and His father's body having extinguished, Bharata was depressed and began to cry loudly. Miserable as He was to see the spot, Bharata fell weeping on the ground, as a flag staff fastened by any mechanical contrivance would drop down while being raised in honor of Lord Indra. All His ministers hastily approached Bharata who was virtuous in conduct, as sages once rushed to the fallen Yayati at the time of his death. Seeing Bharata,

Shatrughna was also overwhelmed with grief and while recollecting the king, fell unconscious on the ground.

Then, Vasishtha, the family priest of Their father, raised up that Bharata from the ground and spoke the following words: “O, Lord Bharata! This is the thirteenth day of the death of Your father. Why are You hanging down here, when the ceremony of collecting the bones is still unfinished? The three pairs of opposites (namely hunger and thirst, joy and sorrow; birth and death) occur to all living beings without any distinction. They being inevitable, You ought not to behave like this.”

Even Sumantra, who knew the Truth, raising up Satrughna and pacifying Him, told Him about the origin and dissolution of all beings. The two illustrious tigers among men (Bharata and Satrughna) who had got up, appeared like two banners severally raised in honor of Lord Indra soiled through rain and the sun. The ministers hurried up the princes, who were wiping their tears and who were talking pitifully with their eyes reddened (due to excessive weeping) to expedite the other rites pertaining to the thirteenth day.

Thus completes 77th Chapter of Ayodhya Kanda of Ramayana of Valmiki...

**QUESTION:- Did Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu perform Shraddha (Pinda) puja?**

**ANSWER:-** Yes Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu who is the embodiment of Shree Radha and Krsna did perform shraddha puja and this is confirmed in the Caitanya Caritamrita Adi Lila Chapter 17 verse 8... “Thereafter the Lord went to Gaya. There He met Srila Ishvara Puri.” Purport by Srila Prabhupada “ Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu went to Gaya to offer respectful oblations to His forefathers. This process is called pinda-dana. In Vedic society, after the death of a relative, especially one's father or mother, one must go to Gaya and there offer oblations to the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. Therefore hundreds and thousands of men gather in Gaya daily to offer such oblations, or Shraddha. Following this principle, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu also went there to offer pinda to His dead father. Fortunately He met Ishvara Puri there.”

### **Additional notes of Shraddha**

All religions, sects, even tribes have different observances followed when some member of the family dies. The rites are based on certain beliefs and convictions enshrined in religion. One of the cornerstones of the Sanathan Dharma is the belief in the eternity of the Atma. The Atma leaves the body at death. Life after death continues. The Atma goes through the process of transmigration. The passing of the Atma from the physical body, and its sojourn through the many states-of-being, the description of the different bodily forms it attains, the existence of hell and heaven and the Supreme Abode (Vaikuntha) of no return, reincarnation, etc. are given in detail in the Vedic scriptures. It is very necessary to be broad minded, to reflect in ideas, which are novel and alien. Being confronted with these ideas someone inquired: “Can you prove that these things happen after

death?” “Can anyone prove that they don’t”, was the reply. A compromise can be reached by the adage: “for one who believes, no proof is required; and for the one who does not believe, no proof exists”.

In the Vedic culture there are sixteen Samskaras (purificatory rites) from the conception (Garbhaadhana Samskara) up to the final rites (Antyesthi), all of which are to be observed as prescribed duties. Their observance will spiritualize life and purify our existence. But in the present article discussion will be confined to the rites relating to death. The final rites are called Antyesthi, during which the corpse is cremated or buried. The ceremonies performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> day followed by monthly observances until the yearly ceremony are called Shraddha (meaning faith and deep devotion). The performer of the shraddha must not only have the correct attitude but must be purified by good discipline and austerities. It must be stressed that the shraddha is a memorial service in respect of the departed Atma as well as a spiritual act, which benefits the performer and his family. The annual Shraddha performed during Pitṛ Pakṣa falls in the same category of rituals.

Death is a happening that we all are to experience at sometime or the other at the passing away of a dear one. It is the only event that is certain. It may occur at any time, at any age. Generally “Go-Daan” must be performed and this can be performed at any time in one life. Now when it becomes known that a person is nearly death, the relatives / friends of such a person have a duty to carry out. A divine atmosphere should be created by reading the scriptures, chanting the names of the Supreme Lord, singing of bhajans and kirtans. If possible, let the person on the point of death drink Ganga water and the Maha mantra “ Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare” should be chanted. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in Bhagavat Gita 8.5 “whoever at the time of death quits his body remembering Me alone, at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt.”

In order to arrive at a clear understanding of any custom or practice, especially in Hinduism, rituals, philosophies and kathas (stories) must be viewed as one package. Any one aspect taken in isolation could easily give the incorrect meaning. The offering of Pindas (balls of rice), tarpana (oblations), 10<sup>th</sup> day, 13<sup>th</sup> day, 6<sup>th</sup> month and 12<sup>th</sup> month Shraddha, reading of scriptures, are features relating to death. The performance of rituals, the uttering of holy mantras the eating of satwik food cooked in a prescribed way and the observance of other austerities by family members of the deceased, have a salutary effect on the mind; the food devoid of oil and masala, eaten for the 10 days, is especially beneficial to facilitate digestion and the general body metabolism, and helps to heal the deep emotional state into which the family has been thrust through the sudden demise of a beloved members. It has been observed that after the 13th day ceremony, there is calm and an acceptance of the reality of the situation; the emphasis on the spiritual path being followed creates a peaceful, tranquil atmosphere, infusing the bereaved with new strength to cope with life and duties. One comes to the

realization that self-pity and the expression of grief is of no help, as Lord Krsna says in Bhagavat Gita 2.11 “Those who are wise lament neither for the living or the dead.”

When death takes place, there is a separation of the Atma (soul) and the material perishable body. The separation of the body from the soul is the first stage after death. The Atma leaves the body in a subtle form, unseen by material eyes as the Garuda Purana 9.38 states “The vital airs having separated. The Atma leaves the body in a subtle form. The physical body made up of the five elements finally disintegrates.” Bhagavat Gita 2.20 states, “For the soul there is neither birth nor death”.

The second stage of existence of the Atma after death is Preta Loka. In this stage the recently separated soul has not got over the “shock” of removal from the temporary abode, the body. After passing through this initial experience of the other state of being he sees reality and realizes that he is alive, and that the body which was abandoned, was just an outer sheath or covering of his real personality or soul. According to Garuda Purana (1, 49 to 54) the Atma, which leaves the earthly body, attains another body called the Pindaja Sarira in the next world; and the formation of the complete body, including hunger and thirst, in 10 days. Therefore the 10-day ceremony and the offering of the 10 pindas symbolizing each of the 10 sections that constitutes the whole human form. On the 13<sup>th</sup> day the departed soul reaches the highway of Yamaraja.

The calculation of the number of days for carrying out the rituals, is based on the time of cremation or burial, a fact which could be deduced from the Garuda Purana (10.21) “ from the time the Pinda is placed in the hand of the corpse, the departed soul assumes the name of Preta, until the Sapindi (on the 13<sup>th</sup> day) is concluded.

**Sutak** is a period of defilement (contamination) occasioned by the onset of disease and death. It is observed for 10 days. During the period special care is taken to limit contact with the public as far as it is possible. Also this practice is reminiscent of the 10-day period of quarantine/incubation that was imposed to fight off certain infectious diseases.

**SAPINDI PUJA:-** Sapindi is the name given to a special shraddha, which symbolically unites the Atma of the deceased with those of the immediate, past three generations of ancestors. The ceremony is performed on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> day, after which the departed one is no more referred to as Preta but Pitr. The pitrs are worshipped as divine beings. It is only after the completion of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> day shraddha that normal, routine daily prayers are resumed. In this regard the Garuda Purana (13.20/21) instructs: “Offerings of deity worship, sleeping on a bed, and direct contact with the public are not permitted during the Sutak (unclean) period i.e. up to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> day; also one should not perform giving of daan, japa, havan, study of the Vedas, tarpana (offering of water), fasts and Brahman

Bhojan". It must be pointed out that this period should be used to perform the special prescribed rituals relating to the recent death.

Especially during a shraddha ceremony it is the practice to place part of the prepared food, which has been first offered to the Supreme Lord, in a clean place outside the home. In actual fact this is a prescribed routine (Panchbali- giving food to the cow, guests, ants, dog and the birds.) to be performed daily by householders, before eating meals. Charity does not consist in the giving of food only to human beings.

**What is the Pitr Paksha Shraddha:-** The Sanskrit word Pitr embraces the Supreme Lord in all His aspects, the Rishis, our ancestors, and all our departed friends and relatives. Pitr Paksha is a period of 15 days, in the dark half of the month of Ashwini (approx. September), set-aside as a memorial and thanksgiving to the departed souls, who, on this earth, made some contribution to make it a better place. We acknowledge our indebtedness to these ancestors of the world. It is an observance accompanied by intense devotion to the Supreme Lord. The followers of Sanathan Dharma express their gratitude and devotion by oblations of water in memory of these; oblations are also made to the Supreme Lord, to the Devi/Devas, Rishis and the Pitr's. The offerings are made daily for 15 days. It is observed that Christians place wreaths on monuments in remembrance of the departed; similarly Muslims place flowers on the grave of dear ones to remember them. During this period one should purify himself internally and externally. Externally purification comes from disciplined living – which includes abstinence from meat eating, alcohol, sex, and so forth (one or two days observance is certainly not enough); mental and physical is considerably enhanced by prayer, chanting of the holy names, participating in bhajans and kirtans, reading of scriptures, etc. It is difficult to forget beloved ones, who have departed, and people in all civilizations and religions try to remember them in a variety of ways; and it should be more difficult not to show gratitude to those who have contributed to our progress and welfare.

### **Is Pitr Puja Necessary?**

Some people are of the opinion that Pitr Puja should not be performed because the Atma or the deceased has already taken birth again. It might have been born as an animal, bird, insect, human form or whatever form that the soul would receive in accordance with the karmas (actions pious or sinful) of previous lives. After the Sapindi ceremony, the Pitr Puja becomes obligatory on the descendants. Every human being has to pay three debts with which he is reborn and that is (1) indebtedness to the Supreme Lord, (2) to the Rishis, and (3) to the forefathers. Now what does it matter if the soul is re-born? A simple analogy from everyday life will make it clear. A person named Ram owes a sum of money to Gopala who was residing at a certain address at the time when the debt was incurred. Subsequently, Gopala changes his place of residence, and begins to live at another place. Does this absolve Ram from his indebtedness? No. After all death is the leaving of one body

by the Atma and birth is the taking on of a new body. Bhagavad Gita (2.22) aptly describes the process “Just as one removes old clothes and puts on new ones, so does the Jivatma abandons an old body and obtain a new one” For further elucidation we may liken transmigration of the Soul to one abandoning a house which is old and beyond repair and taking residence in another home. Besides, Pitr Puja is a memorial service in which the devotee remembers as well as prays, addressing the departed he says: “O Pitrs in whichever form you may be, wherever you may be, we wish to remember and pray for your peace and welfare”. Auspicious mantras are recited for the welfare, prosperity and peace of all beings.

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