

## Questions and Answers on DEATH.



### **What is Go-dan?**

Go-dan? Go means the cow and dan means gift. So Go-dan is the giving the gift of a cow to a Brahmin. This is an extremely important prayer that one performs in one's life.

### **When should Go-Daan puja be performed?**

Many people are under the impression that this prayer is only performed when one is about to die. This is a great misunderstanding. This prayer should be done when one is fit and in a healthy mind. When one performs this prayer when one is fit and healthy then its efficacy is increased 1000 fold, if a sick man makes the gift its efficacy is only a 100 fold. If his son gifts something on behalf of the dead, the gift is indirect and its efficacy is rendered as normal. (Garuda Purana Preta Kand Chapter 47 verses 37-38)

### **What should be given in the Go-Daan puja?**

Sesame seed, iron, gold, cotton, salt, seven types of grains, earth and a cow. The dying person should give these 8 precious gifts to a brahmana. The wise have prescribed the gift of salt to be given freely and it opens the doorway to the other world. (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 4 verses 7-8,14)

### **Why do Hindus perform cremation?**

In Hinduism, cremation is prescribed by our shastras and it is preferred means of disposal of the corpse. The others being disposing the body via water or burial. The most important reason for a cremation is that with the destruction of the body, the soul of the deceased, existing as the vaayuja shareera is no longer drawn to, or able to identify with the body. With the complete dissolution of the physical body and the consequent breaking of any lingering attachment, the soul becomes free to travel to its next stag. Another aspect is that once the physical remains have been converted into ashes, no impurity exists any longer. The only body we don't cremate is for a baby 27 months and under and saint/guru/sannyasi... They are pure and when we bury them they purify Mother Earth, for other burial contaminates Mother Earth.

### **What is the importance of the funeral service?**

The funeral service provides for the disposal of the body or corpse in a dignified manner and with all the solemnity and decorum permitted by the family traditions and social customs. It presents the last opportunity for the family and friends and well-wishers to bid farewell to a loved one as well as to

offer prayers for the well-being and safe journey of the soul. It provides for a sense of closure and marks the beginning of the purificatory rites.

### **Does the widow have to wash off her Sindoor on the death of her husband?**

There is no scriptural backing for such a ritual. However, the widow ceases using the Sindoor in the traditional manner.

### **Which Deity is invoked and propitiated at the cremation site?**

At the cremation site in the ante-chamber the Fire-god named Kravyaada Agni (the flesh devouring form of Agni-Deva) is invoked at the time of the havan, which precedes the lighting of the funeral pyre. Kravyaada Agni is then invited to consume the body which is being consecrated to the fire and to take the soul to its proper destination.

### **Why is gold placed at certain points on the corpse?**

Gold has a sanctifying and purifying quality and its use is also for the atonement of any sins committed by the deceased knowingly or unknowingly. The pieces of gold are placed at the doorways of entry and exit of the body i.e. the eyes, nostrils and mouth. But the mouth being most important... Of course if gold is not a possibility then you can leave this out because one has to be practical as well.

### **Why is weeping, wailing and excessive outpouring of grief discouraged during this time.**

While it is unavoidable to grieve in such circumstances expressions of uncontrollable grief only serve to hinder the journey of the soul. Tears also increase the difficulty along the soul's journey and pathway since the saltiness of the tears supplements the already oppressively humid conditions. (Rughuvamsha VII.86). The Garuda Purana (Preta Khanda chapter 15 verse 58) mentions this as well "One should not weep. If they weep and spit phlegm the soul of the dead person is compelled to eat that".

### **Can a funeral be performed on Ekadashi\*\*\*?**

Absolutely NOT!!! Any shraddha Puja (i.e. a funeral, the 10th day puja, the 12/13th puja, the 6th and the 11 and 12 month pujas) should NEVER be performed on this most holy of days. The puja should be performed on the following day. This is stated in the Brahma-Vaivarta Purana. "If one performs the shraddha ceremony of oblations to the forefathers on the Ekadashi tithi, then the performer, the forefathers for whom the shraddha is observed, and the purohita, or the family priest who encourages the ceremony, all go to hell." "The shraddha ceremony should be held not on Ekadashi but on the next day, or Dvadashi". There are very grave consequences for those who perform shraddha puja on Ekadashi.

\*\*\* Ekadashi (for those who don't know) is two days in a month that we don't consume grains.

### **What one can or cannot do in this mourning period until the Sapinda prayers.**

Lord Vishnu said "Offering of Ashirbaad (blessings), Deity worship, direct contact with the public, giving of Daan (charity/gifts), Hawan, Tarpana, Fasts, and Brahmin bhojan (feedings Brahmins) are forbidden in this period". (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 13 verses 20-21)

Also Offering of Surya jal, lighting of deeyas, performing aartee and other forms of daily poojaa which constitute one's nityakarma (daily worship) should be suspended during the 10 days period. But I advise to resume worship once the 12/13<sup>th</sup> day puja has been completed. This excludes, however, the single deeya that is kept lit throughout the 12 day period in the name of the departed.

### **Why is the Deeya kept lit until the 12<sup>th</sup> day?**

The soul exists in darkness after death, sometimes in a confused state and the deeya is lit to provide a guiding light for the soul until the completion of all funeral rites. So how do we go about doing this... Keep a picture of the deceased and a clay lamp in front of the picture, in a room or a designated area in a southerly direction. This clay lamp must be kept lit continuously for 12 days. On the 12th day this lamp must go off by itself. AND THIS LAMP MUST NOT BE TAKEN ON THE 10TH DAY TO THE RIVER.

## When do we start counting the days for the rituals?

According to 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 Puja is concluded". In the ante-chamber the claimant places the 6th and the last pinda in the right hand of the deceased. When that Pinda is placed in the right hand the calculation of the number of days for the rituals are thus determined. Thus the progress of the soul only begins on the day of disposal of the body.

It is noted in the Ramayana, that the body of Maharaja Dasharatha was preserved in oils for 14 days before the arrival of Bharata Maharaja who had been at His uncle's residence. Upon His return, the Shraddha rites were performed. If the day of death were the reference point then the shraddha rites would have been completed on that death day.

## Why are Kusha (Darbha) grass and Gingelly (Til/Sesame) seeds are used?

### Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 29

15-17 "Sesame seeds originate from my sweat and hence holy. Asuras, Danavas and Daityas flee from the place where gingelly seeds are kept. Gingelly seeds, white, black and brown destroy sins committed by the body. One gingelly seed offered in the holy rite is on a par with a gift of a drona (basin) measure of golden gingelly seeds. Gingelly seeds offered in tarpana and homa have an everlasting benefit."

18-19 "Darbha grass is born of My hair and the gingelly seeds originate from MY sweat. Not otherwise. The holy sacred thread is an essential item in all-religious rites. The whole universe rests on it. Brahma and the other deities are propitiated when the sacred thread is worn in the normal way. When it worn over the right shoulder and under the left arm the ancestors are propitiated."

20 "Brahma is stationed at the root of the Darbha grass. Keshava is stationed in the middle. Know that Shankara is stationed at the tip of the Darbha grass. Thus, the three deities are stationed in the Darbha grass."

25 "Gingelly seeds are holy and unparalleled. Similarly Darbha grass and Tulsi too. The three ward off mishaps."

27 "The dead person should be enveloped with Darbha grass and placed over the bed made of the same grass. Then it is sure that the dead man will attain Vishnu's region, even without the recital of mantras."

29 "if the ground is smeared with cow dung and the death bed is made of Kusha grass, whatever charity is given there dispels all sins."

### Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 30.6

"Gingelly seeds and cows constitute the major gifts and they quell all major sins. The two should be given only to a Brahmin and never to a member of any caste."

## Why is salt used as a gift in the Shraddha puja and in the Seeda?

Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 29 verses 30-33 "Salt is on par with everything divine. It yields everything the person wishes for himself. No dish tastes sweet without salt. Hence, salt is the favourite with the ancestors. The gift of salt leads them to heaven. Salt originated from the body of Vishnu. Hence, Yogins praise a gift of salt. Whenever a person is on their deathbed salt should be given as a gift. It opens the door way to heaven."

## Why do the male progeny shave their heads and facial hair?

It is advised as a sign of mourning in the Garuda Purana. Cutting of the nails and shaving of the hair have been considered purificatory rites. Hair is also a form of beauty and source of ego, and this is sacrificed as a sign of mourning.

## Can non-sattvic foods like meat be offered in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> days?

Absolutely NOT!!! Before one offers food to ones ancestors one must offer the food to Lord Vishnu which then becomes Vishnu prasad and then a portion of that food is offered to our ancestors. Now ask yourself would it be correct to offer meat, cigarettes and alcohol to Lord Vishnu. OF COURSE

NOT. It's a very great sin to offer any un-sattvic foods (e.g. Meat and any type of intoxicants) to one's ancestors. The following three verses are proof in Vedic sastras. "It's not Dharma that in the Shradha feast one should offer meat nor should one eat meat. Only vegetarian food must be offered because meat is obtained by killing". (Srimad Bhagavatam 7.15.7).

"Vegetarian food prepared with pure butter, milk, sugar and curd, etc. are most pleasing to the Pitrs (Ancestors)". (Matsya Purana 17.30).

"Cow's milk, honey and the sweet pudding made of milk and rice and sugar with dry nuts satisfies the Pitrs (Ancestors)". (Matsya Purana 17.36)

#### Why are scriptural readings and satsangs conducted for the first 12 nights after the cremation?

Since the soul does not begin his/her journey on the Path to Yamaloka until the 13<sup>th</sup> day, it tends to linger around the home during this time. Immediately upon death, the soul remains in a state of unconsciousness, emerging from which it may be disoriented and confused. It may not yet be aware that it is in an intermediate state, detached from its gross physical body. If there is weeping and mourning and loud expressions of uncontrollable grief by relative, this creates severe problems for the departed soul and hinders its progress in its afterlife. So prayers, bhajans, scriptural readings etc create and emit potent, positive psychic vibrations which in turn, give tremendous solace to the departed soul. The readings also serve to provide comfort to the friends and family of the deceased, to divert their minds which may be distracted by grief. In this time the Garuda Purana, Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, Ramayana and other holy shastras are read.

#### What is the size of the soul?

Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 25.17 / 15.24 / 19.40 / 10.74

"The subtle soul of the size of the thumb roams about in its aerial form oppressed by hunger." (The personal souls are the size of the thumb. Mahabharata Satyawati Akhyana where Yamaraj is stated to have forcibly dragged the thumb sized soul out of the body of Satyavan – angushthamaatram purusham nishchakarsha balaad yamah)

#### What is the Narayana Bali Prayer?

Lord Vishnu said to Shree Garudaji: "The Narayana Bali rites is performed in all cases of abnormal death which is defined as follows: death by fasting, one who is killed by animals, death by arson, death by a curse, death by cholera or any disease or great ailment, who commit suicide, fall from a mountain, tree or any height, who hang themselves to death, who are drowned in a tank, river or ocean, death by muggers or robbers, by snake bite, struck by lightning, murder and persons who are great sinners – for such persons O Garuda, the rite of Narayana Bali (offerings to Lord Narayana) should be performed."

#### Is the 3-day havan after death mentioned in our scriptures?

This is a concoction and not prescribed in our scriptures. From the verses of the Sacred Garuda Purana if one performs the 3-day havan for the deceased, the family members will incur the wrath of the deceased. When one offers pindas for the 10 days i.e. one for each of the 10 days then the new body is formed. {On the first day by offering the first pinda the head is formed, by the second, the ears, eyes and nose are formed. By the third, the neck, shoulder, arms and chest are formed. By the fourth pinda, the navel and private parts are formed. The fifth pinda the thighs and calves are formed. The sixth pinda all the vital organs are formed. By the seventh pinda the nerves are formed, by the eighth pinda the teeth and hair are formed. By the ninth pinda semen is formed. By the 10th day fullness is achieved and hunger is satisfied. (Garuda Purana Preta Kanda Chapter 5 verses 31-37). So by the 3rd day when one offers the daily pinda only up to the neck/chest is formed. The new body of the deceased is only formed in 10 days, thus by performing the 3-day havan you are shant-ing (ending) the process but the new body is still incomplete. Now this is where the problem arises. Garuda Purana states that one has to perform the 10-day and 13th day prayer, and so forth to form the new body, which takes 10 days. There are no short cuts in life especially in the final rites.

### **But my priest says we must perform the 3-day havan. So whom do I believe?**

This is a very common question. Firstly if a priest performs the 3-day havan ask him where about is it stated that a 3-day havan should be performed upon the death of a person. He will state that it is in scriptures. Then ask him which scripture and what verse. This will stump him since nowhere in scriptures is the 3-day havan mentioned.

### **Is there a need to perform or observe a 40-day ceremony after the death of a person?**

Definitely Not! There is no such observance required by our scriptures. However in the Sat Kriya Sara Dipika (Page 150) mentions “a 10 day contamination period for a Brahmin and a 30 day contamination period for a non-Brahmin should be observed”. NB: In this contamination (aashauca) period one should refrain from visiting the temple, study of scriptures, perform havans, Deity worship in the temple, entertaining guests, entering a new house, any type of Samskara (purificatory rite), shaving of the hair or cutting nails. An example: imagine that you have passed stool and have not taken bath. So of course you cannot go your prayer place or a temple since you have not taken a bath. So in the same way in this 10 or 30-day period if you visit a temple and so forth it is like passing stool and not taking a bath and visiting the temple.

### **So when do we stop daily (routine) Puja?**

Daily Puja is stopped only during Sutak (contamination) caused by the death of a person. Actually all the rituals performed during this period constitute “Puja”

### **How long does Sutak caused by death last?**

For Death, Sutak lasts until the Sapindi (performed on the 12th/13<sup>th</sup> day) is done. (Sat Kriya Sara Dipika p150).

### **Is a father permitted to light the funeral pyre at the cremation of his son, or perform the other funeral rites?**

The Garuda Purana (11.19) states, “ A father should neither light the pyre, nor himself perform the Antyesthi Samskara (Funeral rites) or any ceremony related to the death of his son.”

### **What is Tilanjali?**

After the cremation / burial, the performer of the last rites offers three anjali (handfuls) of water mixed with til (sesame seeds) on a Kush grass planted in the ground. This act is called Tilanjali. It marks and emphasizes the complete severance of bodily relationships between the deceased and the relatives. Henceforth the departed one exists in the memory; and is remembered by the appropriate memorial services, performed during Pitr Paksa.

### **What is the significance of the practice of touching fire, iron and water on returning from the cremation ground?**

Fire, water and iron are considered especially important times of purification. Therefore, the close relatives returning from the cremation purify themselves by touching water, fire and iron with a syringaberry branch and then sprinkling the water on themselves. After this ritual they enter the house and take a bath.

### **Where is the Das Gatr (10<sup>th</sup> day ceremony) performed?**

It is generally performed at a riverbank but it can also be performed at a lake, well, temple.

### **Why are the rites performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> day???**

The Dasgaatra or the shaving ceremony is performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> day after the cremation of a deceased. The purpose of this prayer is to provide the soul covered in an airy body (vaayuja shreera) with the subtle body (yama yaatanaa or body of suffering) which it will use to travel to the realm of Yamaraja. The other rites are necessary for purification as this marks the end of the period of defilement or asaucha. Gifts are given to the Barber (called the Mahaapatra) on this day in order to



please the messengers of Yamaraja in order that they may be favourably disposed to the departed soul during its journey to Yamaloka.

### Why are the rites performed on the 12/13<sup>th</sup> day?

After the linga shareer or subtle body has been formed on the 10<sup>th</sup> days after offering 10 Pindas for the 10 days, the soul begins to experience hunger and thirst and so forth, so the “Madhyam Shodashi Shraddha” is held on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> day to satiate the hunger of the departed soul and the other Pitr's (one's ancestors) are allowed on this day to partake of the food offered through the bodies of the Brahmin's present. So the shraddha that is performed on this day is for the benefit and protection of the soul as it leaves to undertake the journey ahead. After the puja proper has been completed the Brahmins are fed and given gifts as all this is done with the expectation that the merits accrued from all these actions will now benefit the soul as it commences its journey to Yamaloka. After the 13<sup>th</sup> day puja is completed it marks the end of the contamination period and thus the family returns to their normal daily life and all other pujas can commence henceforth.

### Why do we face the southern direction when making the offerings?

The southern direction is ruled by Yamaraja , the Deity of Death. This is the direction in which the soul travels to reach Yamaloka after death.

### Is the Priest/Brahmin permitted to accept daan (cash) or kind during the first 10 days after death, for his services?

NO! Even for the performances of the last rites he should not accept any type of daan

### What is the Chhamai Ceremony (the apology ceremony)?

Wedding or the Sacred Thread Ceremony may be performed if its urgent after the performance of a special ceremony called Chhamai, which is generally, performed on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, day or 1 ½ months or 5 ½ months from the date of the deceased' demise. Now generally one does not perform any prayers for one year, but one has to be practical. What if on the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the deceased demise there's another death in the family, so for another year you cannot perform pujas. Now imagine if this carried on for 10 years. It means you cannot perform puja for 10 years. Of course NOT. So that's why we have the Chhamai ceremony (an apology) ceremony. Once this ceremony is performed you can perform any prayer thereafter.

\*\*\* Certain excerpts was taken from the works of the Shree Lakshmi-Narayana Mandir (Durban).

\*\*\* Certain excerpts was taken from the brilliant book called Death and the Soul's Journey by Pt Munelal Maharaj. Thank you Punditji for your great contribution to mankind.\*\*\*

**DISCLAIMER:-** Do note that Dipika is not affiliated to any Hindu group or organization. We at Dipika choose to remain an independent repository of spiritual advice. We appreciate that there are variances between organisations and humbly request that if our views differ from yours that you respect our decision not to conform to the prescripts of your particular organisation. We remain committed to spiritual advice which is based on scripture.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this article. We pray that this article will assist you in some way and we also pray that it helps you to appreciate the beauty and remarkable foresight of our ancient Hindu culture. We wish to educate all readers and demystify the path of Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma). Please feel free to share these articles with friends and family who do not have direct access to our website or articles. If you use the articles in any form including blogs and/or as part of other articles kindly credit our website as a source. We hope that the articles serve as a reference to you and your family when you need clarification of certain

topics. Jai Hind. Jai Shree Radha Krsna.

Please do visit our Website to receive more  
free information about our beautiful culture

[www.dipika.org.za](http://www.dipika.org.za)

Compiled for the upliftment of Sanathan Dharma

Narottam das & Arjun Nandlal

Email [info@dipika.org.za](mailto:info@dipika.org.za)