

Go-daan (It's Importance and Significance)



Go means a cow and daan means gift. So Go-daan is the gifting of a cow to a Brahmin. This is an extremely important prayer that one performs in one's life. Many are under the impression that this prayer is only performed when one is about to pass on. This is a grave misunderstanding. This prayer should be done when one is fit and in a healthy state of mind. For example I have performed many Go-daan prayers for children under 7 years old. How do you know that you will live till 60 or 70 years old? Of the last 8 funerals that I have performed 6 of the deceased were under 40 years and of that 6, 3 of the deceased was under 30 years old. There's no guarantee on how long one will live. (In a cow resides all the Devi's and Deva's which are 330 million (S.B 2.3.11) in total)

Let's just rewind a bit here and take it from there... Before a person dies the Go-Daan prayers should and must be performed. When a person passes on and the Sapindi puja is performed on the 12/13th day, the soul (which is made of Pinda called the Pindaju sharir) then travels on a 348 day journey in a south direction to the abode of Lord Yamaraja (the Lord of Death). The soul has to pass thru 16 towns along the way to

Yamaloka (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 5). Around the 6th month prayer for the deceased the soul arrives at the 8th town. When he leaves the 8th town there is a river called the Vaitarani River (the horrifying river) that he has to cross to enter the 9th town. If the deceased in his life time didn't perform the Go-Daan prayers then he has to swim across it but if he did perform this most scared of prayers then he is taken across in a boat.

This is what Lord Vishnu has to say about this terrifying river from the 47th chapter of the Preta Khanda in the Garuda Purana. "O, bird (Shree Garuda) listen to the magnitude of the dreadful Vaitarani, the mighty river at the threshold of Yama's city. That river is 100 yojanas (800 miles/1300 km) wide. It is impassable and foul-smelling. To the sinner it is terrifying even at the very first sight. It is full of putrid blood with sediments and marshy deposits of flesh. On seeing a sinner it assumes the form of melted ghee in a vessel. The river is abound in worms. It is full of crocodiles, fishes with adamantine blade-like tails. It abounds in aquatic creatures capable of piercing through the flesh. It is incumbent on all mortals to witness the mighty river. Persons who had made gifts in their lifetime can cross it easily, otherwise they sink into it. Sinful persons can stay at the Vaitarani River for an indefinite period. The gift of the Vaitarani cow should be made. By making gifts, the river becomes easy to cross and the gift maker obtains all that he wishes to possess. As a result of his noble actions one obtains pleasure here and hereafter. If a thing (the Cow) is gifted its efficacy is increased 1000 fold, if a healthy man makes this gift. If a sick man makes the gift its efficacy is only a 100 fold. If the son gifts something on behalf of the dead, the gift is indirect and its efficacy is rendered as normal. Hence gifts should be made by one's own self. After death whom will care to gift it for him. If men understand this auspicious advice it bestows benefit on them."

So coming back to the Go-Daan prayers, by the gifting of a cow one's route or journey across the Vaitarani River becomes very easy and this gift serves as a relief to the deceased along his/her journey. Sastras highly recommend this sacred prayer. The Sat Kriya Sara Dipika compiled by Gopala Bhatta Goswami (who is one of the 6 Goswamis of Vrndavana.) states below what to do: It is recommended that the person gift a decorated cow to a brahmana to ensure his safe passage over the river of death (Vaitarani River). Also gifts of iron pots, salt, land, grains, ghee, and laddu are also recommended. (Page 144 Sat Kriya Sara Dipika by Gopala Bhatta Goswami.)

In the Garuda Purana Bhagavan Shree Vishnu states to Shree Garuda (the bird carrier of Lord Vishnu) the following on Go-dan and on its importance and significance: Sesame seed, iron, gold, cotton, salt, seven types of grains, earth and a cow. The 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) When he reaches the Vaitarani river, the boatman asks, "Have you gifted a cow", if he has he gets into a boat and crosses the terrifying river. But if has not gifted the cow, he is brushed aside by the boatman and is forced to

swim the river. In the river birds with sharp beaks, ants, etc bite him. The gift of a cow serves as a relief for the deceased. (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda Chapter 5 verses 123-126)

Here the fisherman approaches him saying, “o traveler, give us the liberal fee; we shall row you across the river”. If he has gifted the Vaitarani cow he is rowed across the river. The gift of a cow at the time of death is called Vaitarani which gives relief to the departed soul. (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda Chapter 16 verses 27-28). Sesame seeds, iron and salt pleases Yamaraja (the Lord Of Death), the gift of cotton wards off dangers from ghosts, the gift of a cow enable the giver to cross all difficulties and saves him from the threefold afflictions, the gift of gold and grains yields happiness in the afterlife and the gift of earth (plot of land) one shall never experience any torture or distress in hell. (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda Chapter 30 verses 12-16)

Frequently asked Questions (F.AQ'S)

QUESTION:- I want to perform the Go-Daan puja but my elders said I must not as I will die after performing it. Is this correct?

ANSWER:- This cannot be further from the truth. Many Hindus have being indoctrinated since birth with a lot of traditional beliefs that has no sastric backing and these traditions are based on fear. And due to this fear we have been taught that we only perform this prayer when one is about to die. As stated above this prayer must be performed when one a young and fit then the efficacy is 1000 fold. One should request a Brahmin to perform this prayer on an auspicious day.

QUESTION:- Can Go-daan be performed collectively as a family or must it be done individually?

ANSWER:- It MUST be performed individually. Even if the husband and wife dies at the same time their karma's committed in their life will take them on different paths although they will be travelling to Yamaloka.

QUESTION:- After every Katha and Jhunda our priest performs Go-daan with only rice. Is this correct?

ANSWER:- No this not the correct procedure... as stated above that go-daan consists of 8 items and not just rice... these 8 items must be used. One should request your family priest/ a Brahmin to perform this prayer on an auspicious day. These below are as stated above from the Garuda Purana what you must donate for the Go-daan puja...

- * 25 g of sesame seeds (til).
- * A small piece of iron.
- * A small piece of gold ((please note this is given only if one can afford it. A Priest cannot demand this. You can use an old piece of an earring screw, wash in Hurdi water and use).
- * A roll of raw cotton.
- * 500 g of rough salt.
- * Navadhan – (9 types of grains in a small packet).
- * A little sand in a bank packet. (One is supposed to buy a plot of land. In South Africa this is way too expensive, so one can donate sand to represent the land).
- * An ornament cow. (In South Africa a fully matured cow cost over R8000. Now we have

to be practical a person just do not have R8000 to give just like that, so to substitute a real cow we are gifting an ornament cow. In any case where is the priest going to keep the cow)? The above prayer goods except for the cow should not cost you more than R20.

Now for many that want to really to perform Go-daan then it can be a very very expensive prayer. This is the reason I have humbly stated the above. Many of course will find this offensive about the above items to donate but remember that we have to as Hindu's adapt or perish. If you can afford to purchase a cow and donate the cow then you can contact your local Go-shala. This prayer is a once off and there's no need to perform this prayer again when one is about to leave his/her body.



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