

Is there any significance, or proof, of a “40 day” fast or period of observance in the Vedic culture?



“Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah”

Dharma protects those who protect Dharma. (Manu Smṛti, chapter 8, verse 15)

Dharma is the principle of righteousness. It is the principle of holiness. It is also the principle of Unity. ... If you protect it, it will protect you. - His Holiness Swami Shivananda-ji.

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This article is very thought-provoking and is not intended to create further questions - rather to view the concept of a 40 day period from different perspectives. There are many interpolations of our Holy Vedic Shastras, especially from the West, that now we at Dipika feel obliged to put forward information regarding this subject and right the wrongs that have truly marred our understanding of this subject.

Many residing in Bharat Bhumi (commonly known as India in recent times) have, for quite some time, been adopting other cultures' ways of life - especially that of Islam. For example, we were known as Sanatanists (the followers of Sanatan Dharma – the eternal way of life) or Vedics (those who follow the Vedic scriptures) until Islam came about. Thus, before commencing discussion on the subject of this article let's get into the main topic at hand in this article namely Is there any significance, or proof, of a “40 day” fast or period of observance in the Vedic culture?. There are few points that need clarification first, and the article topic will be discussed, and ended thereafter.

The number 40 in Hinduism

1) The term “Hindu” has no derivation in Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas. The term “Hindu” is not found in any of the Vedic literatures. So, how can such a name truly represent the Vedic path or culture? For, if the term “Hindu” has no reference from the Vedas, it is not verified, and thus should not be used. The term “Hindu” was hence developed by outsiders and other foreigners who could not pronounce the name of the Sindhu river properly. According to the respected Sir Monier Williams (the Sanskrit lexicographer), one cannot find an indigenous root for the words Hindu or India in Sanskrit. Furthermore, these words are not found in any Buddhist or Jain texts, nor any of the 23 official languages of India. Some sources suggest that it was “Alexander the Great” who first renamed the river Sindhu as the Indu, dropping the letter “s” at the beginning, thus making it easier for the Greeks to pronounce. Thus, the river was often called the “Indus”. This was when Alexander invaded India around 325 C.E. . His Macedonian forces thereafter called the land East of the Indus India, a name used mainly during the British regime. Before this, the Vedic name for the area (now called India) was Bharat Varsha (the Land of King Bharata Maharaja), which is still the preferred name of many. {In the Srimad Bhagavatam 5th Canto, “The Creative Impetus” - SB canto 5, verse 11 states “Bharata, the eldest son of King Rishabdev, was a devout Theist and before retiring in the wilderness, appointed his son, Bharata, to succeed him as king. Accepting his father’s order, he began to rule the vast kingdom.”

(Modern India is still named Bharata, but during the time of Bharat’s rule, his domain, known as Bharata Varsha, included all the land between Persia and South East Asia). Originally this (Asian-known) expanse of land was called Ajanabha-varsha (in Vedic history), but since the time of King Bharata it became known as Bharata Varsha.

Later, when the Muslim invaders arrived from places such as Afghanistan and Persia, they called the Sindhu river, the “Hindu” River. Thereafter, the name “Hindu” was used to describe the inhabitants from that tract of land in the north-western provinces of Bharat varsha where the Sindhu River is located, and the region itself was called “Hindustan.” Because the Sanskrit sound of “s” converts to “h” in the Parsee language, the Muslims pronounced Sindhu as “hindu,” even though at the time the people of the area did not use the name “hindu” themselves. This word was used by the Muslim foreigners to identify the people and the religion of those who lived in that area. Thereafter, even the Indians conformed to these standards as set by those in power and used the names Hindu and Hindustan. Other than these misconceptions of foreigners, the word has no meaning except for those who place value on it or now use it out of convenience. Parts of the above information was provided by Sri Nandanandana Prabhu. We pray that the above information now, finally, settles this issue.

2) **Why do Hindu females cover their head with their archara (sari piece)?**

It is the general consensus among the Muslims that a Muslim woman is required to cover her head, leaving only her face showing, as part of an overall dress code and behaviour which Islam prescribes. It is therefore part of the social system of Islam, and

a manifestation of important general Islamic principles. Firstly, a Muslim woman privy to her religion's scriptures does this because she is following guidance from God and His prophet Muhammad - recorded in the Qur'an, and in the Sunnah (the knowledge about the practice and example of the Prophet Muhammad). For example, one translation of the meaning of the specific ayat (verse) of Qur'an that mentions the head covering is as follows:

Surah 24 Al-Nur (The Light); ayat 31 (part of); "And say to the believing women... ..that they should draw their head-coverings over the neck opening (of their dresses) , and not display their ornaments except to their husbands, their fathers... ..(etc)"

So, when Muslims ruled over India at some point, Hindu ladies were forced to adopt this dress code and thus it became part of the Hindu tradition which is still followed up to today. Have you noticed that none of the Devis – for example Mothers Durga, Lakshmi, Kali, Saraswati, Bandi, etc., do not cover their head with their Achara? Thus, the covering of the head by a female is a Muslim tradition, forced upon the residents of Bharat in ancient times, and has no source in our Vedic scriptures.

3) Talaq (divorce). In Islam, the *talaq* divorce, is when the husband pronounces the phrase "I divorce you" (in Arabic, *talaq*) to his wife. A man may divorce his wife three times, taking her back after the first two (reconciling). After pronouncing *talaq*, either once, twice or thrice, the man has to wait for three menstrual periods before finally letting his wife leave. There is no such word as *talaq* in Vedic scriptures, yet so many Hindus in this day and age divorce. Once again, Hindus seem to have been influenced by Muslims.

4) Mehndi (mendhi)...

The use of henna (mehndi) - the Shariah allows women to use henna.

Hindh-Binte-'Ukbah said to the Messenger, 'I want to take oath to you,' to which the Messenger replied, 'First go and colour your hands.' A woman wished to give the Messenger a book (from behind a curtain), the Messenger withdrew his hands and said, 'I cannot tell whether this is a male or a female's hand.' The woman replied, 'It is a woman's hand.' The Messenger replied, 'If it is a woman's hand then the fingers should be coloured with henna.' Book 33, Hadith 4154 Dawud.

Mehndi is not mentioned in any of the Vedic scriptures, yet it seems to be compulsory for the Hindus of today to apply Mehndi a day before the Hurdi/Nelengu ceremony or two days before the wedding ceremony. Yet again, Hindus seem to have been influenced by Muslims.

So, with the information provided above, one can deduce that the so-called modern Hindus seem to have lost a significant part of their own culture and identity.

INTERESTING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:-

It is quite interesting to note that South Indian ladies never cover their head with the archara. What is the reasoning behind thus?

The Mughals (Islam) invaded South India in the past. The timeline of the Mughal

empire was between 1526 and the start of 19th century. However, they could not destroy the South like they did the North. When Muslims invaded India, they did not have significant influence over South India due to the Vindhya mountains. Hence, the temples remained fairly intact - unlike the North Indian temples that were demolished and mosques built on top of those demolished temples, the most famous example being the Tejo Mahalaya (built in 1155 AD), or as it is famously known now as the Taj Mahal. The Tejo Mahalaya was a very popular Lord Shiva temple in ancient times. Taj Mahal is a corrupt form of the sanskrit term Tejo-Mahalaya signifying a Shiva Temple. Agreshwar Mahadev i.e., The Lord of Agra was consecrated in it. The tradition of removing the shoes before climbing the marble platform originates from pre Shahjahan times when the Taj was a Shiva Temple. Had the Taj originated as a tomb, shoes need not have to be removed because shoes are a necessity in a cemetery. The term Tajmahal itself never occurs in any mogul court paper or chronicle even in Aurangzeb's time. The attempt to explain it away as *Taj-i-mahal* is ridiculous. The ending "*Mahal*" is used for hindu palaces and is never muslim because in none of the muslim countries around the world from Afghanistan to Algeria is there a building known as "*Mahal*". So, if you look at South India, the Sanatan Dharma culture was relatively well-preserved, thus you don't find events like the use of mendhi, the covering of the head, etc being observed.

Do remember that we Sanatanists (or Vedics) are not supposed to be "religious" - rather "spiritual". There is a huge difference in the meanings of these two words.

RELIGION is an institution established by man for various reasons like exerting control, instilling morality, stroking egos, or whatever else it does. Organized, structured religions all but remove God from the equation. You confess your sins to a clergy member, go to elaborate churches/mosques to worship, told what to pray and when to pray. All those factors generally removes one from God.

SPIRITUALITY is born in a person and develops in the person. It may be kick started by a religion, or it may be kick started by a revelation. Spirituality extends to all facets of a person's life. Spirituality is chosen while religion is often at times forced upon.

True spirituality is something that is found deep within oneself. It is your way of loving, accepting and relating to the world and people around you. It cannot be found in a church/mosque or by believing in a certain way.

Religion is man-made, while Sanatan Dharma isn't – it is a way of life. Sanatan Dharma has no beginning and it would never have an end. Abrahamic-rooted religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism as well as Buddhism, Sikhism, etc. were all created by man, whereas Sanatan Dharma was not.

To conclude the first part of this article, we shall now expound upon this article's topic -

Is there any significance, or proof, of a "40 day" fast or period of observance in the Vedic culture?

Just like how we Sanatanists adopted the word "Hindu", the number 40 has similarly made it's way into the Vedic way of life.

In Hinduism, some popular religious prayers consist of forty shlokas or dohas (couplets, stanzas). The most common being the Hanuman Chalisa ('chaalis' is the Hindi term for 40). In the Hindu culture, some of the popular fasting periods consist of 40 days and is called the period 'One Mandal kal' (Kal means a period and Mandal kal means a period of 40 days). For example, the devotees of 'Swami Ayyappa' strictly observe forty day fasts and visit with their holy submittance or offerings on 41st or a convenient day after a minimum of 40 days practice of fasting. The offering is called 'Kanikka'. The Sindhi Hindu community commemorate a festival of thanks to God called Chaliho Sahib. It lasts for 40 days during which time devotees avoid aspects such as cutting their hair, wearing clothes washed by soap, drinking milk, eating fried food and wearing shoes. In Hinduism, when someone dies, the family of the deceased are given 13 or 40 days mourning period (length of time depends on caste and community) until they are re-integrated into society. Amongst Hindus, it is also common for a mother and child to rest for 40 days after the birth of the child, during which neither leaves their home. Kundalini Yoga has evolved as a practice out of Hinduism. Kundalini Yoga is known as the yoga of awareness because it uses physical movement, breathing and sound to directly affect one's consciousness, develop intuition, increase self knowledge, and unleshe the unlimited creative potential that exists within every human being. It emphasises the need to practice Kundalini Yoga for a consecutive 40 day period to make or break habits.

So, from the information above, one can deduce that most of the information provided has little scriptural backing – rather, it is more traditional following than any significant practice sourced from Vedic scriptures. Thus, from the above-mentioned information, the observance or fasting period of 40 days has absolutely no spiritual bearing for a Hindu. Hence, it is highly recommended to stop following the 40 day observance period.

This may lead to questions regarding the period suggested for the resting of a mother and child after birth, the period of mourning after a person passes away or with regard to animal sacrifice.

1) Is there a need to perform or observe a 40 day ceremony after the birth of a child?
Definitely not! There is no such observance required by our Vedic scriptures.

BIRTH OF A CHILD:- Yes, the family should still light their lamp or perform prayers even if a baby has very recently been born in that house. Only the mother cannot perform any puja - as instructed by Lord Vishnu in the Garuda Purana. However, excluding the mother, the father and the family still continue with their daily prayers. This is sourced from the Garuda Purana, Preta Kanda Chapter 29 verses 9, 11 and 12 Lord Vishnu said, “In impurity accruing from birth, the rules are less strict. The mother is “purified” after 10 days and the father just after taking a bath. In birth, the

relatives incur no impurity. Impurity attaches to mother alone. Primarily, it is the mother who becomes “impure”. The father is purified by the touch of water alone. In birth or death O Garuda, impurity lasts only for 10 days.” Do note that English is a very limited language and Lord Vishnu most certainly does not mean “impurity” in a derogative way, rather, in these 10 days after giving birth to her baby, the mother is kept in confinement simply for her to rest and give her body time to recover from an extremely stressful period of giving birth of her baby.

CONCLUSION:- The period of 10 days applies only to the mother, and not to any other relative.

2) Is there a need to perform or observe a 40 day ceremony after the death of a family member?

Definitely not! There is no such observance required by our scriptures.

DEATH OF A FAMILY MEMBER:- Garuda Purana, Preta Kanda Chapter 29 verse 12 Lord Vishnu said, “In death O Garuda, impurity lasts only for 10 days.” In the Garuda Purana, Lord Vishnu states quite clearly that the “ashucha” (contamination period) starts from the day of the funeral (more specifically when the body enters the furnace) and lasts for 10 days, but all other prayers only resume when the 12th / 13th days puja is completed and thus the family is then re-integrated into society. Do note 12th days is observed by Brahmins and 13th days for non-Brahmins.

Lord Vishnu said to Shree Garuda (His eagle bird carrier), "*Offering of Ashirbaad (blessings), Deity worship, direct contact with the public, giving of Daan (charity/gifts), Hawan (Homa), Tarpana (offering of water), Fasts (like Krsna astami, Raam Navami etc), and Brahmin bhajan (feeding Brahmins) are forbidden in the 10 days period*". (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 13 verses 20-21).

CONCLUSION:- The period of 12 or 13 days applies to the family of the deceased individual only. Other prayers continue as normal once the 12th / 13th days puja is completed.

3) Is there a need to observe a 40 day waiting period after an animal sacrifice prayer?

The topic of Kasi puja (animal sacrifice) is a hotly-debated topic that shall not be discussed in this article. However, we at Dipika will compile and release an article in the future on animal sacrifice. For the purposes of this article, the tantric shastras that we have been through (and we have researched a significant number) don't specify a

waiting (or re-integration) period after one performs a Kasi puja. Thus, this question remains a grey area for now - and is still being researched, although is yet to be confirmed.

CONCLUSION:- However I shall humbly suggest a waiting period of at least 13 days since the animal was sacrificed.

SPECIAL NOTE:- The article above was compiled with the best of intentions - with the aim of making our fellow Hindus aware of the traditionally followed 40 days observance. www.dipika.org.za is trying it's utmost to bridge the unfortunate "man-made" gap made by individuals with very narrow mindsets, who have their own agendas regarding Hinduism. Should you have more *shastric backed* information on the 40 days observance kindly email me on info@dipika.org.za and I will amend this article accordingly. Also, if you are e-mailing me to inform me that what is compiled above is not correct, then kindly provide me with the "*correct*", proven information. I will always gladly welcome constructive criticism. :)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The early track of 40 days:- A very effective method of measuring and metering out each passing solar year can be derived from a number of early sources. Ancient writings and artifacts (including certain monuments) make it clear that a cycle of 40 days was once carefully time tracked. As the subsequently presented paragraphs will attempt to show, early astronomers appear to have once time tracked a cycle of 40 days for calendric purposes. The ancients appear to have also revered and celebrated this cycle in the practice of religion. 40 (forty) is the natural number following 39 and preceding 41. Despite being related to the word "four" (4), the modern spelling of 40 is "forty". The archaic form "fourty" is now considered a misspelling. The modern spelling possibly reflects a pronunciation change due to the horse-hoarse merger. The planet Venus forms a pentagram in the night sky every eight years, with it returning to it's original point every 40 years with a 40-day regression (some scholars believe that this ancient information was the basis for the number 40 becoming sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims). The number 40 is used in Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other Middle Eastern traditions to represent a large, approximate number, similar to "umpteen".

The number 40 in Christianity

QUESTION:- Why does the mourning period in many cultures and religions lasts for 40 days? What is the origin of this tradition? Why is not based on solar / lunar cycles?

ANSWER:- There are various answers. Primarily, these go back to the various 40 day events in the Bible. The 40 days and 40 nights of the Flood, the 40 days that Moses was

on the Mount Sinai, the 40 years in the wilderness. This motif was repeated in Christian texts with Jesus fasting 40 days after being baptized. Also, his ascension to heaven on the 40th day. Eastern orthodox traditions have latched on to this 40th day as the day of Judgement after the death of a loved one. This is also tied to Russian pagan tradition that matches this count.

Christianity uses forty to designate important time periods.

- Before his temptation, Jesus fasted "forty days and forty nights" in the Judean desert. (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2)
- Forty days was the period from the resurrection of Jesus to the ascension of Jesus. (Acts 1:3)
- Biblical verse Numbers 14:33-34 alludes to the same with ties to the prophecy in The Book of Daniel. "For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you."
- In modern Christian practice, Lent consists of the 40 days preceding Easter. In much of Western Christianity, Sundays are excluded from the count; in Eastern Christianity, Sundays are included.
- The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (the Holy Forty were a group of Roman soldiers in the Legio XII *Fulminata* (Armed with Lightning) whose martyrdom in 320 for the Christian faith is recounted in traditional martyrologies.)

The number 40 in Judaism

In the Hebrew Bible, forty is often used for time periods, forty days or forty years, which separate "two distinct epochs".

- Rain fell for "forty days and forty nights" during the Flood. (Genesis 7:4)
- Spies explored the land of Israel for "forty days." (Numbers 13:25)
- The Hebrew people lived in the Sinai desert for "forty years". This period of years represents the time it takes for a new generation to arise. (Numbers 32:13)
- Moses' life is divided into three 40-year segments, separated by his growing to adulthood, fleeing from Egypt, and his return to lead his people out. (Acts 7:23,30,36)
- Several Jewish leaders and kings are said to have ruled for "forty years", that is, a generation. Examples include Eli (1 Samuel 4:18), Saul (Acts 13:21), David (2 Samuel 5:4), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:42).
- Goliath challenged the Israelites twice a day for forty days before David defeated him. (1 Samuel 17:16)

- Moses spent three consecutive periods of "forty days and forty nights" on Mount Sinai:
- He went up on the seventh day of Sivan, after God gave the Torah to the Jewish people, in order to learn the Torah from God, and came down on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, when he saw the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf and broke the tablets. (Deuteronomy 9:11)
- He went up on the eighteenth day of Tammuz to beg forgiveness for the people's sin and came down without God's atonement on the twenty-ninth day of Av. (Deuteronomy 9:25)
- He went up on the first day of Elul and came down on the tenth day of Tishrei, the first Yom Kippur, with God's atonement. (Deuteronomy 10:10)
- A mikvah consists of 40 *se'ah* (approximately 200 gallons) of water
- 40 lashes is one of the punishments meted out by the Sanhedrin.
- One of the prerequisites for a man to study Kabbalah is that he is 40 years old.

The number 40 in Islam

- Muhammad was forty years old when he first received the revelation delivered by the archangel Gabriel.
- Masih ad-Dajjal roams around the Earth in forty days, a period of time that can be as many as forty months, forty years, and so on.
- God forbade the Fasiqun (the non-believers) from entering the Holy Land for 40 years to separate them from Musa (Moses) and his brother.
- Musa (Moses) spent 40 days on Mount Sinai where he received the 10 commandments.
- Prophet Ibrahim spent 40 days in a fire and lived because God made the fire like flowers.
- On the 40th verse (ayat) of the 2nd chapter of the Quran (Al-Baqarah) God changes the topic.
- Forty was the number of days that Prophet Ilyas (Elijah) spent in the wilderness before the angel appeared to him with God's message on Mount Horeb.
- Forty was the number of days that Prophet Isa (Jesus) was tempted in the desert by Satan.
- Muhammad prayed and fasted in the cave for 40 days.
- Muhammad then had 40 followers to spread the religion of Islam.
- Prophets Dawuud and Suleiman each ruled for forty years.

- Regarding the flood that Noah encountered, it is said that for forty days water continued to pour from the heavens and to stream out over the earth.
- There is also a hadith from Mohammad that the prayers of a person who gossips would not be accepted for forty days and nights. (Al-Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 400)
- Imam Ali has narrated from Mohammad that one who memorizes and preserves forty hadith relating to their religious needs shall be raised by God as a learned scholar on the Day of Resurrection.
- It is said that a person's intellect attains maturity in forty years, everyone according to one's own capacity.
- It is believed that one who assists a blind man for forty steps becomes worthy of entering heaven.
- Imam Baghir has said: "The prayers of someone who drinks wine are not accepted for forty days."
- Believers have also been encouraged to devote themselves to God Almighty for forty days to see the springs of wisdom break forth from their hearts and flow from their tongues.
- The mourning period officially lasts for 40 days.

Information from the following sources was used in the creation of this article: Credit to Sri Nandanandana Das for the first part of this article (page 2). www.stephen-knapp.com

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.



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