



Pitar Paksha (The Memorial Period for the ancestors)



Pitar aka Pitr (ancestors) Paksha (phase of the moon) or simply “The auspicious period for remembering those who have passed on” is very important and significant in the Hindu culture. The Sanskrit word Pitr embraces God in all His aspects, the earliest sages, and our immediate ancestors to the third generation, and all our departed friends and relatives. In writing this article we hope to enlighten people from all cultures as to why we honour this very auspicious period of 15 days which comes in the dark half phase of the month of Ashwini (September/October), set aside as a Memorial and thanksgiving to the departed souls, who, when on this Earth, made some contribution to make it a better place. We acknowledge our indebtedness to our ancestors in this period. It is an observance accompanied by intense bhakti (devotion) to the Supreme Lord.

This year Pitar Paksha falls between 3rd - 17th September in SOUTH AFRICA.

On 2nd September at 07h21 Pitar Paksha starts and continues until the 17th September (Ends at 00h59).

Do Note:- Sunrise in Durban on the 2nd is at 06h10 and Jhb at 06h19. So when the Sun rises in these two cities, the Tithi (Vedic Lunar day) will still be Full Moon, thus the entire day is observed as Full Moon. So the first offerings of water and the start of Pitar Paksha proper commences the following day (the 3rd) after Sunrise.

***** Offer 1st water oblations (Tarpana) on the morning of the 3rd September after sunrise.**

***** Last water oblations to be offered after sunrise on the 17th September.**

All religions, sects, even tribes follow different observances when a member of the family passes on. The rites are based on certain beliefs and convictions enshrined in religion. One of the cornerstones of Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) is the belief in the eternity of the Atma (Soul). The Atma leaves the body at death but life does not end there but continues after death as Lord Krishna says in Bhagavata Gita 2.20 “For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. The soul is unborn, eternal,

ever existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.”

The final rites after death are called Antyesthi, during which the body is cremated or buried depending on the age of the deceased. The ceremonies performed after the 10th, 12th/13th day followed by the 6th, 12th month, and yearly ceremonies are all called Shraddha. The annual Shraddha performed during Pitr Paksh falls into the same category of rituals.

So many cultures pray to their ancestors like in Sub-Saharan Africa, Red Indians (in North America), the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Koreans, the Christians (Roman Catholic church) in November celebrate all souls day. Christians offer flowers, wreaths, and grave decorations and candles, on graves year-round, as a way to honour their dead. Hispanics, celebrate Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) on or around All Saints Day (1st Nov). During Samhain in Ireland the dead were supposed to return, and food and light were left for them. Lights were left burning all night. They are so many other cultures as well that perform ancestor worship. Due to space we have just but mentioned a few.

But it seems that many Hindus are just embarrassed at performing these prayers or is it due to laziness. This I cannot answer for sure but Hindus should be very proud in performing these sacred prayers. It's just not an Indian thing as some do say.

Especially in South Africa many Hindus observe this very important period for just a few days. Now that's just not right. Now many offer food after three days when they are performing their havan. That's incorrect. Shree Yamaraj-ji releases our ancestors in this period for them to accept food that has been offered to them by their descendents. This memorial period is not just for three days rather it's for 15 days. If a guest comes to your house will you make the guest starve? No! Of course not then why are your ancestors not being fed daily. Remember you do not have to cook 10-15 preparations daily to offer to your ancestors. Whatever you cook for yourself on that day you can offer to your ancestors.

Is Pitar Puja Necessary?:- Some people are of the opinion that Pitar 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 good or bad) of previous lives. After the Sapindi ceremony (the 12th/13th day ceremony performed 12/13 days after the cremation of the deceased), the Pitar 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 ancestors. 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 Gopal who was residing at a certain address at the time when the debt was incurred. Subsequently, Gopal 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 abandon 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, Pitar Puja is a memorial service in which the devotee remembers as well as prays, addressing the departed he says: “O Pitars 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.

How to observe Pitar Paksha:- In this period one should not consume any meat, alcohol and other intoxicants. One must offer food and tarpana (water oblations) to ones ancestors daily during the day light hours. One should not perform weddings, Katha and Jhunda, Sacred thread ceremonies, one cannot move into a new house and sign important papers, start a new job, start a new business venture and so forth. **BUT** one should perform charity, deity worship, daily Sandhya (offering of Surya jal, etc), japa, study of scriptures, fasting like Ekadashi, Agni Hotra (a 10 second havan performed at the junction of sunrise and sunset) and so forth.

How to offer food to your ancestors

Food prepared **MUST FIRST** be offered to Lord Krsna/Raam/Vishnu then that offered food becomes sanctified food (Prashad) and only then must that prashad be offered to the ancestors. By performing it in this way the ancestors bless that family immensely since they are eating Krsna/Raam/Vishnu prashad, which relieves them very quickly, from whatever bad situation they are in. The prashad must be offered in the daylight hours as Shree Yamaraj-ji releases our ancestors at sunrise and they must return to Pitar-Loka (the ancestor world) at sunset. On a tray place a banana leaf. On the banana leaf place a tablespoon of all the food that was cooked. Go to your prayer place and offer the food first to God (Lord Krishna/Raam/Vishnu). Leave the food at the prayer place for about 10 minutes. Thereafter take a little of each of the food and put back into the pot. The food in the pot is now Krishna/Raam/ Vishnu prashad. Now take the tray with the food and go to a corner of your yard facing South in a clean place offer the food together with a small cup of water or milk. Say “all my ancestors please partake in this prashad”. Then leave that food. One should do this for 15 days. On the last day you can either perform a havan or donate charity (whichever suits you and can afford – like 3 three types of grains, fruits, vegetables...) to your family priest or a poor person.

Please note on the **13th September is Indira Ekadashi**. On this day you must only offer your Pitar's Ekadashi (non-grain) food...

Finally many people have emailed me asking what if for example one of their ancestors became a cow, what happens then. Good question. Obviously the cow is not going to come to your house to eat the food that you offered. What happens is that the food (the merits) that you have offered to that ancestor goes to that person or in this case the cow. In the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda II 19. 26-27 Shree Garuda-ji asks: “O Lord Vishnu, things are gifted by the relatives at home in the favour of the deceased. How do they reach the deceased and who receives them?” Lord Vishnu replied “O Garuda, Varuna dev (the deva in charge of the oceans) receives those gifts and hands them over to Me. I give them to Suryadeva, and from Suryadeva the deceased person obtains them” so from the above verse its quite clear whatever you

give on behalf or the food that you offer to you ancestor, the food/gift goes go to that entity in whatever form it is in.

What is Tarpana:- The followers of Sanatan Dharma (Hindus) express their gratitude and devotion by offering oblations of water (Tarpana) in memory of their ancestors. Humans have three types of debts when they are born viz. debt to Lord Krsna and the devas, debt to the Rishis and finally debt to ones departed ancestors. 'Trup' means satisfying others. The word 'Tarpana' has been formed from the root word 'Trup'. Offering water to Lord Krsna, the devas, the Rishi's and one's ancestors one satisfies them immensely and through it is called Tarpana. The objective of performing Tarpana is that Lord Krsna, the devas, the Rishi's and one's ancestors whose names are pronounced while performing Tarpana, should bestow happiness on the performer. The offerings are performed daily for 15 days. For your information we have provided the mantras and procedure on how to perform Tarpana daily during Pitar Paksha.

After taking a bath in the morning one should wear clean fresh clothes. You should try to perform the Tarpana outside by your prayers place. Then in a dish of half filled water add some milk, sugar, honey, a few grains of barley, scent, and flowers petals – mix these items.

Now face east and keep 3 pieces of knotted Kush grass across both palms forming a cup and offer this water every time you chant “trip-ya-taam” in the dish – NOT on the ground.

Offerings to God and the devas:- Please note again that at the end of each mantra i.e. “trip-ya-taam or trip-yan-taam” offer the water into the dish.

Om brahmaa trip-ya-taam

Om vishnus trip-ya-taam

Om rudras trip-ya-taam

Om prajaapati trip-ya-taam

Om devaas trip-yan-taam

Om chandaamsi trip-yan-taam

Om vedaas trip-yan-taam

Om rishiyas trip-yan-taam

Om puraa-naa-caaryaas trip-yan-taam

Om gandharvaas trip-yan-taam

Om devyas trip-yan-taam

Om itaraa-chaar-yaas trip-yan-taam

Om apa-sa-rasas trip-yan-taam

Om devaa-nugaas trip-yan-taam

Om naagaas trip-yan-taam

Om samvat-sarah saavayavas trip-yan-taam

Om saaga-saas trip-yan-taam

Om parvataas trip-yan-taam

Om saritas trip-yan-taam

Om manush-yaas trip-yan-taam

Om yak-shaas trip-yan-taam

Om rakshaansi trip-yan-taam

Om pishaa-chaas trip-yan-taam

Om supar-naas trip-yan-taam

Om bhootaani trip-yan-taam

Om pashavas trip-yan-taam

Om vanas-patyas trip-yan-taam

Om osha dha-yas trip-yan-taam

Om bhoota-graa-mash chatur-vidhas- trip-ya-taam

Then face north and offer water in the name of the Rishis.

Offerings to the Rishis: -

Om mareeshis trip-yan-taam

Om atris trip-yan-taam

Om angiras trip-yan-taam

Om pulast-yas trip-yan-taam

Om pulahas trip-yan-taam

Om kratus trip-yan-taam

Om vasish-thas trip-yan-taam

Om bhrigus trip-yan-taam

Om naaradas trip-yan-taam

Om prachetaas trip yan-taam

Om sanakas trip-yan-taam

Om sanandanas trip-yan-taam

Om sanaatanas trip-yan-taam

Om kapilas trip-yan-taam

Om aasuris trip-yan-taam

Om bodhus trip-yan-taam

Om panchas-hikas trip-yan-taam

Then face south and now add Black til (Sesame seeds) into the water and offer this in the name of the pitrs (ancestors).

Father (Pita) (please note that if your father is still alive then this mantra is skipped.)

Om Asmat Pita (say your father's name) trip-ya-taam

Paternal Grandfather (Aaja)

Om asmat pita-maho (say your Paternal Grandfather's name) trip-ya-taam

Paternal Great Grandfather (Par-Aaja)

Om asmat pra-pita-maha (say your Great Paternal Grandfather's name) trip-ya-taam

Mother (Mata) (please note that if your Mother is still alive then this mantra is skipped.)

Om asman mata (say your Mother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Paternal Grandmother (Aaji)

Om asmat pita-mahi (say your Paternal Grandmother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Paternal Great Grandmother (Par-Aaji)

Om asmat pra-pita-mahi (say your Great Paternal Grandmother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Maternal Grandfather (nana)

Om asman mata-maho (say your Maternal Grandfather's name) trip-ya-taam

Maternal Great Grandfather (Par-Nana)

Om asman pra-mata-maho (say your Great Maternal Grandfather's name) trip-ya-taam

Maternal Great great grandfather (Vridha Nana)

Om asmat Vridha pra-mata-maho (say your Great great Maternal grandfather's name) trip-ya-taam

Maternal Grandmother (Nani)

Om asman mata-mahi (say your Maternal Grandmother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Maternal Great Grandmother (Par-Nani)

Om asmat pra-mata-mahi (say your Great Maternal Grandmother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Maternal Great Great grandmother (Vridha Nani)

Om asmat vridha pra-mata-mahi (say your Great Great Maternal grandmother's name) devi trip-ya-taam

Now for the other family members like your cousins, your friends etc you can chant this mantra.

Om asmat (his/her full name) nam amukee devee trip-ya-taamidam.

Remember that the water is only offered in the dish. Only after all offerings have been completed then the dish of water is dropped on a plant. This can be repeated as many days as one desires in the 15 days.

How to perform your own Pitar Paksha Havan

The Pitar Paksha Havan can be perform inside one's home. The devotee should have a bath and put on clean clothes before proceeding to the puja place. Have all the requirements for the Puja and the havan arranged on a tray. Please have a small bowl of weakish sweet rice (Kheer) and mixed with the Kheer and ghee and black Til. Sit facing East or North.

Wash your hands and then place some water in your right hand and sip water from the palm of the right hand, chant Om Vishnu, wash your hands again and do this two more times...

Say in English "O Lord Krsna on this day (which ever day you are performing the puja), in this month of Ashwina, your name, I am performing my Pitar Paksha Havan.

Then light the fire with a pieces of camphor and place in the havan kund. Place some wood in the kund now. You can add more camphor in the kund. Add some cow dung pieces soaked with ghee in the kund.

Chant the mantra **Om Agni Devtaa bhyo swaahaa**

Offer a Tulsi Twig into the fire. (this is optional).

Offer three lit incense sticks clockwise around the fire.

Offer a clay lamp with a piece of camphor in it. Light it and offer three times clockwise around the fire.

Offer one flower clockwise around the fire.

Now you may commence with the havan. Every time "swaahaa or swaadaa" is chanted offer a little of the Kheer into the fire.

Om Sarasvatayai swaahaa

Om Prajaapataye swaahaa

Om Indraaya swaahaa

Om Agnaye swaahaa

Om Somaaya swaahaa

Om Bhooh swaahaa

Om Bhuvah swaahaa

Om Swah swaahaa

Om Namō Naaraaya-naaya swaahaa

Om Namō Bhagavate Vaasudevaayaa swaahaa

Om Shree Vishnave swaahaa

Om Shree Krishnaaya Govindaaya swaahaa

Om Shree Keshavaaya swaahaa

Om Chitra-guptaaya swaahaa

Om Yam-devaaya swaahaa

Om Pitri devaayaa swadhaa x 9 times

Om Namo Bhagavate pitare bhiyo swadhaa x 9 times

Om Sarva Devee Devebhyo swaahaa x 9 times

Now you offer all the remaining Kheer in the next offering...

Om Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare swaahaa

Offer water three times around the havan kund. Thereafter you should bow down before the fire and then stand up and you can offer Artee to the fire and to your family Deities with a lamp. Your final prayer is to chant the Maha-mantra three times which is as follows (“Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare”) to nullify any mistakes you made while performing this prayer to your Pitr's.

References: Bhagavat Gita, Garuda Purana, Astaang Shraddha Paddhatee

Certain excerpts are taken from the article on “Shraddha” from the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir

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