

Mahalaya Paksham (How Pitar Paksha Started)

(21st September - 6th October 2021)



The dark fortnight of Ashwini Month (21st September - 6th October 2021 in South Africa) is observed as Mahalaya Paksha or the fortnight especially sacred for offering oblations to the departed ancestors. The last day of this period, the new moon day (Amavasya), is considered as the most important day in the year for performing obsequies and rites (or in simple terms offerings to our dearly departed ancestors).

This year it falls on the **6th October**.



Karna – The half Brother of the Pandavas.

In the Puranas there's a katha of an account of how important this period and day really is. The renowned hero of the Mahabharata, Karna (the Pandavas half brother), when he passed on, he ascended to the heavenly planets and the great charity that he had performed in his lifetime was returned to him hundredfold. But, it was all gold and silver; there was no food, as he had not performed any food in charity! He prayed to the Deity of death (Lord Yamaraja). So, he was sent back to earth for one Paksha (fourteen-fifteen Vedic days), to make up for this deficiency. For fourteen days, he fed Brahmins and the poor, and offered oblations of water (tarpan). On his return to the heavenly planets, he had food in plenty. It is these fourteen-fifteen days that are commemorated in the Mahalaya Paksha. Due to the grace of Shree Yamaraja, it has been ordained that offerings made during this period benefit all the departed

souls, whether they are connected to you or not. The offerings reach the ancestors very quickly like an express delivery. This is the boon of Lord Yamaraja.

Charity in the form of food is important during this observance. Life depends upon food. You cannot preach religion to empty stomachs. This human body is the most important vehicle for realizing God. How precious must food be which keeps the body fit for spiritual practices! The gift of food is the greatest gift as Lord Krishna says to Shree Arjuna in the Bhavishya Uttara Purana: "O son of Kunti, all the ancestors and devas in heaven become very satisfied when one gives food grains in charity." Therefore, give food in plenty, not only during the Mahalaya fortnight but also all throughout the year.

Many hold the view that "Ok I will give a loaf of bread in charity but what's in it for me?" Now this sort of mentality is rather sad and unfortunate as "whatever the right hand does the left hand should not know" or i.o.w's do not perform charity with some intention of gaining something. Lord Krsna says in the Bhagavad Gita that this charity is in the mode of total ignorance. Remember that "whatever goes around comes around" and Lord Krsna has seen what you have done and that will not go by unnoticed. Remember that we are all God's children regardless of our beliefs and will you allow your blood sister/brother to starve? Of course not!!! So by feeding the needy this pleases the Supreme Lord immensely and it's something that He will not forget. That you can be rest assured with.

So what can you give on this day: As Lord Krsna said to Shree Arjuna that grains should be given. But you can also give vegetables, fruits, beans, flour, sugar, salt (yes salt this is esp. recommended in the Garuda Purana), etc. I.O.W'S give a little of each (like a hamper) so that the person can cook and feed his/her family for a meal or two.

Who to donate to? You can donate the foodstuff to a poor family or to your family priest.

Most important: Just before donating the charity pray to Lord Raam/Krsna/Vishnu asking Him the benefits that you are going to receive for donating these items to please give that punya-karma (spiritual merits) to all your ancestors.

In the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda II 10.50-55 Lord Vishnu says to Shree Garuda-ji "On the day of Amavasya (new moon day), the airy manes (the ancestors) stand at the door of their descendants in order to receive their food. They remain there till sunset. When they do not receive their food they fall in despair and out of suffering heave long sighs and go back cursing the descendants. Therefore, one should carefully perform shraddha (offer food) to your ancestors on the new moon day (Amavasya) every month. Well why are you hearing this for the first time? Well that's a million dollar question, which I can't answer.

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 Garudaji said: "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 Garudaji, 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.

Finally the few verses below are from the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda on Gifts that one performs in one's lifetime:-

Chapter 13 verse 19 "Whatever gifts are made by one during one's life time, becomes beneficial later"

Chapter 14 verses 4-5 "Anything given to a deserving person flourishes day by day. A gift wipes off the sin of the giver and the acceptance of the same by a person of good wisdom does not affect him."

Chapter 14 verse 6 "Every day something must be given to deserving persons, particularly so on special occasions. If one wishes for one's own wealth, one shall be sane enough not to give anything to the undeserving"

Chapter 14 verse 8 "I affirm that just as seeds and other valuable things invested or sown in the ground offer fruitful results so also things by one's own hands yield fruitful results."

Chapter 14 verse 12 "Therefore, life being unsteady it is incumbent on everyone to do every thing beforehand. With the food for the journey in the form of gifts offered to the deserving, one is able to travel with comfort in the Great Highway in the journey after death. Otherwise, the wretch undergoes great hardships without food to subsist on, on the way."

Chapter 20 verse 8 "Those who have offered gifts in their lifetime should not entertain any fear from Dharmaraja"

Chapter 20 verse 9 "Yamaraj moves from his seat as soon as he sees a holy man."

Chapter 20 verse 10 "Virtue can easily be procured by offering gifts. The path to Yama's region can easily be traversed by acts of charity. This highway cannot be easily covered otherwise."

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