

Suggested Guidelines on what to do Before Death, Upon Death to Disposing of the Ashes.

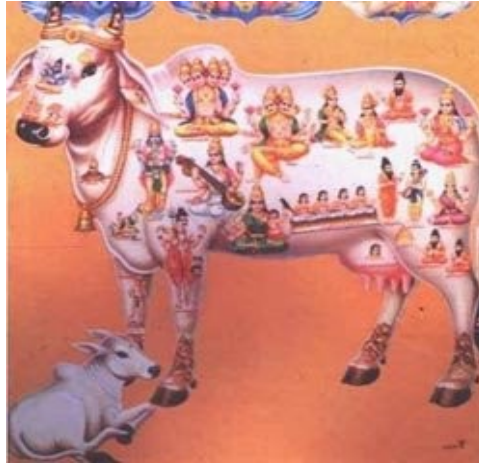
The following article is merely a guide, it is not intended as an "in your face" dogmatic presentation, but rather a presentation of shastric facts to help individuals deal appropriately with the fact of the death of a loved one and understand and apply the guidelines of the ancient Vedic scriptures to their/our lives in modern times. Obviously various gaunas/traditions differ with these guidelines, and according to the family lineage, gotras, caste, or sampradaya these may differ slightly. Many challenges, burdens, or in-appropriations occur or are invoked upon families, societies, communities, as well as individuals within them due to not knowing what to do. Especially in the fallen age (Kali yuga) where religious principles and inclination have reached an all time low, or disinterest, due to misrepresentation and deviation of the clergy (in practically all religions) so much has been lost. The clergy (head) becomes deviated and the rest of the body cannot help but follow suit.

With the onslaught of enticements (belittlement and misrepresentation of Vedic culture) from the colonialists to give up the Vedic way of life and adopt western ideals of pursuing material temporal bodily pleasures as the ultimate goal in life, and think of this life to be all in all. As a result of such powerful propaganda there is now a lacking for proper guidance as to what to do, and what to avoid. Lusty mundane liberalistic academics, and other unqualified persons now guide the people through what they call the "Education System" which saintly Vaishnavas refer to as the slaughter house of youth.

So I have been asked so many times over the years about what happens before, during and after a person dies. We Hindus generally observe many rites throughout our lives that we plan well in advance and with plenty of guidance is available. However in this age of rapid changes and urban living and the breakdown of the extended family, most Hindus are ignorant of the customs associated with death. The Antyesthi Samskara (the last of the 16 main samskaras) is extremely important and when death comes so suddenly, many people are totally unaware of or even know what has to be done. In South Africa we have too many so call "family experts" giving their views and thus causing even more confusion. The Garuda Purana is the Authoritative Text on Death, dying and the post mortem rituals. The following is the gist of what should be done on the death of a loved one. This article is aimed to satisfy the thirst for knowledge that many Hindus have. Jai Hind.

Way before a person passes on the first thing I would advise is to perform the Go-daan Puja. This puja must be performed when one is fit and healthy and young as well.

Go-Daan Puja: 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 people are under the impression that this prayer is only performed when one is about to pass on. This is a great misunderstanding. This prayer should be done when one is fit and in a healthy mind.



From the 47th chapter of the Preta Khanda in the Garuda Purana "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."

This is what Lord Vishnu advises to donate "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." (Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 4 verses 7-8, 14).

Upon dying at home - or in a hospital: When a person is close to death the family members should inform the family priest or find and appoint a priest who will direct and conduct the final rites. Begin the chanting of the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram or continuously play a CD of the same within the hearing of the dying one. If the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram cannot be recited then any name of God should be recited or played. Other types of prayers or bhajans can also be sung. When it is seen that death is very near – pour a few spoons of Ganges water/Tulasi water into the mouth either at the time of death or soon after a person is dead.

It will be very auspicious that this mantra "Om Shree Krishna Sharanam mama" be recited three times in the ears of the dying person. If this can't be done then it's fine try your best. This is not possible most of the times. While it is very auspicious for a person to die on Mother Earth herself this is generally not possible. But some black Til (Sesame Seeds) should be sprinkled around the person and a few strands of Darbha (Kush) grass is placed underneath the bed/mattress. A sesame oil lamp (with one wick only) and a single agarbatti (Incense) are lit and kept near the head of the corpse. A photograph of deceased family's favourite deity may also be placed at the head side...



Upon death taking place: When it is ascertained that life has departed from the body, the eldest son or a designated person should take a bath. Daughters may be appointed by the dying person to perform their rites. When a person is pronounced dead by the doctor, one needs to obtain the death certificate from the appropriate authorities. Thereafter contact and consult with your family priest to determine whether death occurred during an auspicious or in inauspicious times such as Panchak, Dwi-pushkar or Tri-pushkar. He/she will kindly advise you accordingly. Generally due to circumstances beyond our control most funerals are performed the next day to a few days after the death of a person.

PANCHAK TIMES FOR 2022.
(The Inauspicious Period To Pass On In)

In Hinduism death is not treated as the end of life rather it is treated as a moment when the 'Atma' or 'soul' after leaving the present body will starts its journey either for reincarnation in some new form or for 'Moksha' (final emancipation).

Panchak dates are based upon astrological calculations so when a person passes on the first thing that you should check is what time the deceased passed on. Panchak is a very inauspicious time for a person to die in. Panchak is a combination of 5 Nakshatras (asterisms/stars) viz. (Dhanishta, Shatabhisha, Poorva Bhaadrapada, Uttara Bhaadrapada and Revati). The Garuda Purana II. 4 180 states "Cremations are harmless in this period if the Vedic injunctions are strictly observed".

For example on **5th January 2022 @ 16h23m23**, panchak commences and ends on **10th January @ 05h19m06**. If a person dies within this time then the pundit/priest has to perform a Panchak Shanti puja which takes like a few minutes to perform in the antechamber of the crematorium. Please, please make sure that the priest performs this prayer. I am not going to scare you but if this prayer is not performed then many

lives (generally) 5 lives will be lost within the family within that one year. Many Hindu's take Panchak lightly and when problems arise then the family is put through so much of hardship when it could have been avoided. If the deceased died on Panchak then on the funeral day please **INSIST** on the Panchak Shanti puja if the priest doesn't want to perform it. You rather delay the funeral then having problems later on. Those that know me well know I don't like to scare people but in these cases I am dead (no pun intended) serious. Don't mess the with the dead.

DO NOTE: All times indicated below, associated with the start or end of a particular day are in 24-hour format.

05 to 10 January

Starts: 16:23:23, Ends: 05:19:06

02 to 06 February

Starts: 03:14:48, Ends: 13:39:28

01 to 05 March

Starts: 13:01:12, Ends: 22:58:47

28 March to 02 Apr April

Starts: 20:24:20, Ends: 07:50:44

25 to 29 April

Starts: 01:59:20, Ends: 15:12:19

22 to 26 May

Starts: 07:42:01, Ends: 21:08:12

18 to 23 June

Starts: 15:12:42, Ends: 02:44:06

16 to 20 July

Starts: 00:46:49, Ends: 09:20:16

12 to 16 August

Starts: 11:19:03, Ends: 17:36:21

08 to 13 September

Starts: 21:09:00, Ends: 03:05:39

06 to 10 October

Starts: 04:57:32, Ends: 12:31:37

02 to 06 November

Starts: 10:45:57, Ends: 20:33:44

29 November to 04 December

Starts: 16:21:05, Ends: 02:46:06

27 to 31 December

Starts: 00:00:28, Ends: 08:16:38

With regards to Panchak there are specific instructions given in our scriptures esp. the Garuda Purana (Preta Khand Chapter 10) that are to be performed upon the dead body just before cremation. Five Putale's (forms) made from Kusha grass are to be placed, accompanied by Mantras chanted by the presiding Pundit, the first on the head, the second and third one on each side of the stomach, the fourth on the navel and the fifth and last one between the feet of the deceased. Then the Claimant offers 5 offerings of ghee into the fire for the 5 Nakshatras to appease them.

PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT THE FUNERAL DOES NOT TAKE PLACE ON EKADASHI. THIS MUST TAKE PLACE THE NEXT DAY. THIS IS OF EXTREME IMPORTANCE.

Ekadashi Dates for 2022 (South Africa).

January : 13, 28
February : 12, 27
March : 14, 28
April : 12, 26
May : 12, 26
June : 10, 24
July : 10, 24
August : 8, 22
September : 6, 21
October : 6, 21
November : 4, 20
December : 3, 19

In conjunction with consulting with your family priest, the funeral parlour/director should be contacted and make arrangements for collecting the body and booking the crematorium. Since the coffin is to be burned – it is prudent to get the cheapest and most simple coffin available. No one will be in the mood to discuss the price of the coffin but one should not pay more than necessary.

Preparing the body: The funeral director/s then collect the corpse and take the body for washing and dressing. Most funeral directors in South Africa will accommodate the family who wishes to wash the body themselves. The family members who can should assist in this service and not leave it to strangers to do it. Close relatives rub oil and bath powder on the head of the dead person before it is bathed. Males and widows should suggestedly be dressed in white. Married women and girls should suggestedly be dressed in coloured garments. The big toes are tied together with a piece of string. For men and widows either Vibhuti or chandan is used to decorate the forehead. For females the turmeric powder and kum-kum are used and if it a female deceased then her maang (middle path of her head) should be lined with Sindhur. A garland of flowers and Tulsi leaves should be worn around the neck. A small gold piece should be put in between the lips and front teeth. The whole procedure should suggestedly be done without commotion and weeping and with dignity.

Customs to be observed at the Home: In South Africa generally the body is taken back to the deceased home for viewing at an appropriate time. If possible sweep the place where the coffin is going to be and smear the place with Cow dung and strewn the place with Kush grass and black sesame seeds as well. When the body is brought back to the home it should be brought in head-first and placed on a stand with the deceased head pointing in the North Direction. Light a ghee lamp with sesame seeds in it and keep a small bucket of water under the coffin as well as light a few incense. This must be placed underneath in the North end of the coffin. While the family members and friends sit around the coffin bhajans should be sung and members can read from the Bhagavad Gita, Garuda Purana, Ramayan, Srimad Bhagavatam and other shastras... In the meantime while this is going on the designated person to perform the last rites should shave his head, beard and moustache. Some leave a tuft of hair. As time is going by many are not shaving their head etc we cannot force a person - it's left to the individual. He should wear white shorts and t-shirt. While performing the rites he should wear a jeneo (Brahmin thread) over his right shoulder, if he is not a Brahmin then use a towel.

Ajamila just passed on.
The Yamadutas on the right and the
Vishnudutas on the left



Do note that there is no scriptural injunctions that if the deceased was a man then the widow is made to use her late husbands finger to remove the red Sindhoor from her maang. This is not in our shastras and MUST BE STOPPED.

The body is kept at home for as long as the family desires, generally its about for two hours or so to allow for people to gather and pay their last respects. Just before the body is to be taken to the crematorium the family priest together with the Yajman performs the Shraddha rites. Preliminary prayers are performed and then 6 pindas (rice balls) in total are to be offered on the body. Three are offered at home and three at the crematorium. By gifting and offering these 6 pindas the body achieves sanctity and eligibility to be sacrificed into the fire.



A PINDA

After the Pindas are offered more mantras are chanted and then Shanti Paath Mantras are chanted and then the family and crowd then pays their final respects before the body leaves for the crematorium. The coffin is taken out of the house with the feet first. The lamp is put off and the bucket of water is dropped by the hearse.

The coffin is placed in the hearse and driven to the crematorium. Two persons should accompany the body; the Claimant who performs the rites and another who could be an elder in the family. Those that remain at home will cleanse the house by sprinkling some water with Hurdi and salt in it and then smoking the house with some lobhaan. Those that are at home take a bath and wear clean clothes. All the bedding on which the body was lying must be washed.

At the crematorium, the coffin is carried from the vehicle to the platform where it is placed. Many priests offer the 4th Pinda which will be on the right knee of the deceased while some offer this in the ante chamber. Many still follow the tradition of placing the coffin on the ground and lifting it up 5 times. This is symbolic as it bids farewell to each of the five elements of which the body comprises of (earth, water, fire, air and ether) prior to consecrating the remains in the fire. But this is traditional. My take of this is that in India there was no hearses hence they had to carry the coffin to the cremation grounds to be cremated. Now carrying a coffin for a few minutes can be very strenuous so after a little while the 6 men that carried the coffin placed it on the ground and the next 6 men carried the coffin. They did this 5 times and this tradition carried over in South Africa. So this is the logic behind the whole "manzil" act.

After placing the coffin on the platform with its feet to the south (if possible), the performer of the funeral rites should sit, along with the other mourners, facing the south. Final speeches are read and then its time for the body to enter the ante-chamber. Once in the ante chamber the final prayers are performed. The claimant performs sankalpa and then offers 2 more Pindas. Then havan is performed. Here Kravyaada Agni - the flesh devouring fire deva is invoked into the havan kund and thus worshipped. Its in this fire that the body will be consumed. Offerings of samaghree and ghee are offered into the fire. Then the last pinda is offered in the right hand of the deceased. This is a very important step as stated in Garuda Purana Preta Kand Chapter 10 verse 2. Lord Vishnu said to Shree Garudaji "The corpse is placed on the pyre and 2 pindas are offered, from the time the pinda is placed in the right hand of the corpse the departed soul assumes the name of Preta (Spirit) until the Sapindi (12/13th days prayers) is concluded." So on the calculation of the number of days for carrying out the rituals is based on the time of cremation when the last Pinda is placed in the right hand of the deceased.

If the deceased passed on in the inauspicious time of Panchak then this special ritual is performed now. This extremely important ritual **MUST** be performed - its compulsory. Failing to do so results in 5 deaths of family members within one year. So before hand one should make 5 Putale (figurines/forms) with Kusha Grass smeared with flour paste. These are placed on the body as the Pundit chants the specific mantras as follows. Place one on the head, one on each side of the stomach, one on the navel and the last one between the feet of the body. Then havan is performed for the 5 inauspicious Nakshatras... This ritual just takes less than 5 minutes but its so, so important.

Then a stick with a cloth attached on the top of the stick is then lit from the havan fire. The Yajman then circumambulate the corpse - clockwise - 7 times - starting at the head with other family members following behind him. Each time the yajman completes a round he should touch the head with the burning stick. Another family member has 7 sandalwood sticks with him for each round he should place one stick in the coffin. Mantras are chanted by the Pundit from the Varaha Purana.

Then just when the body is about to be pushed into the incinerator mantras are chanted from the Isopanishad. Then Til and Tulsi twigs are scattered all over the body. Three pieces of camphor are placed on the body and the Claimant then lights all three camphors and then the contents of the havan kund are emptied into the coffin and the coffin is then pushed into the furnace while auspicious mantras are chanted by the Pundit.

Post Cremation Rites

After leaving the ante-chamber just outside the ante-chamber the Claimant then performs Tilanjali. The claimant 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.



Whatever things that were brought from home should be left behind or discarded and are not to be taken back home. Keep the place clean.

I would request the Pundit stay back and wait for the ashes. It's the right thing to do. He/She should stay back and counsel the family and answer any questions they may have... and if the Pundit does this the family will never forget that he/she was there for them in their time of need.

The ashes generally is ready within two hours. The Pundit and the family members go back into the antechamber to collect the ashes. A 2m white cloth folded in half is placed on the floor and a clay pot is placed in the middle. Here the ashes is emptied in the clay pot. Then milk and water is sprinkled on the ashes to cool it down. A camphor is lit and place on top of the clay pot lid. The Claimant with his family then circumambulates the clay pot three times. This is all done while the Pundit chants a mantra.

Disposing of the ashes. The Pundit and Claimant and his family now proceed to a local river, sea or I would highly recommend if you are in Durban - The Shivananda Ghat. As the Pundit chants a mantra the ashes is disposed into the river, sea or Ghat. The family then returns home.

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 ARE THE RULES OF ASAUCHAM TO BE OBSERVED BY THOSE ATTENDING A FUNERAL?

All those who attend a funeral or touch a corpse are considered as impure until they take a bath and wash the clothes that they wore to the funeral. One should bathe in the tank near the crematorium which is there for this purpose or they should bathe in the sea which is generally not practical in South Africa so one should return to one's home and take a bath. The mourners should at least sprinkle water mixed with turmeric over themselves, before entering the house and taking bath. They should never enter a temple or even salute the Deity while in the state of asaucham!

When the family members return from the river/sea/ghat after disposing the ashes, they stand by the entrance of the yard and they are cleansed by washing their hands firstly and then touching the following times which are for purification. These are the following items: - touch water, fire and iron (or a metal) with syringaberry leaves and sprinkle this over yourself three times and then sprinkle a little water on yourself. After this ritual they enter the house and take a bath and wear clean clothes.

A verse to ponder on as a conclusion to this part of the article.

These are the final mantras chanted before the body enters the incinerator

Sri Isopanishad Sholka (Verse) 17

vayur anilam amritam

athedam bhasmantam shariram

om krato smara kritam smara

krato smara kritam smara

TRANSLATION

Let this temporary body be burnt to ashes, and let the air of life be merged with the totality of air. Now, O my Lord, please remember all my sacrifices, and because You are the ultimate beneficiary, please remember all that I have done for You.

We shall stop here with regards to this article. The next article is called What's the procedures during the 12/13th days after the cremation of a deceased. This article continues from this current article.

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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 Shree Radha Krsna.

Compiled for the upliftment of Sanatan Dharma

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