

## **F.A.Q'S during Pitar Paksha**

Prem Namaste, Vanakkum, Hare Krsna, Jai Shree Krsna, Jai Shree Raam  
All glories to the wonderful servants of the Supreme Lord.  
All glories to one's wonderful ancestors.



Once again we come to a very auspicious time in the year. This period is called Pitar aka Pitr/Pitri Paksha [“The auspicious period for remembering those who have passed on”](#).

Every year so much confusion reign on the **DO'S and DON'TS** in this period. We in our quest to make life uncomplicated for all humankind decided to compile an article on the Most Frequently Asked Questions during Pitar Paksha. We hope that this article does bring some sort of sanity in this period. Due to the volume of Questions that we have received we are going to answer the Questions as brief as possible so that we can answer as many questions as possible. Lastly many perform prayers due to tradition and fear. While we respect our ancestors in what they did we are very forthright in following our scriptures. If its not is our Vedic shastras we just don't follow. If this does offend you please do delete this mail. As always we always prefer quoting from the Srimad Bhagavatam Maha Purana, which is the summum bonum and the final verdict of all Vedic shastras and the Garuda Purana.

**Question:** What is the significance of Pitar Paksha?

**Answer:** 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. Pitr Paksha 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.

Question: Is there any proof in Hindu Shastras that Pitr Paksha prayers must be performed in this period?

Answer: There is much proof in Vedic shastras but we shall quote just two. In the Srimad Bhagavatam 7.14.19 Srila Vyasadeva said to Narada Muni. "During the dark fortnight of the month Ashvina [September -October] one should offer oblations to the ancestors as far as they can afford it". Secondly "A brahmana who is sufficiently rich must offer oblations to the forefathers during the dark-moon fortnight in the latter part of the month of Bhadra. Similarly, he should offer oblations to the relatives of the forefathers during the Mahalaya ceremonies in the month of Ashvina. (Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Srimad Bhagavatam 7:14:19.)

Question: Can we offer meat, alcohol and cigarettes when we perform our Pitr Paksha prayers. We have been doing it this way for as long as I can remember because my grandparents used to eat meat, drink alcohol and smoke. Is this correct?

Answer: Before one offers food to ones ancestors one must offer the food to Lord Vishnu which then becomes Vishnu prasad and then a portion of that food is offered to one's ancestors... Now ask yourself would it be correct to offer meat, cigarettes and alcohol to Lord Vishnu ...OF COURSE NOT. It's a very great sin to offer any un-sattvic foods (e.g. Meat and any type of intoxicants) to one's ancestors. The following three verses are proof in Vedic shastras.

"It is Dharma that in the Shradha feast one should never offer meat nor should one eat meat. Only vegetarian food must be offered because meat is obtained by killing". (Srimad Bhagavatam 7.15.7).

"Vegetarian food prepared with pure butter, milk, sugar and curd, etc. are most pleasing to the Pitrs (Ancestors)". (Matsya Purana 17.30).

"Cow's milk, honey and the sweet pudding made of milk and rice and sugar with dry nuts satisfies the Pitrs (Ancestors)". (Matsya Purana 17.36)

Question: Why during this period, prayers like Katha and Jhanda, weddings, moving into a new house etc are NOT performed?

Answer: This is a period set-aside for our ancestors...a thanksgiving period. 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), lighting of your Lakshmi Lamp, japa, study of scriptures, fasting like Ekadashi, Agni Hotra (a 10 second havan performed at the junction of sunrise and sunset) and so forth.

Question: Some Hindus say that if you don't take out food for your own ancestors in Pitr Paksha then one should not go to someone else's home help them to prepare for the food or even to eat the food prepared because you didn't perform your prayers first. Is this backed by our shastras?

Answer: This is a fabrication and it's not shastric based and thus not followed... if one goes to a person house and don't partake in the food that is offered to the Lord

then that person is committing a grave offense because he/she is refusing prasad (offered food) and we know from the Satya Narayana katha about the katha of King Tungadhwaaja on how he lost everything by refusing prasad offered to him... So to answer your Question yes we can eat ...

Question: I'm a working class woman and I arrive home around sunset and it's rather difficult to offer the food before sunset. What do I do in this case?

Answer: You can offer your food to your ancestors anytime in the daylight hours. Which means that you can offer the food in the morning as well. One does not have to prepare elaborate preparations rather one can just make sweet rice which takes a few minutes to prepare. And if that's difficult then cut a few fruits and offer that.

Question: Why do we perform tarpana (water oblations) in this period to our ancestors?

Answer: 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 Rishis 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 Rishis and one's ancestors whose names are pronounced while performing Tarpana, should bestow happiness on the performer.

Question: If I were observing any vrat, would I stop it during Pitr Paksh. For e.g. if I was observing prayers that involved fasting on Saturday for Lord Shani, or a Lakshmi Vrat on Fridays and so forth?

Answer: If one has already started a fast like a 9 Saturday fast then one can continue with that fast because it has already been started. The same goes for one who is performing a Lakshmi Vrat. But remember that one cannot commence a vrat or fast in Pitr Paksha.

Question: Can I light my Lakshmi lamp in this period?

Answer: Yes absolutely you can light your Lakshmi lamp... Why do people switch on their lights at home? It's the same thing. The lamp is there to remove darkness from one's life. As well as one is asking Mother Lakshmi for Her divine blessings.

Question: What happens if a baby is born during Pitr Paksh and a family has not done their Pitr Paksh rituals yet? Do you stop the offerings because of this Ashucha period?

Answer: Pitr Paksha is also devotional service to Lord Vishnu. And Lord Vishnu prayers are never stopped. So yes the family can still offer water and food. Only the mother cannot perform any puja as such because she is still in her confinement period etc. But she need not worry as whatever her husband does half of his spiritual merits goes to her. But remember excluding the mother, the father and the family still continue with the Pitr Paksha prayers. This is proof from the Garuda Purana. Preta Kanda Chapter 29 verses 9, 11&12 "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 parents 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.

Question: What type of fast does one perform during this period, what should I abstain from?

Answer: One should abstain from MEAT and intoxicants. It's rather strange for me to say this because all humans are supposed to be vegetarian. One can have salt based foods in this period.

Question: Currently I reside in a flat so it's not possible for me to offer the water or any food outside. Is there any other way that I can observe this fast?

Answer: Now this situation is time, place and circumstances, if you live in a flat and if you have a balcony then you can offer the food on the balcony. If you don't have a balcony then offer the food and tarpana in one corner of the apartment facing the south direction. You must offer food to your ancestors for entire period. On the last day a havan is performed (optional) and food offered into the fire but I highly recommend performing charity.

Question: My dad's sister-in-law passed away last December and all the poojas up to the six months was performed. My question is that, can the pundit perform the havan & especially the PINDAS for Pitr Paksha @ my mum's house during their offering, although the one year ceremony was not done as yet?

Answer: Yes absolutely that's correct. To perform any shraddha pujas (like Pitr paksha pujas, 6<sup>th</sup> and 11 ½ month pujas, and so forth) is highly recommended in this period...

Question: Do we have to observe this fasting period for the fortnight?

Answer: Yes this period is not for only three days rather it's a period of a fortnight. If one performs it for 3 or so days then one rather not observe this period. Especially in South Africa many Hindus observe this very important period for just a few days. Now that is incorrect. 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 a fortnight. 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.

Question: I was advised that we do not need to perform Pitr Paksha this year as we have already performed ceremonies this year due to death in the family. I do not agree with this advice and I still wish to perform Pitr Paksha. Please help.

Answer: The advice given was indeed incorrect. One must perform Pitr Paksha puja regardless of a death in family. By performing the Pitr Paksha puja the deceased comes in the form a Pitr in Pitr Paksha to honour the prashad and thus very beneficial for the deceased... Please do observe this period.

Question: My father-in-law is late but my mother-in-law is alive and she is the head of the family. Previously we would all perform the Pitr paksha puja at her house, offer our tarpana at her house in the morning of the prayer, assist in the preparation of sattvic food etc and offer puja. But now my mother-in-law has suggested that her sons each do the prayer separately in their own homes, is this okay - considering that she is the elder in the family and still alive?

Answer: Yes she is correct. Once one leaves one's parents home and stay by oneself then I would humbly advise to perform their Tarpana and offer food at their own home.

Question: Can I perform Pitr Paksh for my parents, even though I am married and follow the "kool/Kul" (Family Linage) of my in-laws?

Answer: Yes absolutely... I even offer tarpana and food to my late friends etc... the more people you offer to the more blessings you receive.

Question: Who observes Pitr Paksha? (Hinduism, north, south... etc)?

Answer: Well all Hindus (Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, and Gujarati) etc speaking people should be observing this important period. It's due to ignorance and misunderstanding that it has become a prayer only for the "Hindi speaking people" and this makes me very sad. We should be congregating and not segregating.

Question: What is the main food to be offered? (Some of us cook lots and lots of food)

Answer: Food must be offered daily for the fortnight. And what ever you cook (of course only vegetarian food) you can offer. There is no special food that is cooked but do cook what your ancestors liked excluding the meat etc. Please don't cook like 10 curries prepare a few curries but cook them well and with love and devotion.

Question: Can females offer water and partake in the prayer and eat the prayed food?

Answer: Yes absolutely. Prashad (offered food) is not rubber stamped ONLY FOR MEN. Prashad is mercy and blessings from the Lord and is available to all humankind regardless of their sex, colour and creed...

Question: Why we use Til (sesame seeds), Jaw/Jau (Barley seeds) and Kush grass (a.k.a Darbha/koos/kusha/darbhe)?

Answer: This is stated in the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda chapter 29 verses 15-17 "Sesame seeds originate from My sweat and hence holy. Asuras, Danavas and Daityas flee from the place where gingelly (Til/Sesame) seeds are kept. Gingelly seeds, white, black and brown destroy sins committed by the body. One gingelly seed offered in the holy rite is on a par with a gift of a drona (basin) measure of golden gingelly seeds. Gingelly seeds offered in tarpana and homa have an everlasting benefit."

Verses 18-19 "Darbha (kush) grass is born of My hair and the gingelly seeds originate from My sweat, not otherwise.

Verses 20 "Brahma is stationed at the root of the Darbha grass. Keshava is stationed in the middle and know that Shankara is stationed at the tip of the Darbha grass. Thus, the three Deities are stationed in the Darbha grass."

Verse 121 “Performing all rites with concentrated mind he should give water, rice and barley”.

Ch15 verse 64 “Barley-meal, boiled rice, fruits, etc one should partake”

Question: Can we donate salt in charity?

Answer: This is stated in the Garuda Purana Ch 2 verse 30-32 “Salt has come out from the body of Lord Vishnu”. “Salt is very effective for the destruction of sins”. Garuda Purana Ch 29 verse 30-33 “Salt is on par with everything divine. It yields everything the person wishes for himself. No dish tastes sweet without salt. Hence, salt is the favourite with the ancestors. The gift of salt leads them to heaven. Salt originated from the body of Vishnu. Hence, yogins praise a gift of salt. Whenever a person is on their deathbed, salt should be given as a gift. It opens the door way to heaven.” Hmmmm this is rather contradictory to what Indians generally believe “Oh I can’t donate salt all my luck will disappear”. Can you see how blindly we have followed over the years? So please from now believe and have faith in the words of Lord Vishnu and donate salt freely.

Question: Can we offer food in the fire/havan kund?

Answer: Yes in the Srimad Bhagavatam 3.6.30 the great Rishi Maitreya says “Agni-dev is the mouth of the Lord and if food is offered into the fire then the Lord consumes the food first and then that food becomes prasadam, which serves as an antiseptic to ward off the difficulties of this age (Kali Yuga)”. Please remember that all the Devi’s and Deva’s including Lord Vishnu eats via the mouth of Lord Agni. The sacrifices made to Agni-dev go to the devas because Agni-dev is a messenger to and from the other devas.

Question: If a widow has only daughters can they take out the food?

Answer: Yes that is quite fine - male or female can offer food and Tarpana, as long as it’s offered. Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma) is not a sexist religion.

Question: If a girls parents are late and she has no brothers who does Pitir paksha for them?

Answer: The girl/daughter performs the pujas. Even if she is married when tarpana (offering of water) is performed she should take her parents names.

Question: Is it true that Lord Raam and Mother Sita performed Shraddha puja?

Answer: Yes in the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 10.31-51 this is stated: - “O Garudaji, I shall tell you how once Sita saw in the body of a brahmana the ancestors, her father-in-law, grandfather-in-law and her great-grand-father-in-law. At the behest of his father, Rama went to the forest. When he reached Pushkara, the holy center, together with his consort Sita he performed Shraddha with the ripe fruits Sita collected from the trees. When the sun reached the middle of the sky the sages who had been invited by Rama presented themselves. When Sita saw the sages she was extremely delighted. By the instructions of Rama she served them with the food. Then, all of a sudden, she got away from among the brahmanas. Covering herself behind the bushes she hid herself. Then having learnt that Sita had gone all-alone, Rama was anxious and lost in thought. He wondered why she had gone away so soon without feasting the brahmanas. He thought to himself “Maybe she felt shy, I shall search for her.” Thinking this way He himself feasted the brahmanas. When the brahmanas went away Sita

returned. Then Lord Rama spoke to her: “ Why did you leave when the sages came here to the forest. Let me know the reason of your abrupt departure” then addressed by the Lord, Sita stood with her face cast down. With tears flowing down from her eyes she spoke thus to her Lord. “Lord, hear, I saw a wonder here. I saw your father, in front of the brahmanas dressed in royal costume. I saw two elderly folk donning the similar garb. On seeing your father I moved away from his presence. Attired in bark and hide, how could I serve him with food? How could I offer him food in a vessel of grass in which even slaves would not eat from? How could I, full of perspiration and dirt, go before him knowing that he had never seen me before in that miserable state? I felt shy and moved away from his presence, O Rama.” Thus, O Garuda I have told you how Sita saw the ancestors.

Question: Did Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu perform Shraddha (Pinda) puja?

Answer: Yes Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu who is the embodiment of Shree Radha and Krsna did perform shraddha puja and this is confirmed in the Caitanya Caritamrita Adi Lila Chapter 17 verse 8... “Thereafter the Lord went to Gaya. There He met Srila Ishvara Puri.” Purport by Srila Prabhupada “Shree Caitanya Mahaprabhu went to Gaya to offer respectful oblations to His forefathers. This process is called pinda-dana. In Vedic society, after the death of a relative, especially one's father or mother, one must go to Gaya and there offer oblations to the lotus feet of Lord Visnu. Therefore hundreds and thousands of men gather in Gaya daily to offer such oblations, or Shraddha. Following this principle, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu also went there to offer pinda to His dead father. Fortunately He met Ishvara Puri there.”

Question: Are we allowed to perform our daily offering of jal (water) to Lord Surya (Sun)?

Answer: YES

Question: Can one celebrate one's birthday in this time?

Answer: Yes this is fine. Of course with the orthodox older folks this will not be kosher but try to explain to a little child “O baby so sorry I can't celebrate your birthday because it's Pitr Paksha”. This child will grow up to hate Pitr Paksha. Please people we have to move with the times.

Question: How certain are we that the food that we offer goes to our ancestors?

Answer: In the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 19. 26-27 Shree Garud-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 Suryadev, and from Suryadev 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 ancestors, the food/gift goes to that entity in whatever form it is in.

**Question:** My in-laws are doing the fast only until this Sunday, I know that this is wrong and I have printed out the information that you sent me and given it to them, but they are still doing it the way they think is correct. Can you please advice?

**Answer:** It's rather sad when we have shastric proof and yet many will still be stuck with their orthodox beliefs. Well this is mainly due to fear. This is the reason why I am targeting the younger generation rather than the older orthodox folks. Naturally to the primitive mind any sophisticated and advanced knowledge would be indistinguishable from the masses and be naturally scorned upon. We have to evolve as Hindus and not be stuck in the past otherwise in 2020 the only Hindu will be in a museum.

**Question:** At my in-laws house after they offer all the food to the Pitr's, they perform havan of which only the males are allowed to partake, is this correct?

**Answer:** This is absolutely nonsense and not backed by our amazing shastras. A family that prays together stays together. When are we going to learn that prayers are not rubber stamped ONLY FOR MEN TO PERFORM? Prayers are meant for all humanity to perform regardless of sex, colour or creed.

**Question:** During this time, if it is that time of the month for us females are we allowed or not allowed to prepare the food, offer the water or part-take in the prayer performed.

**Answer:** Well this is an age-old question. Strictly speaking when a female has her menses she should not perform all these prayers. But again we are living in an age where circumstances force us to do things that was not previously done. I surely don't have a problem with it if the circumstances permit it. I would rather have a female in her menses performing the puja than a male who is drunk or not in his senses performing these important prayers.

**Question:** My in-laws are still living. My husband and I are observing Pitr Paksh with them. I would like to know if we must also offer water daily or do my in-laws only offer water?

**Answer:** Both your in laws, your husband and your self must offer tarpana daily.

**Question:** Is there no other way to do the final once off prayer for the departed ancestors, instead of doing this Pitr Paksha prayers every year?

**Answer:** NO. The Pitr prayers are performed yearly and not once off. A question I would like to ask you. Ask your doctor for a once off injection that will not make you sick again. I am quite certain there is no such medication or injection. Yearly we have to visit the doctor for constant medication so in Pitr Paksha we feed our ancestors in this time until next year. And finally we have three debts to pay viz. debt to Lord Krsna and the devas, debt to the Rishis and finally debt to ones departed ancestors. It's an on going process.

**Question:** How do we dispose of the Pitr's Prasad after it has been offered to them?

**Answer:** According to the Bhagavad Gita, "Bhuta Yajna" is an important part of charity and if placed outside (which in this case for your Pitr's. Your Pitr's eat this food ethereally – thro smell.) After your Pitr's eat the food it cannot be consumed by humans and thus Ants, Insects, Dogs and Birds and other creatures enjoy eating this food. Sastras call this Panch Bali (5 types of creatures we should



feed). Its extremely auspicious if any life forms (Vedic sastras state there are 8,400,000 species of life forms) consume the Prashad. But if the food still hasn't been eaten then you can dispose of the remnants in a local river or if that is a bit difficult then dig a hole in your yard and bury the prashad.

Question: Are we allowed to visit family and friends during this time?

Answer: YES

Question: Can a female perform shraddha puja's (for example Pitr prayers, 6<sup>th</sup> month, 11½ month etc)?

Answer: The daughter, wife, mother and daughter-in-law of the deceased person have the authority to perform Shraddha. In spite of this, in the current era, some who conduct the Shraddha puja deny their consent for females to perform Shraddha. In emergency conditions, however, if no one is available for performing Shraddha, then it is better for it to be performed by females instead of not performing it at all. This is collaborated in the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 8.3 Lord Vishnu replied to Shree Garuda-ji: " If both families are maleless, the women should perform the obsequies".

\*\*\*Certain excerpts are taken from the article on "Shraddha" from the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir\*\*\*

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