



श्री लक्ष्मी नारायण मन्दिर

Shri Luxmi Narayan Temple

An organisation dedicated to the dissemination of the teachings and practices of Sanathan Dharma

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SHRI LUXMI NARAYAN SANDESH

Pitra Paksha

Editorial Standing Committee

Shri Luxmi Narayan Temple: Mobeni Heights

Pitra Paksha is a period of 15 days during which Hindus or followers of Sanathan Dharma observe a memorial and thanksgiving to the departed souls. It is a special time when we acknowledge our indebtedness to our ancestors who made a valuable contribution to the world and specifically to our well-being.

The Sanskrit word Pitra refers to our immediate ancestors, our departed relatives and friends, the earliest Rishis (sages) and God in all His aspects. The observance of Pitra Paksha, involves intense Bhakti to God, as does every Hindu Religious observance. In addition, devotees pray for the well-being of the souls of departed relatives.

Thanksgiving or memorials to the departed souls is practiced in almost all cultures. Some place wreaths and flowers on graves annually, and on special occasions like festivals and birthdays. Others light candles in memory of those who have passed on. Similarly Hindus express their thanks to their ancestors and pray for their well-being by offering oblations of water to God, to the Devas and to Rishis annually for a period of fifteen days during the dark half of the month of Ashwin (around September).

During this period of Pitra Paksha, devotees purify themselves in all aspects, internally and externally. Strict discipline, including a vegetarian diet, abstinence from alcohol and sex is observed. All one's activities are supposed to be Sathwik (in the mode of goodness). Mental purification is also required and devotees therefore control their thoughts, focussing on that which is good and divine. Prayer, chanting the Holy names of The Lord, engaging in Sathsangh, reading of scriptures and giving charity are meant to enhance this purification. Similar purification is also required during other observances like Ram Naumee, Krishna Astami, Ganesh Chaturti and Diwali.

Recently, there have been some sections of the community who have questioned the need for observing Pitra Paksha. One of the key beliefs of Hinduism is that the soul is real and eternal while the body is impermanent. We should therefore engage in activities that elevate the soul. Further, Karma and Reincarnation are important principles of Hinduism. Based on the reality and eternity of the soul and considering the principle of reincarnation, it becomes clear that it is both necessary and obligatory on all Hindus, but especially on householders to acknowledge indebtedness to their ancestors, no matter where they may be and irrespective of their physical form. Change of location and of form does not free us from our indebtedness. The followers of Sanathan Dharma express their gratitude and devotion to the Pitras by oblations of water. This spiritual activity of oblations of water is referred to as TARPAN. The word Tarpan is related to the Sanskrit word Trpti, which means satiation or satisfaction. Tarpan is a process of gratifying your ancestors.

EKAM SATYA VIPRA BAHUDA VADANTI | Truth is one . . . Sages call it by many

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There is a Law of Nature known as Bija Vrksa Nyaya: the Law of Seed and Tree (Svoboda, 2002:1). The seeds of the human being are her genes and chromosomes (the essence of the parent's germ plasma), while the human being herself is the tree – the product of those seeds. Biologically we are aware that half our genes come from one parent and half from the other. We may physically distance ourselves from our parents, but in reality this distancing from our parents is impossible. We share identical genes with our parents and they (the genes) resonate with one another. This fundamental identity therefore means that our parent's emotions are bound to resonate with our own emotions, no matter how physically far we may move away from our parents. Our emotions are influenced by our grandparent's emotions since our parent's genes originated in our grandparents. So even though most of our ancestors are already dead the subtle effects of their personalities remain in our genetic environment and continue to affect us. According to Robert Svoboda (2002:2), homeopathic medicine talks of miasms, which is inherited weaknesses that are passed down from generation to generation in a family. In Sanskrit the inherited weaknesses are referred to as Kutumba Dosha (faults in the family). The Ayurvedic rejuvenation works on the physical manifestations of these faults. Tarpan works more deeply, reducing the emotional charges, which have accumulated in us as a result of the activities of our forbears. Devotees therefore remember the departed and pray for their well-being by saying – In whichever form you may be, wherever you may be, we wish to remember and pray for your peace and welfare.

Observing Pitra Paksha is in accordance with The Lord's will. Sri Krishna has instructed in The Srimad Bhagvatam Canto 11, Chapter 7, Text 50 that grihastas (those who are householders) should perform Pitra puja, understanding ancestors to be manifestations of His Potency. This is further confirmed in Canto 7, Chapter 14, Text 15 – The Sage, Sri Narad Muni, in explaining to Maharaja Yudhisthira about Ideal Family Life says that one should worship the Supreme Lord, Saintly persons and one's forefathers. We see therefore that we do not engage in Pitra Puja to the exclusion of worship to the Supreme Lord. Fasting, attending sathsangh, chanting The Lord's names, reading of scriptures, giving charity and worship of God are all undertaken during Pitra Paksha.

The observance of Pitra Paksha does not mean that elders are appreciated and respected only after death. In fact every Hindu is expected to respect parents, grandparents and other elders while they are still in our midst and to value and acknowledge their contributions to our development. Only then does observance of Pitra Puja become meaningful.

Shraadh : Supporting references

1. Sri Bhagavatam

1.1 Canto 3 ch 3 verse 26 "After arriving ...they offered their respects to forefathers, devas & great sages..."

Prabhupada's Purport : "... As a rule, every human being is indebted to God, the devas, great sages, other living entities, people in general, forefathers etc. for various contributions received from them. Thus **everyone is obliged to repay the debt** of gratitude."

1.2 Canto 3 ch 7 verse 33 "Please also explain the regulations for offering respects to the forefathers..." **so there were regulations for this!**

1.3 Canto 4 ch 27 verse 8 Prabhupada's purport : "... The offering of oblations in the name of Lord Vishnu is called pindodaka, and **it is necessary that descendants of a**

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family offer pinda to the forefathers."

1.4 Canto 4 ch 21 verse 42 Prabhupada's purport : "...When He (Advaita Prabhu) performed the sraddha ceremony for His father, He first of all called Haridasa Thakura and offered him food."

1.5 Canto 7 ch 14 verse 15 "Every day, one should worship the Supreme Being who is situated in everyone's heart, and on this basis one **should separately worship the Devas, saintly persons...one's forefathers**"

1.6 Canto 7 ch 14 verse 19 "...Similarly, he should offer oblations to the relatives of the forefathers during the mahalaya ceremonies in the month of Asvina."

1.7 Canto 7 ch 15 verse 7 "A person fully aware of religious principles should never offer anything like meat, eggs or fish in the sraddha ceremony,... When suitable food prepared with ghee is offered to saintly persons, the function is pleasing to the forefathers and to the Supreme Lord, who are never pleased when animals are killed."

1.8 Canto 11 ch 17 verse 50 " One in the grhastha order of life should daily worship the sages by Vedic study, the forefathers by offering the mantra svadha, the Devas by chanting svaha, all living entities by offering shares of one's meals, and human beings by offering grains and water. Thus considering the Devas, sages, forefathers... to be manifestations of My potency, one should daily perform these five sacrifices."

2. Padmapurana

2.1 Srsti-khanda) "From the full moon day of Asadha, one should perform a sraddha."

3. Yajur Veda

Chapter 2 Mantra 29 to 34 are relating to Pitaras.

Mantra 29

अग्नये कव्यवाहनाय स्वाहा सोमाय पितृमते स्वाहा । अपहताऽसुरा रक्षांसि वेदिषदः ॥

Offerings in respect of pitaras are called Kavya. We offer this kavya to the pitaras and to Somadeva.

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4. Rgveda

Mandala 10 Sukta 15 mantra 1

उदीरतामवर उत्परास उन्मध्यमाः पितरः सोम्पासः ।

असुंय ईयुरवृक ऋतज्ञास्ते नोऽवन्तु पितरो हवेषु

May the pitras come forward, being kind-hearted may they protect us.

Mandala 10 Sukta 15 Mantra 13

ये चेह पितरो ये च नेह याँश्च विद्म याँ उ च न प्रविद्म ।

त्वं वेत्थ यति ते जातवेदः स्वधभिर्यज्ञं सुकृतं जुषस्व ॥

O Jatavedas! You know the pitras who are there and those who are here (near us), those we know and those whom we do not know (because they are remote ancestors) – be gracious to accept this offerings which are well prepared.

Mandala 10 Sukta 14

ये अग्निदग्धा ये अनग्निदग्धा मये दिवः स्वधया मादयन्ते ।

तेभिः स्वराळसुनीतिमेतां यथावशं तन्व कल्पयस्व ॥

O (Agni) Resplendent along with those (Pitras) who were burnt by fire (cremated) and also those whose bodies were not burnt and who enjoy delight (on account of offerings made) with swadha – may you arrange a body as (the deceased) desires that will inspire him to a new life (in heaven).

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