

The Association of Mandhata Samaj UK



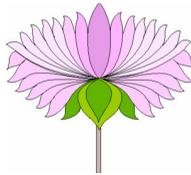
HINDU DEATH RITES
SUGGESTED GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION



**THE ASSOCIATION OF MANDHATA SAMAJ UK
(AMSUK)
Registered Charity No: 1055169**

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“Aa atma janamto nathi temaj marto pan nathi. Te pahela hato ane bhavishyama nahi hoi aevu pan nathi. Kemke ae janma-rahit chhe. Nitya, shashvat ane anaadi chhe. Tethi sharirno nash thata teno nash thato nathi”.

“The Soul is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain”.

From the Bhagavad Gita 2/23

Introduction

Hindus generally observe many sanskars – sacraments or ‘rites of passage’ throughout their lives. For Hindus these sanskars represent the important stages in a person’s life –from conception to death. These sanskars are found in the law books of Manu (Manava-dharma-shastra) – one of the sacred Hindu texts (which comes under the category of smrutis –scriptures that deal with the practical applications of eternal principles) and dates back to 250-100BC. Death rites, termed antyeshti sanskars in Sanskrit, are the last of the sanskars and are considered to be the most important rites that have to be performed: in order to ensure that the departed soul can move on peacefully to whatever its next life will be. These sanskars have been observed for thousands of years by Hindus throughout the world.

Whilst Hindu death rituals follow a fairly uniform pattern drawn from the Vedas (these come under the category of shrutis – scriptures that deal with eternal principles), practices do vary according to sect, region, caste and family tradition. This is also the case in Britain – where it has been estimated that about 400, 000 –555,000 Hindus reside currently. However, concern about the differences in practices and, perhaps more importantly, the fear that in this age of rapid change there are many of us who do not know what has to be done when a death occurs in the family, prompted many members of the Women’s Forum and the Association of Mandhata Samaj UK (AMSUK) to call for the preparation of guidelines which would enable members of the Koli Patel community of Great Britain to observe some basic rites that need to be performed in the event of a death in the family. These Funeral Rites Guidelines have therefore been produced in response to these concerns. Our objective has been to produce common guidelines that can be used by all members of the Koli Patel community of Great Britain.

In line with the objective, both of the Women’s Forum and of AMSUK, of ‘maintaining and preserving our religion, traditions and culture for current and future generations within our community’, these guidelines have been produced not only for information and use by the older members of our community currently but also by younger people in years to come. Emphasis has been placed on the religious and cultural aspects of the death rituals and the way the rites are performed. The final section also attempts to explain the reasons for performing the rituals. In so doing – explaining

what needs to be done, how and why, we hope these guidelines will help to ensure that members of our community, for generations to come, will know what has to be done when a death takes place within the family and the basic rites that need to be observed for the peaceful migration of the departed soul of a loved one. Some information is also given on documentation and legal requirements, the practicalities of organising a funeral and making a will.

In drawing up these guidelines, we have attempted to obtain a general consensus by consulting a wide range of people from within the Koli Patel community of Great Britain. These have comprised maharajs - priests - including a few from India, members of AMSUK, members of the Women's Forum, elders, Mahila Mandals - Women's Groups - and other people familiar with the rites and we have endeavoured, as far as possible, to reflect their views. The Women's Forum and AMSUK will be happy to include any major omissions, if any, in any future re-prints.

Rekha Shivam,
Women's Forum, AMSUK



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This booklet is the result of the co-operation and teamwork of many individuals of our community as well as other organisations. The Association of Mandhata Samak UK (AMSUK) would like to acknowledge their assistance in preparing this publication and in particular to thank the following:

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Dear Reader,

The Association of Mandhata Samaj UK (AMSUK) is pleased to present to you our first edition of “HINDU DEATH RITES- SUGGESTED GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION” booklet.

It is our sincere hope that this booklet will be used by members of our community- to serve both as a guide to users and to assist them in the unfortunate event of bereavement.

The Executive Committee of AMSUK is always striving to improve and provide a better service. All care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this booklet. However should you have any comments on any inaccuracies, errors or omissions, please write to the Secretary of AMSUK or convey them to any member of the Executive Committee of AMSUK.

Yours faithfully,

Editorial Board
On behalf of AMSUK

SECTION A

Things to be done prior to imminent death

Generally no religious sacraments are performed prior to death within the Koli Patel community in Britain - largely because it is difficult to predict when death is likely to occur. However, if it is considered that a loved one's passing is imminent:

- (1) A little Ganga Jal - holy water from the river Ganges - should be placed in the mouth.
- (2) The eldest son, family members and relatives should sit beside the head of the ill relative and chant "Shree Ram, Ram, Ram" and "Aum Namah Shivaya " (or any other personal mantra that the dying person may have).
- (3) Chapter 12 of the sacred Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita should also be read. Being reminded of God at the time of one's death is considered to reduce suffering and also lead to a better after-life. It is written in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 8 verse 5)* that a dying person who thinks of God or recites God's name when taking his/her last breath will achieve moksha - salvation - and be freed from sansar - the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. **

Things to be done soon after death within the home

At the time of death or soon after a person has passed away:

- (1) A wooden board covered in silver foil, should be placed on the floor – generally beside a wall in a prominent place in the main living room of the house. A divo – a cotton wool wick dipped in ghee – purified butter -(with the wick lying sideways, not facing upwards) and an agarbati – a stick of incense – should be lit and placed in front of a photograph of the deceased. An image of

*“And he, who leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone, at the time of his death, attains My being; there is no doubt about this”.

** See Appendix 1 Summary of Basic Hindu Beliefs Pertaining to Hindu Death Rites.

Lord Vishnu* (or the deceased's favourite deity - and a photograph of their guru if they had one) should also be placed nearby, as should a small mound of rice on which a sopari - betel nut - has been placed. Money to the value of £1.25 should also be placed on the rice underneath the sopari or nearby. All of the above should be placed on the wooden board covered in silver foil.

- (2) The divo should be kept lit for 24 hours a day for 13 days and it is customary for a wife, mother or daughter etc. to sleep on the floor in the living room for 12 nights to ensure that the divo does not go out at any time during this period.

Things to be done soon after death – outside the home

□ Documentation and Legal Requirements

If the Death Occurs in Hospital

If the death occurs in hospital:

- The hospital staff will contact the person named by the deceased as the next of kin (relative or friend).
- An executor (personal representative of the deceased) will need to appoint a funeral director.
- The hospital will keep the body in the hospital mortuary until the executor arranges for it to be taken away.
- The hospital will arrange for the next of kin or nearest relative to collect the deceased's belongings.
- The Medical Certificate/ Death Certificate that confirms the cause of death will be automatically issued by a doctor (this is free of charge and will be given in a sealed envelope addressed to the registrar).

*See Appendix 1 Summary of Basic Hindu Beliefs Pertaining to Hindu Death Rites.

- A Formal Notice that a doctor has signed the Medical Certificate/ Death Certificate and tells you how to get the death registered will be given.
- If the deceased is to be cremated the hospital can also arrange for the completion of two additional medical certificates that are required.

If the Death Occurs at Home

- The deceased's local doctor should be contacted; if the death was expected e.g. in cases of terminal illness, the doctor will be well aware of the situation and may well have been calling at the house regularly.
- If the doctor can certify the cause of death he or she will give you a Medical Certificate/Death Certificate and a Formal Notice.
- Depending upon your immediate wishes about how long you wish the deceased to stay in the house, you will need to contact a funeral director. Most people contact a funeral director quite quickly after a death, they will be able to guide you through the legalities and advise you what to do next.
- The Death Certificate will need to be taken to the local Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths so that the death can be registered.
- Deaths must be registered normally within five days of the death in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Reporting a Death to a Coroner

The doctor may report the death to a coroner if the death occurred as a result of an accident or injury, an industrial disease, during a surgical operation, if the cause of death is unknown and if the death was sudden and unexplained, e.g. a sudden infant death (cot death).

You will be advised if the death is to be reported to the Coroner, in which case the death cannot be registered nor the funeral take place without the Coroner's Authorisation. Where a death is reported to the Coroner, the Coroner's Office will contact the relatives.

A Coroner can order a post-mortem examination without getting the relative's permission. This examination will ascertain the cause of death. He may also wish to hold an investigation into circumstances leading up to a death. (This is called an inquest). When an inquest is called, the Coroner's Office will contact the relatives. This should not cause undue distress as it is a legal formality.

If the post-mortem shows that the death was due to natural causes, the coroner may issue Pink Form B (form 100) giving the cause of death so that the death can be registered. The coroner usually sends this form directly to the registrar but may give it to you to deliver.

Where the body is to be cremated the coroner will give you the Certificate for Cremation (form E), which allows cremation to take place.

When an inquest is held, the death cannot be registered until the conclusion of the inquest, but a Certificate for Cremation (form E) may be issued so that the funeral can take place before the inquest is completed.

The coroner will also send a Certificate After Inquest (form 99(rev)) stating the cause of death to the registrar. This allows the death to be registered.

Registering a Death

The death can be registered by anyone with legal responsibility to register - including a relative of the deceased, a person present at the death or the person arranging the funeral (NOT the funeral director)

The following documentation will be required to register the death:

- The Medical Certificate giving the cause of death - or notification from the coroner to register the death.
- The Formal Notice confirming that a doctor has signed the death certificate.
- The deceased's NHS medical card, if possible.
- The deceased's birth and marriage certificates if available or their passport if available.

The registrar will also need to know:

- The date and place of death.
- The deceased's last (usual) address.
- The deceased's first names and surname (and the maiden name where appropriate).
- The deceased's date and place of birth (town and county if born in the UK, and country if born abroad).
- The deceased's occupation and the name and occupation of their spouse.
- Whether or not the deceased was receiving a pension or allowance from public funds.
- If the deceased was married, the date of birth of the surviving widow or widower.

Once the death has been registered, the registrar will give to you:

- a Certificate of Burial or Cremation (often known as the green form) unless the coroner has given you an Order for Burial (form 101) or a Certificate for Cremation (formE). These give permission for the body to be buried or an application for cremation to be made. This should be taken to a funeral director so that funeral arrangements can be made. (There is no cost for this certificate).
- a Certificate of Registration of Death (formBD8). This form is for Social Security purposes only. The information on the back of the Certificate will need to be read, if any of it applies to you, the certificate will need to be filled in and given in at your social security office. (There is no cost for this certificate).
- Leaflets about widows' benefits and income tax for widows, where appropriate.
- Death Certificate(s). This is a certified copy of the entry on the Register of Deaths. You will need this for a variety of purposes such as sorting out the Will and for any pensions claims, insurance policies or unlocking savings from the deceased's account etc. Whilst the death is registered free of charge you will need to pay for each Death certificate. It is better to ask for as many as you think you will need because the fee rises for certificates needed later on.

Organising the funeral

Once the death has been registered plans for the funeral – generally cremation within our Koli Patel community - can proceed and a booking can be made at a crematorium, once the attendance of a priest - (if required) has been arranged. The choice of a firm of funeral directors is important as you should feel comfortable and confident with them. Friends, family, your religious adviser or your doctor may be able to suggest local reputable funeral directors.

A firm of funeral directors may be contacted straight away after the death in order that they may begin certain arrangements. The funeral directors can also advise on all the procedures and documents needed to register a death.

Most funeral directors have a code of practice and should give you an estimate of costs – their own and those fees they will pay on your behalf and add to the account. You can ask for this estimate in advance and you may wish to ask different firms for quotes in order to compare quotes.

In order for a cremation to take place five forms, which can be obtained from the funeral director or crematorium, have to be completed:

- An application form (form A) signed by the next of kin or executor.
- Two doctor's certificates for cremation (forms B and C) each signed by a different doctor. These will need to be paid for. If the death is referred to the coroner, these two certificates are not needed. Instead the coroner will issue you with a Certificate for Cremation (form E).
- A Crematorium Certificate (form F) signed by the medical referee at the crematorium. The medical referee has the power to refuse cremation and either ask for a post-mortem examination to be made or refer the matter to the coroner.
- A Certificate for Cremation issued by the registrar. This form is not required if the coroner has issued this.

When organising the funeral the following need to be arranged:

The date of the funeral, the time the deceased is to be brought home*, the time the cortege will be leaving the home, the time and place of cremation.

Once the funeral is booked a notice should be put up in an easily visible place within the home giving all of the above information. Another notice that indicates the last formal day for condolence visits should also be displayed. This is usually put up after the funeral has taken place.

In India a funeral generally takes place on the same day that a death occurs and the funeral rites are performed accordingly. However it is common practice within our Koli Patel community here in Britain that because it can take up to a week (and, occasionally, longer) before a cremation can be authorised and arranged, the deceased is generally held in a chapel of rest – pending the funeral.

*In exceptional circumstances, where space is limited in the home for example – the final rites may be performed elsewhere – e.g. in a pre-arranged church hall. Nevertheless the deceased should still be brought home for a short while and prathnas – prayers – said in order to enable the spirit of the deceased to say farewell and also to enable a smoother, more peaceful transition to the next life.

Generally observed customs within the home

Space needs to be made in the living room for mourners and white sheets, generally, are spread out on the floor for people to sit on. A few chairs are also set aside for those unable to sit on the floor.

It is a requirement that vaas – food and drink– be served to the departed soul – once a day for thirteen days. The food should be prepared early in the morning and, ideally, be the deceased's favourite food. A little ghee should be trickled over the food to render it pure and placed in a small thali – round stainless steel tray - together with a small loto – metal vessel – containing water and an agarbati that has been lit. The vaas should be put in front of the photograph of the deceased for a while – ideally by the eldest son, or a close relative if this is not possible - and then put outside in the

garden, preferably before midday. The ground around the vaas should be rendered pure by sprinkling water all around the thali.

It is customary, but not a religious requirement, that the family of the deceased should not prepare food in the home from the time of death of a loved one until after the funeral and it is traditional that relatives and friends prepare meals in their homes and take them to the home of the family of the deceased. A rota is normally organised quite quickly by the relatives and friends to ensure this happens.

Visitors going to offer their condolences to the family of the deceased are not offered food or drink within the home.

As a mark of respect no- one within the family of the deceased will have their hair cut nor male members of the family shave or cut their beard from the time of death until the day of the sutak – ritual cleansing of the home.

White is the traditional colour for mourning and the family of the deceased generally wear white clothing until after the funeral. People who go to pay their respects normally wear white or light coloured clothing. A widow may choose to wear white clothing for one year after the death of her husband and light coloured clothing thereafter. A widow does not wear a red chandlo – spot on the forehead - after the death of her husband.

Although not a religious requirement, in Britain, it is usual for members of our community to gather at the deceased's home every evening at a set time, for thirteen days for puja - paath. Using a 108 bead mala- rosary - the mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya' is chanted one hundred and eight times. Chapter 12 from the Bhagavad Gita, dealing with bhakti-yoga - devotional service- may then be read out loud by one, or more, of the people present. Passages from the Garud Puran, a sacred Hindu scripture that deals with life and the afterlife, the paths that lead to bandhan and moksha - bondage and salvation - and the essential ceremonies required to be performed after the death of a loved one are also read. Maharajs suggest that where possible the Garud Puran should be read in its entirety. Where this is the case it must be completed by the end of the tenth day after the bereavement -before the Shradh rites are performed.

This is then followed by prathnas - and bhajan-kirtans - hymns. They are recited and sung not only to provide comfort and solace to the family of the

deceased but also to encourage the soul to leave this life and move on to the next life. Examples of the usual prathnas and bhajan-kirtans and the order in which it is recommended they be recited/sung are given in Appendix 2.

Paying Respects

Our community in Britain is very close-knit and once one or two close relatives are informed about a death in the family the news spreads very quickly by word of mouth. Close family relatives and friends start coming to offer their condolences quite soon afterwards and will visit more than once to provide comfort and support and ensure, as far as possible, that the family of the deceased are not left to grieve alone for any significant period of time. Close family, relatives and friends and other members of the community (who come from the same village perhaps) living at a distance may choose to go to pay their respects on the day of cremation.

Most people go to pay their respects quite quickly after a death. Where possible it is recommended that people should go to offer their condolences at any reasonable time before the funeral of the deceased takes place or within the first thirteen days.

Generally within our community in Britain once funeral arrangements have been made a notice stating the time the deceased will be brought home and the time when the cortege will be leaving home as well as the time and place of the funeral is put up in a prominent place within the home. A notice indicating the last formal day on which people can come to pay their respects is also displayed, generally after the funeral has taken place.

In India one day only is generally set- aside for people to visit to pay their respects.

Preparing the body for cremation

The day before the funeral the deceased is generally bathed and prepared for cremation by family members and close relatives. Unless expressed differently beforehand, if the deceased is a man, men will shave him before bathing and dressing him in new clothes. If the deceased is a woman,

women will go to bathe and dress the woman in a new sari, prepare her hair and, depending upon the age and marital status of the woman, put on a little make-up, a chandlo – a small spot - on her forehead etc. Generally, a husband puts a chandlo of kanku – red powder - on his deceased's wife's forehead. Where the deceased is a widower, unmarried man, unmarried woman or child, chandan - a small spot of sandalwood powder - is placed on the forehead. Sandalwood paste is applied to the deceased after bathing and before dressing. A garland of flowers will also be put round the neck of the deceased. A new white sheet is placed in the coffin prior to this.

It should be noted that socks should be put on the deceased but no shoes. It is considered that the deceased should be ready to enter the temple of God - and shoes are never worn when entering a temple.

After this has been done, close members of the family may choose to go to view the loved one in order to say their farewells in private.

Items required for puja on the day of the funeral

The following items are required for this service:

- Abil - white powder
- Gulal - pink powder
- Kanku - red powder
- Chokha - rice
- Tal - sesame seeds
- Jav - barley
- Garland or a piece of Sandalwood (if available)
- Ganga Jal
- Panchamrut – five nectars – a mixture of honey, shaakar - crystallised sugar, purified butter, milk and yoghurt.

- Panchdhattu – five precious metals – a mixture of: gold, silver, copper, brass, and rupee – similar to silver. Generally available from Indian jewellers.
- Panchakpadi - a piece of wood with five holes in it, five dolls made of dharba grass (or urad flour), five karoda –small round clay pots - if the death has occurred during a panchak day –five specific days during every month. These can be identified from a Hindu calendar.
- Garland of Tulsi - holy basil leaves (if available)
- Garland of Flowers
- New White Cloth (2.5metres)
- Divo
- Agarbati
- Tulsi leaves
- Pan leaves
- 4 Packets of butter or containers of ghee
- 4 Coconuts
- Loose Flower Petals (for all mourners – at least 2/3 thalis - round stainless steel trays - will be required)
- £1.25 – loose change
- 6 Pinda – funeral cakes
- 5 Ladwas – sweetmeats

Apart from the last two items, all items should be placed in thalis or small bowls, ready for use, at least one day before the funeral. The 6 pinds - funeral cakes- are made on the day of the funeral within the home, generally by the person performing the rituals -the eldest son or close male member of the family or other close relative - after the person has bathed.

The 6 pinds are made of rice flour, tal, jav, tulsi leaves, ghee and a little cold milk. These are mixed, kneaded and form into oblong cakes.

Within our Koli Patel community it is also customary to make 5 ladwas: Rotlis from wheat flour are first made in the usual way. These are crushed and to these are added, tal, jav, ghee, gor / jaggery - unrefined solidified sugar - or a little honey. These are mixed together and formed into round balls. The ladwas are made within the deceased's home if the deceased was unmarried, within the maternal home if the deceased was a married woman or provided by the in-laws of the deceased if the deceased was a married man, on the day of the funeral.

Procedures at home on the day of the funeral

Antyeshti sanskars prescribe that the deceased should be brought home and rites performed prior to cremation at the crematorium. These rites take the form of a puja that is held over an open casket in the deceased's home. In exceptional circumstances, where space is limited in the home for example, the final rites may be performed elsewhere – e.g. in a pre-arranged church hall. Nevertheless the deceased should still be brought home for a short while and prathnas said in order to enable the spirit of the deceased to say farewell and also to enable a smoother transition to the next life.

Depending upon how many people are anticipated to attend, sufficient time - up to an hour - should be allowed for all procedures at home prior to the cremation.

The following is a breakdown of what generally needs to be done and what happens on the day of the funeral:

- Empty the room where the coffin is to be placed and make as much room as possible for mourners.
- Plastic sheeting needs to be laid out on an area set aside (front lawn etc.) for flowers from family, relatives and friends.

- After bathing, pinds and ladwas, as referred to earlier, need to be made. The pinds are generally made by the main person who will be carrying out the rituals.
- All items for the puja should be ready and easily accessible.
- The designated person, who has been selected beforehand by the deceased's family and knows what needs to be done arrives and will guide the performance of the rituals. This may or may not be a priest. A new white cloth is placed in the centre of the room, above which the casket will be placed, and an 'aum' sign is made with kanku in the centre of the cloth. 5 pan leaves, one for each end of the coffin and for the middle, may also be placed on the cloth. These represent the five Gods: Lords Bhrama, Vishnu, Mahesh, Yama and Tatpurush and also the five elements the body is made up of: water, air, soil, fire and ether.
- Abil and gual are sprinkled over the heads of the sons, son-in-laws and brothers of the deceased and other immediate members of the family by the designated person to denote that they are the family members of the deceased.
- Mourners start arriving. Mantras: "Shree Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram", "Aum Namah Shivaya" or any other mantras are chanted repeatedly in a soft voice.
- The cortege arrives. Four close male members of the family, with towels on their shoulders, bring the casket into the home and place it above the aum sign on the white cloth. The casket is placed in such a way that the head of the deceased faces north and the feet face south since Lord Yama is believed to live in the South.
- The eldest son, other sons, sons –in law, brothers are asked to perform the rituals.
- Other family members may also be allowed to take part in performing the rituals.
- A little kanku and rice are put on the forehead of the deceased for sanctification. The kanku is used in particular to facilitate both receiving God's blessings and love and to centering one's life around God in the next life. Kanku also provides fragrance.
- Abil and gual are sprinkled on the deceased. Abil increases longevity and gual facilitates the ability for self- enquiry and the awareness of the need to focus on God in the next life. Abil and gual also provide fragrance.

- One garland of sandalwood, one of tulsi and one of flowers is placed around the neck of the deceased for purification and fragrance.
- Some tal and jav, and 5 flowers are placed on the body. The tal and jav represent Lord Vishnu and are used for purification whilst the flowers represent the 4 pall bearers and the clay pot.
- The panchdhattu, panchamrut, tulsi leaves and a little Ganga Jal are placed in the mouth. Ganga Jal is also sprinkled within the casket. The panchdhattu is used to purify the body, the panchamrut to provide radiance and lustre- since the soul is immortal, the tulsi leaves - signifying Lord Vishnu's wife (who has taken the form of a plant) - and the Ganga Jal are used for purification and considered to cancel out all sins and save the deceased from going to hell.
- The Panchakpadi - a piece of wood with five holes in it, five dolls made of dharba grass or urad flour – representing Lord Vishnu -and five karoda –small round clay pots – is placed in the casket if the death has occurred during a panchak day –five specific days during every month. These can be identified from a Hindu calendar. The panchakpadi is used to ward off any malevolent forces.
- All 6 pinds and 5 ladwas are placed in the coffin. One of each is placed on either side of the feet, one of each on either side of the hands and one on the chest. One pind is for the deceased, one for Lord Yama, one for Lord Agni, God of Fire, one for local spirits/ghosts and one for spirits/ghosts who may be anywhere. One pind is also placed in the casket in reverence to the sacred cow. The five ladwas are for the nourishment of the deceased only for it's onward journey.
- If the deceased is a man two shawls are placed over the deceased. (The shoulders and head are not covered). The shawls are used purely for covering the deceased. One shawl is provided by the family of the deceased and the other by the in-law family if the deceased was married. £1.25 is tied in the corner of the shawl provided by the deceased's family. If the deceased is a woman, two saris – one provided by the deceased's family and the other by the in-law family if the deceased was married – are placed over the deceased.
- The 4 coconuts are also placed in the coffin – two beside the shoulders and two by the feet. These represent the 4 pallbearers and

the 4 most sacred and oldest Hindu texts, the Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.

- The agarbati and butter or ghee are placed in the coffin to purify the organs e.g. eyes, ears, nose, nails through which the Atma - Soul is considered to leave the body.
- If the deceased was a married man his widow will take off her mangal sutra - wedding pendant - and place it around her husband's neck, signifying her enduring tie to him. She will also discard the other jewellery of a married woman i.e. chandlo, bangles, nose-ring (if worn).
- After all the rituals have been completed the eldest son, other son/s, sons –in law, brothers and close family members walk clockwise around the coffin three times – to ensure severance from all forms of attachment – maya, moh, mamta – to loved ones, to possessions, to everything and everyone within the world generally. They will scatter flower petals in the casket and put a little Ganga Jal and rice in the mouth of the deceased to provide nourishment for the journey ahead.
- Other family members, relatives and friends will then go for darshan - to view the deceased - to pay their last respects by walking clockwise around the casket once and also scattering flower petals in the casket.
- The lid is placed on the casket and, with the grandson (or nearest young relative of the deceased) walking in front, the coffin is carried out by the pallbearers with the head first.
- The grandson is required to break a clay pot that has string attached to it with his feet before the coffin is placed in the hearse. This signifies that all ties have now been severed between the deceased and his/her family.
- The coffin is placed in the hearse with the feet first.
- The funeral cortege goes to the crematorium. Depending upon the number of people expected to attend the cremation service, the family of the deceased may provide some transport, for those who need it, in the form of a coach or a bus.

In Britain it is increasingly becoming the norm that the younger female members of the deceased's family go to the crematorium as well as men. Elder female members of the family, female relatives and friends generally stay at home. They will sit in quiet contemplation, listen to recitals on

tape/CD from sacred scriptures – generally the Bhagavad Gita, chant mantras and /or say a prathna for the peaceful migration of the departed soul.

In India traditionally females do not go to the cremation, which generally takes place beside a river at a designated site, but stay at home.

Procedures at the cremation hall

The following are the accepted practices:

- After entering the chapel close members of the family will sit at the front.
- A designated person, who may or may not be a maharaj, will conduct the ceremony. The person will:
 - Give a eulogy to the deceased.
 - Read the following slokas – verses - taken from different sacred Hindu scriptures:

Shraadhanjali

“Hey ananthrup, aap aadi dev tatha puran purush chho. Tamo aa vishvanu param ashray-sthan chho tatha jan-nar, jaanva yogya ane para-dham chho. Aapnathi aa saghdun jagat pari-purna chhe”.

O Lord! Thou art the Primal God, the Ancient Being; Thou art the final resting place of this universe. Thou art the Knower, and That which is to be Known and the ultimate Goal. By Thee is the universe pervaded, O Being of infinite forms.

“Jem manushya potana jooona purana vastra tyaji nava vastra dharan kare chhe tevij reete aa atma rogi ane ashakta sharir chhodi navo deh dhaaran kare chhe”.

Even as person casts off old clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Soul casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new.

“Aa atma janamto nathi temaj marto pan nathi. Te pahela hato ane bhavishyama nahi hoi aevu pan nathi. Kemke ae janma-rahit chhe. Nitya, shashvat ane anaadi chhe. Tethi sharirno nash thata teno nash thato nathi”.

The Soul is never born nor does it ever die, nor, having once been, does it again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and primeval, it is not slain when the body is slain.

“Aa atmane shashtro chhedi shakta nathi. Aene agni badi shakto nathi. Aene pani palladi shaktu nathi ane aene pavan shukvi shakto nathi”.

*No weapons can hurt the Soul. No fire can burn It.
No water can wet It and no wind can wither It.*

“ Hey Bhaarat! Pranimatra janma pahela sukshmarupe hata, matra madhyakaadma sharirvada pratit thaai chhe . Ane maran pachhi sukshmarupe rahe chhe tau pachhi tene mate shok karvo yogya nathi”.

O Bharat! All beings were unmanifest before they were born and become unmanifest again when they are dead; they are manifest only in the intermediate stage. What then is there to grieve about?

“ Je Prabhu aatmik ane maansik shakti aapnar chhe, gnaaneo jeni upasna kare chhe ane jenu vishvanu sanchalan prassaniya chhe tatha jena ashrayma manas amarta pame ane viyog mrutyune laavnar bane chhe. Aeva anand-swarup bhagwan-ne ame amaari sarva bhavna samarpea chhea.

We offer our worship to the blissful God, giver of spiritual knowledge and strength and the appreciated ruler of the universe for giving us birth, refuge and death.

“Hey Jeev! Tara sharirna saghda tatvo, srushtina mahan tatvoma vilin thao, Tari aankhon tej-tatva agnima madi jao, Tara praan vayuma badi jao, Tari andarnu aakash-tatva antarikshma vyapak bano, Taru sthul tatva pruthvima eka-kaar bano, Taru ras tatva paanima ekras thao, Taru chetan atma tatva bija lokma tene yogya sharirne praapt thao”.

O Jeev (Soul)! May all the components of thy body be rightfully returned to the five elements from whence they came. May the power of thy sight be absorbed in the sun (fire) and thy breath be absorbed in the air (atmosphere). May thy other parts be absorbed in their appropriate elements and may thy Soul be returned to the ether to enter a new body in accordance with the meritorious deeds thou hast performed here.

“Badhane karmo pramane tapavnar Parmatma! Aa mrut-dehna atmane paschim dishani gatima shanti ho. Purva dishana pramanma aene shanti mado. Tevij reete uttar, dakshin oopper tatha nicheni baajuo aene maate shanti-dayak ho. Hey sarvagna! Tame ek chho chhatan utpatti, sthiti ane pralayani shakti vade trane rupe jaanita chho. Hey Parmatma! Aa jiv-atmane punya-atmaona lokma sadgati aapo”.

O effulgent God! Thou art the supreme judge and the dispenser of justice to all according to his or her deeds. Please bestow peace to this Soul in the West, the East, the North, the South and all other directions. O Omniscient and all-illuminating God! Thou art the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer of this universe. May thou bestow a worthy abode to this Soul and let this Soul join all holy Souls.

“Hey Jeev! Tun tara tap, sadhna ane sat-karmona aadhare tara pitruo sathe ut-krushta avasthane praapt tha. Ane nishpaap bani uttam sharir dhaari aa sansarma tara baki rahela shubh karmo karva aav”.

O Jeev (Soul)! By thy austerity and enlightenment, and by thy good deeds, attain bliss in heaven and join the company of thy forbears. Be free from all sins and return to this world again in a noble body full of lustre/enlightenment. And once again may thou come to this world to perform noble deeds.

“Hey Jeev! Aa sharirnu chetan panch-mahabutonu nathi, pan amar chhe. Sharir-to badine bhasma thai naash pame chhe. Maate hey karmashil manushya! Tun bhagwan-nu smaran kar. Taara karmonu smaran kar. Karma pramane fad aapnaar bhagwan-nu smaran kar. Taara karela karmone yaad kar. Tari gati taara karmo pramane thavaani chhe”.

O Jeev (Soul)! The body may burn to ashes but the Soul is immortal. So remember thy deeds and think of God. For it is God who will create thy future according to thy deeds.

“Aaa sharir sathe sarva vastuno naash sarjayo chhe. Pan dharma aej ek sachio mitra chhe.ke maran pachhi pan jiv-aatma sathe sankdayelo rahe chhe. Tethi dharmano naash thava na devo. Kemke naash pamelo dharma aapno pan nash kare chhe”.

Everything perishes with the death of the body. It is only Dharma (righteousness) that is our real friend, which even after death remains with the Soul. Therefore do not allow Dharma to perish, for dharma (when) perished brings about our (own) destruction.

“Je manushyo maan ane moh thi rahit chhe, jemne aashakti-rup doshne jityo chhe, jeo kaamnao chhodine nitya atmaswarupna chintanma rahe chhe. Jeo sukh dukh vagere dardothi par thayel chhe, teva viveki-jano te avinaashi padne paame chhe”.

Those who are free from pride and delusion, victorious over the evil of attachment, dwelling constantly in the Self, have overcome completely their desires, and are freed completely from the pairs of opposites – such as pleasure and pain, the undeluded ones reach the Goal Eternal.

“ Hey Prabhu! Amne asatya-mathi satyama lai jaa. Andhkaar-mathi prakashma laiija. Mrutyu mathi amrutma laiija. Hey Param-dayalu! Sarvane trividh dukhthi rahit kari shaashvat shanti aapo”.

O Lord! Lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. Free us from sorrow and bless us with peace.

- Everyone then stands to sing the following:

Anjali Geet

“ Hey naath! Jodi haath paaye, prem-thi saho lagi-ye,
Sharnoo male sa-choo tama-roon ae hruh-dai-thi mangi-ye.
Je jeeve aa-vio aap paase, charan-ma apnavjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Va-li karma-na yoge kari, je kul-ma ae avt-re,
Tyi-an purn preme, O Prabhuji! Aap-ni bhakti kare,
Lax-chorasi bandhano-ne, lax-ma la-ye kaap-jo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Su-samp-ti su-vichar-ne sat-karm-no d-ai varso,
Janmo-janm tum bhakti-thi kirtar paar utar-jo,
Aa loko-ne parlok-ma tum prem ra-ge-rag viya-pjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Ma-le mox, ke sookh swarg-na, aasha u-re evi nathi,
D-yo deh dur-labh manvi-no, bhajan kar-va bhav-thi,
Sa-choo bata-vi roop, shree Ran-chhod hruh-dai stha-pjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Ma-nav tan, aa chhodi-ne te, aap dwa-re aa-vio,
Karm-na dhagh ho bha-le Prabhuji poon-ya thi ugar-jo,
Apra-dh maaf ka-ri sa-hoo, am vin-an-ti- swi-kar-jo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Hey naath! Jodi haath pa-ye, prem-thi saho mangi-ye,
Sharnoo male sa-choo tama-roon, ae rah-dai-thi mangi-ye.

*O Merciful Lord, with folded hands and loving heart
We request You to accept at Your lotus feet
The Soul that has come to You. Please take It into your fold.
Give It everlasting peace.*

*And if it be It's karma to be reborn,
Then let It be born into a pious family
Wherefrom It continues to sing Your praise.
Cut short It's burden of birth and re-birth
And let It have everlasting peace.
Grace It with a pure heart full of love
And service at Your lotus feet
And bless It with true peace wherever It be.*

*We do not ask for Moksha or Heavenly Bliss
But bless It with a human life
To continue to sing Your everlasting praise.*

*And when the time finally comes for It to be released
From the cycle of birth and death,
Show It Your Universal Form and take It into Your heart.
O Merciful Lord, give It true peace.*

- Any individual may then give a eulogy after consultation with the designated person.
- A member of the family may then give a eulogy.
- There is a two minutes' silence and this is followed by the reciting of:

Shanti Paath

Om dhy-o	shanti;	Antariksha	shanti;
Pruth-vi	shanti	Aap	shanti;
Au-sha-dha-ya	shanti;	Vanas-pat-i	shanti;
Vishva-deva	shanti;	Brah-ma	shanti;
Shanti-rev	shanti,	Ksha- ma	shanti;

Om shanti, shanti, shanti.

*May there be Peace in Heaven and on Earth,
May the Skies, the Waters, the Plants and the Trees be Peaceful ,
May Peace, Real Peace prevail in All.*

- The following prathna is then sung as the chief mourner pushes the button to lower the coffin:

Mangal Mandir Kholo

Mangal mandir kholo DayaaMya, mangal mandir kholo.
Jeevan van a-ti vege vataavyu,
Dwaar u-bho sishu-bholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Timir ga-yu ne jyoti prakaash-yo,
Shishu-ne ur-maan lo lo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Naam madhur ta-m rat-yo nirantar,
Sishu sah preme bolo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.

Div-ya trushaa –tur aavyo baalak,
Prem - ami-ras dholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Mangal mandir kholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.

*O merciful Lord, please open up Your temple
Having completed the journey through the forest of life
This innocent child waits at the door.
The darkness has vanished the light increases.
Take this child to Your heart. Continuously have
I chanted your sweet name. Please speak to me with love.
I come unto You with a divine thirst.
Bestow upon me the nectar of Your love.*

- Everyone leaves quietly as soon as the curtain closes.
- The chief mourner may be joined by other family members in going below to ignite the cremator.

Nowadays, some members of our community are beginning to incorporate more personal elements in the traditional service. Examples of this include the chief mourner reading a holy text dedicated to their loved one or playing a prayer, at a low volume, as mourners enter the chapel that has been recited in Sanskrit by a widow for her deceased husband etc. Occasionally others may have a service that reflects the person and the sort of life that they led. Playing favourite music, both classical and contemporary, poetry reading, telling a favourite story etc. are now also to be found and a number of individuals may make contributions. Where this is the case, a running order will need to be planned in order that those people contributing know when to do so.

In all instances the procedures should be dignified and uplifting and help create a lasting memory.

Things to be done after cremation

a) On the day of cremation

A specific time is given for when the cremation will take place at the crematorium. Immediately after this, within the home, when a married man has passed away, his widow will be taken to bathe. Any young/unmarried children in the home will also bathe.

Immediately after the cremation has taken place, in Britain, as long as the funeral does not fall on a panchak day and is on the 3rd, 5th, 7th or 9th day after the death, the sutak ritual needs to be performed within the home. This is generally carried out by close members of the family and necessitates removing the divo, flowers, rice, money and sopari and putting them in the garden. Thereafter the whole home is cleaned: all bed linen is changed, the home is vacuumed, utensils are washed etc. and the home is sprinkled with Ganga Jal to purify it. A new divo, fresh flowers, rice, money and sopari are placed as before in front of the photograph of the deceased. The divo continues to be lit 24 hours a day until the thirteenth day.

Vaas -food for the deceased - is also prepared: Khichdi-plain rice with mag- ni- dal or tuvar dal, without salt, is prepared. Plain rice is prepared if the day of the funeral is Sunday or Monday. A little milk, sugar and ghee are placed in the kichdi and mixed a little. This is placed in a small thali, together with a loto -vessel - containing water and an agarbati that has been lit. The vaas is put in front of the photograph of the deceased by a close relative and, after a while, placed outside in the garden, preferably by the eldest son if the deceased was a man or the husband if the deceased was a married woman - once mourners return from the crematorium. The ground around the vaas should be rendered pure by sprinkling water all around the thali.

Water and towels are placed outside the home to enable mourners returning from the crematorium to sprinkle water over their heads, to symbolise bathing, before entering the home. Generally only family members, close relatives and close friends will return. Other mourners will generally go straight home after a funeral to bathe.

It is customary for all mourners who attend a funeral, whether they go to the crematorium or not to bathe and put on fresh clothes. Clothes worn to the funeral are generally washed quite quickly after the funeral.

It should be noted that married daughters of the deceased bathe in their own home, that of their in-laws or a relative's home. They cannot bathe in the parental home.

Close male members of the family shave and may have their hair cut or, more so in India, they may have their heads shaved completely on the day the sutak ritual is performed.

Mourners will gather for puja - paath at the usual time in the evening.

b) After the day of cremation

The divo continues to be lit and mourners will continue to come for puja - paath until the thirteenth day.

Shraddh Rites

There are two types of shraddh rites: the funeral rites, which are considered to be inauspicious – amangal -and shraddh performed as worship of the ancestors which is considered to be auspicious –mangal.

The first shraddh rites are performed on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th day after the death of a loved one. The ceremonies performed on these days are considered to be the most important – in that they yoke the inner and outer worlds, Bhuloka and Devloka, and recognise that a family consists not just of its living generations, but ancestors as well. The rituals on these days are performed therefore for the ceremonial uniting of the deceased with his/her forefathers and for the honouring of ancestors.

The following are essential components of the shraddh rites:

- Tarpan – offering libations of consecrated water.

- Arpan– offering oblations into a havan – a holy sacrificial fire.
- Offering pinds.
- Feeding invited guests.

Items required for performing the Shraddh rites

Items required for the:

- **10th day**

10 pinds, one medium-sized garland of flowers, loose flowers, dharo (grass), dharba, tal, jav, cow's milk, yellow chandan, rice flour.

- **11th day**

Pinds, one large garland of flowers (one metre), 7 small garlands of flowers, loose flowers, 3 coconuts, dharo, tulsi leaves, 1 ball of white cotton thread, 1 ball of red cotton thread, nadachadi, kanku, abil, gulal, chandan, agarbati, one bag sopari, one bag karekh (dried dates), 1 box kesar, some aarti-kapur (camphor), 2 dried coconuts, some sukho mewo (dried fruit): badaam (almonds), akhrot (walnuts), aaloo (dried apricots), kaju (cashew nuts), pista (pistachios), raisins; laweng (cloves), elechi (cardamom), 1 piece new white cotton cloth (one metre), kamar khadi, 25 pan leaves with stalks, 5 bananas, 5 apples, 5 oranges, 5 mangos, 5 pears, satsumsas, grapes.

Items required for the Havan Samigri:

Havan padi: two bundles of dry wood, ghee (125grams)

Two baajat; one havan kund.

For the havan: Tal (100grams), jav (100gms), kir (thick dudhpak), powa-rice flakes (625grams), 7 types of lentils: wheat (625grams), rice (1.125kgs), rice flour (1.125kg), green mung (625grams), urad flour (625 grams), green vatana (dry peas) (625grams), muth (625grams), cows milk (500ml)

For the puja: pinds, 3 copper lotas, 3 copper dishes, 5 stainless steel thalis, 8 stainless steel vatkis, 2 copper divi, 2 clay kodis, 5 small spoons, 1 kitchen roll, kitchen foil, box of matches.

- **12th day**

Pinds, one garland of flowers (1/2metre), loose flowers, dharo (grass), tal, jav, cow's milk, kanku, yellow chandan, rice (500grams), rice flour (500grams), 12 soparis (betel nut), 12 karekh (dried dates), 3 types of fresh fruit: 3 each of bananas, apples, oranges. 2 clay karodas, 2 clay kodis.

- **13th day**

Pinds, one garland of flowers (1/2metre), loose flowers, dharo (grass), tal, jav, cow's milk (1/2 litre), kanku, yellow chandan, rice (1kg), 1 bag sopari, 1 packet of karekh (dry dates), 100gms mixed dry fruit, 5 pan leaves, 3 types of fresh fruit: 3 each of bananas, apples, oranges.

1 small silver cow, 1 small silver boat, 1 small silver ladder, vastradaan/posaak: gifts of clothing for men, gifts of clothing for women, paatradaan: gift of utensils, umbrella.

The main rituals are performed on the 11th and 12th days. In Britain the 10th day rites are generally performed together with the main 11th day rites.

The following rites are observed:

On the 11th day – known as Ekaadasi shraddh.

- 1) Pitru tarpan: libations of consecrated water are offered to the deceased and to ancestors for drinking.
- 2) A puja is carried out for Lord Vishnu and his eight patranis.
- 3) Hemadik prayog or prayaschhit puja relating to the origins and nature of the cosmos and the absolution of the sins both of the main person carrying out the rituals and the deceased are performed. The person carrying out the rituals is required to bathe (or to wash both hands and feet to symbolise bathing) after this puja is completed before continuing with the remaining rituals.
- 4) Separate pujas are offered to the five following Gods: Bhrama, Vishnu, Mahesh, Yama and Tatpurush.
- 5) A havan, a sacrificial fire, is lit and a puja offered to encourage the physical body of the deceased to return to the fire to enable the soul

to continue on its onward journey. Arpan -oblations - are also offered into the sacrificial fire.

- 6) A puja is carried out for Lord Shiv.
- 7) Pind daan takes place: pinds are offered in order to provide nourishment for the gods, the ancestors, the deceased and the sages and rishimunis- who were responsible for writing the sacred Hindu texts.
- 8) Vaas is put out in the garden for the deceased in the usual manner.

An extra puja is offered if the death takes place during panchak.

On the 12th day:

- 1) Pitru Tarpan: libations of consecrated water are offered to the ancestors for drinking.
- 2) A puja is offered to Lord Vishnu.
- 3) A puja is offered to the deceased. This involves making a representation of the deceased using dharba grass.
- 4) Pind daan takes place: pinds are offered in order to provide nourishment for the gods, the ancestors, the deceased and the sages and rishimunis.
- 5) Puchhapani vidhi: rituals performed to assist the soul to cross the Vaitarnee river after death.
- 6) Vaas is put out in the garden for the deceased in the usual manner.
- 7) Invited guests are fed. If the deceased was a man, the four pallbearers and the priest are generally fed. This is known as khandyabhar shraadh. If the deceased was a woman four ladies and a priest are fed (only 4 widows are invited as guests if the deceased was a widow). This is known as gorni shraadh. In Britain it is traditional to give one shirt and one utensil, generally a copper loto containing one penny and crystallised sugar to men. To women, if the husband is still alive chandlos, a comb, a mirror, a rolling pin and a shawl or piece of cloth are given, together with one utensil containing a penny coin and shaakar. Clothes from the mother's side are generally given to the deceased's family. It is generally the bhabhis who bring sari, blouse etc. Men should wear clothes given by the in-laws. New clothes are given to indicate that life now needs to resume afresh.

On the 13th day:

- 1) Pitru Tarpan: libations of consecrated water are offered to the ancestors for drinking.
- 2) A puja is offered to Lord Vishnu.
- 3) A puja is offered to the deceased.
- 4) Pind daan takes place: pinds are offered to provide nourishment for the gods, the ancestors, the deceased and the sages and rishimunis.
- 5) To denote completion of the 13th day rites and severance of attachments to the deceased, the person performing the rituals is then required to bathe (or to wash both hands and feet to symbolise bathing). A puja is then offered to Lord Ganesh. Other family members and guests present also worship Lord Ganesh after the puja is completed.
- 6) Vaas is put out in the garden for the deceased in the usual manner.
- 7) All invited guests are fed.
- 8) Guests are given clothes, utensils and money.

The eldest son or other close male members of the family are required to carry out these rites under the guidance of a maharaj who refers to the necessary appropriate holy scriptures. It is important to note that although there is no religious requirement for a maharaj to be in attendance at a funeral, this first shraddh ceremony should be assisted by a maharaj.

It should be noted that whilst the rites on the 13th day are generally carried out these days by the eldest son-in-law this is not a religious requirement.

After all the thirteenth day rituals have been completed a new divo - with the wick now facing upwards (instead of sideways), fresh flowers, rice, money and sopari are placed before a photograph of the deceased and images of deities which are newly garlanded with fresh flowers. These should no longer be placed on a wooden board covered in silver foil on the floor but on a table or hung on a wall.

A satsang – a religious gathering – may be arranged at the family's discretion later on during the same day within the home generally.

After the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days, the next shraddh ceremony needs to be carried out at the end of the first month. Thereafter, although some people consider that the shraddh ceremonies need to be performed after three months, six months and twelve months, the shraddh ceremony should, strictly, be performed every month for a total of twelve months – with the last shraddh ceremony being completed by or on the anniversary of the death of the deceased.

Nowadays, in Britain however, people may ask a maharaj to perform all these ceremonies in one go for practical reasons e.g. marriages cannot take place within 12 months of a death taking place in the family if the shraddh ceremonies have not been performed.

Shraddh ceremonies cannot be performed for five weeks, however, if a baby is born on the male side of the family.

In addition to these observances there is yearly honouring of ancestors. The second half –vad - of the Hindu month of Bhaadarvo (September/October) is generally known as the shraddh period and is considered to be particularly mangal – auspicious - for the performance of shraddh for ancestors. In addition to paying homage to the deceased in accordance with his/her tithi - date of death according to the Hindu calendar, the last day of this two week period- Amaavashya - is set aside by Hindus to honour all ancestors –for whom the tithi is not known. The eldest son, or close relative if this is not possible, is required to perform the rites. This annual honouring of ancestors is known as Pitru Paksha/Sarve Pitru Shraddh.

In Britain this generally involves saying a prayer and putting vaas out in the garden in the usual manner for the deceased members of the family and may also involve a family or communal meal.

In India ancestors are also honoured annually on Makarshankranti day, which may fall on the 13th or 14th January, on Somvati Amaavashya - which may fall one or two times at any time during the year - and on Dhara Ashtami in September/October.

The performance of shraddh rites on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th days and annual honouring of ancestors which keep open the inner communication between the inner and outer worlds and make a family prosperous and preserves its longevity, are specified in the Garud Puran and other sacred Hindu texts as being part of one's ordained duty or obligatory karma and

considered to be one of the most important duties that need to be performed by Hindus.

Fulfilling one's duties and obligations is part of 'Dharma' one of the four goals in human life for practising Hindus and showing respect for and fulfilling obligations towards one's parents and one's elders is considered a most important duty within this. Shradh rites should not be performed, therefore, merely as religious rituals, or worse, a social obligation but to show our devotion to and respect for our elders to whom we are greatly indebted for our corporeal existence.

Collection and Dispersal of Ashes

Although ashes may be collected on the second or third day after cremation you may wish to keep them with the funeral director until you are ready to dispose of them. Hindus generally scatter the ashes in a nearby river or the sea either in Britain or in India. Increasingly relatives of a loved one take the ashes to be scattered in the holy river Ganges in India. If ashes are to be taken out of the country the funeral director will need one or two days to provide the necessary paperwork. Relatives wishing to scatter a loved one's ashes in the river Ganges generally go to Varanasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh or Gaya. Where this is the case it is useful to contact a local ashram and make arrangements in advance to save time and avoid any difficulties.

SECTION B

Wills

It is not unusual within our community to find that members fail to make a will – as if the very planning of it will somehow invite death.

It is important however to make a will to ensure that family and relatives do not have to struggle with a mountain of paperwork and financial problems that can arise after your death - and add to the trauma of the bereavement itself. Failing to leave a will also means that your estate – the total value of your home, money, savings and all your other assets – will be distributed under the rules of intestacy and this may not be how you may have wished your estate to be shared out.

Whilst it is not necessary to use a solicitor to draw up a will it is advisable to do so. The current average cost of going to a solicitor is about £65 for a single will and £95 for a couple. Additional advice e.g. regarding inheritance tax will increase the cost but can still be a worthwhile investment for peace of mind. If you don't already have a solicitor, then like all services, it is worth shopping around.

In order for a will to be valid it has to be made voluntarily by a person – the testator -who is over 18 years old and of sound mind i.e. fully aware of the nature of the document he/she is writing or signing and aware of his/her property and the identity of the people who may inherit and be able to confirm this in writing. The will needs to be signed by the testator and two witnesses (one in Scotland) who must be present at the same time. Neither they nor their married partners can be beneficiaries.

When making a will you should:

- List all the assets you own and their value. Inheritance tax may have to be paid if the value exceeds a certain threshold. Your solicitor should be able to help you to minimise this.
- Appoint one or two personal representatives – executors – to administer your affairs after your death. They can be

members of your family or professional executors e.g. solicitors or accountants (the latter will charge fees and these should be checked before making an appointment).

- Appoint a guardian for children under the age of 18 in the event of the death of a surviving married partner.
- Outline your wishes with regard to your funeral.
- Outline any legacies of cash gifts to specific individuals or charities.
- Outline any specific personal belongings (e.g. jewellery, pictures, furniture, cars etc.) you wish to leave to specific individuals or to one specific person.
- Having made any specific bequests, the remainder of your estate can pass to a surviving spouse outright or in trust, provided that they survive you by 30 days.

Trusts

Trusts are used to set aside funds for children without allowing them access to the capital until they reach a specified age, generally 18 or older depending upon the funds. A discretionary trust may be set up whereby the trustees have discretion as to when the capital is handed over and thereby prevent a beneficiary from selling their future interest when they reach the age of 18 if they wish. A protective trust may be used to protect a beneficiary and disqualify them from receiving their inheritance if they sell their interest or become bankrupt.

Multiple Death

The law of intestacy applies if provision has not been made for your estate in the event you and all your immediate family members die together.

The solicitor generally keeps the will and gives you a copy. This should be kept in a safe place and executors told where it is kept.

Clear records should be kept of financial records such as savings, current accounts, life insurance policies, shares etc. and someone told where they are kept.

DIY Wills

A pre-printed form is available from most stationers and it is possible to draw up your own will as long as it is witnessed. Any errors, however, may render it invalid and result in the need for lengthy expensive legal intervention to resolve matters.

Probate

The executors of the will need to apply to the Probate Registry for a grant of probate to confirm they have the right to process the will. If someone died without making a will, the executors have died or are unwilling or unable to act, then the relatives may apply for similar powers, known as letters of administration.

Most solicitors offer probate services but it may be useful to choose a solicitor who specialises in probate work. Fees depend upon the amount of work necessary and the size of the estate.

Probate Registry, Principal Registry, personal Applications Dept, First Avenue House, 42-49 High Holborn, London. WC1 6NP.



SECTION C

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Question 1:

Why light a divo and place flowers, sopari, a little money etc. by the photograph of the deceased?

Answer:

We light a divo and place flowers, rice, a little money and sopari by the photograph of the deceased essentially to pay homage to the deceased and to help the deceased to move on to the next stage in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth –sansar- and ultimately achieve moksha – salvation- when the individual Atma –Soul is freed from sansar and merges with Brahman, the Universal Soul.

Rice is considered to be auspicious. Generally money -£1.25 is placed on the rice and the sopari is placed on top of the money by the photograph of the deceased. Money is considered to be the embodiment of the Goddess Laxmi – the goddess of wealth and is always considered to be auspicious. Money plays an important role throughout everyone's lives and Hindus use it to give to others for birthdays, weddings etc. to mark important events. The placing of money by the photograph signifies that money is available to give to others. By placing the sopari on the money we are inviting Lord Vishnu and other gods to be in attendance.

The lighting of the divo itself may be considered to be a symbolic act in that the flame of the divo always rises up and motivates people to think on a higher plane and raise their consciousness. Once human consciousness acquires a religious orientation it begins to move to spiritual heights.

Just as the flame of a divo generally disappears into the unknown after flickering for a short time, in the same way life is also short and this symbol reminds us that we should aspire to elevate our thinking and strive to attain our ultimate goal in life.

Question2:

Why leave the divo on the floor initially and move it up after 13 days?

Answer:

We leave the 'divo' on the floor initially and move it up after 13 days because it is believed that the Atma –Soul of the deceased remains floating around the upper part of the house for 12-13 days and should not be disturbed. After the thirteenth day the Atma leaves the home and embarks on its onward journey. Hence the divo is moved up on to a table etc. after this time.

Question3:

Why are mantras chanted, prathnas recited and bhajan-kirtans sung beside the body following death?

Answer:

Mantras are chanted, prathnas recited and bhajan-kirtans are sung beside the body following death to urge the Atma – Soul to leave this life and continue on its onward journey. Hindus believe that when the Atma leaves the body it's senses do not cease to function immediately and hence the Atma can hear the singing and chanting.

Also the chanting of mantras, the reciting of prathnas and singing of bhajan-kirtans creates an atmosphere which is generally uplifting and provides some solace and relief from pain and suffering for the relatives of the deceased. They also help to still the mind and enable it to become peaceful and focus on God.

This lasts for 13 days – the period of time when the Atma of the deceased is considered to remain around upper part of the house.

Question 4:

What is the sutak ritual, by whom is it performed, when is it performed and why?

Answer: Sutak means impure and the sutak ritual is performed to cleanse and purify the home after there has been a death in the family. This is done not only from the point of view of hygiene and cleanliness but also to sever all personal attachments to the deceased.

In India in former times it was considered that a person generally died because of some illness or disease and that this could be infectious. It was therefore essential to prevent it from spreading. Hence the home was cleansed using Ganga Jal – holy water from the river Ganges. In ancient times no chemicals had been invented and as such water, which was easily available, was widely used. From the point of view of hygiene it was also necessary to throw away cooking pots that were generally made of clay and could, therefore, be carriers of disease. Clothing and bedlinen etc. are also washed thoroughly for the same reasons.

In Britain the sutak ritual is carried out generally on the day of the funeral, immediately after the deceased has been cremated, by close members of the family. This involves removing the divo, flowers, rice, money and sopari and placing them in the garden. Thereafter the whole home is cleaned; all bed linen is changed, the home is vacuumed, utensils are washed etc. and the home is then sprinkled with Ganga Jal to purify it. A new divo, fresh flowers, rice, money and sopari are placed as before in front of a photograph of the deceased.

For similar reasons of cleanliness, purification and the need to sever ties, another important aspect of the sutak ritual is the requirement for bathing after the funeral.

In Britain a specific time is given for when the cremation will take place at the crematorium. Immediately after this, within the home, when a married man has passed away, his widow will be taken to bathe. Any young or unmarried children in the home will also bathe.

Water and towels are placed outside the home to enable mourners returning from the crematorium to sprinkle water over their heads, to symbolise bathing, before entering the home. Generally only family members, close relatives and close friends will return. Other mourners will generally go straight home after a funeral and bathe.

It is customary for all mourners who attend a funeral, whether they go to the crematorium or not, to bathe and put on fresh clothes. Clothes worn to the funeral are generally washed quite quickly after the funeral.

It should be noted that married daughters of the deceased are not allowed to bathe in their parents' home and need to go to bathe in their own or a relative's or a friend's home - since it is generally considered amongst Hindus that once a daughter has been given away formally to her husband in marriage -kanya daan- she is no longer a part of her parents' family.

Close male members of the family do not shave or have their hair cut after a death in the family until the sutak ritual is performed. They may also, more so in India than in Britain, have their heads shaved completely to denote that all attachment to the father's side of the family has been severed.

The sutak ritual is considered to be an important part of the death rites and needs to be carried out for reasons of cleanliness, purification and breaking of all bonds with the deceased because Hindus believe that the Atma –Soul of the deceased cannot move on to whatever its next life is going to be if it is being pulled back by attachments to its previous life.

Hence it is considered essential that the relatives of the deceased sever ties to the deceased completely by the thirteenth day.

Question 5:

Why take the divo, saucepan, brush etc. outside in the early morning before sunrise on a certain day? Why should we not look back after leaving this outside and entering the home.

Answer:

Normally in Britain it is after the completion of the Shraddh rituals on the 13th day that a jivno divo is ceremoniously placed outside in the garden together with vaas only. In India this is done in the early morning before sunrise.

Priests recommend this should be done ideally before sunrise on the thirteenth day between between 12. 00am and 5.30am.

Pind daan and flowers used for the ceremonies of the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days are taken and thrown into flowing water - a river or the sea.

One should not look back after these offerings have been made in order to ensure severance of all attachments to the deceased.

Question 6:

For how long and why do we have to put vaas - food and drink- outside for the deceased?

Answer:

Vaas- food and drink - needs to be served to the deceased once a day for 13 days - since it is considered that the Atma – Soul of the deceased remains around the upper part of the house for 13 days. The food should be prepared early in the morning and, ideally, should be the deceased's favourite food. A little ghee should be trickled over the food to render it pure and placed in a small thali together with a small loto containing water together with an agarbati that has been lit. The food is initially placed in front of a photograph of the deceased - beside the divo, flowers, rice, money, sopari within the home and later taken outside and placed in the garden – preferably before midday. This should be done by the eldest son or, if this is not possible, by a close relative. The ground around the vaas should be rendered pure by sprinkling water all around the thali.

Vaas is also offered after shraadh rites are completed on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days and thereafter, whenever shraddh ceremonies are performed during the first year after the death of a loved one. Strictly this should be at the end of the first month and then every month for a total of twelve months – with the last shraddh ceremony being completed by or on the first anniversary of the death of the deceased.

Thereafter, vaas is offered to ancestors when they are honoured annually in the second half -vad- of the Hindu month of Bhadarvo/Bhadrapad (September/October) known as Pitru Paksha/Sarve Pitru Shraddh. Offering vaas at this time is considered to be a most important duty of a Hindu and also most auspicious and most worthy of merit – both for the ancestors and for their living family members.

In India particularly vaas is also offered on Makarshankranti day, which may fall on the 13th or 14th of January, on Somvati Amaavashya which may fall one to two times at any time during the year and also on Dhara Ashtami day in September/October.

Vas is offered to the deceased in order to nourish the Atma and help it move on to its next life smoothly; it is offered to ancestors in order to pay homage to them and keep open the definite link between the living members of the family and those living in the world in which the ancestors reside.

(c.f. answers to questions 7, 9, 14, 15 and 21)

Question 7:

Why are the rituals performed on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days so important?

Answer:

Hindus believe that the human personality is made up of five elements of which four belong to the gross body –sthul sharir - and come from this world, namely, earth, fire, water and air whilst the fifth, the ether (fine matter) belongs to the domain of the subtle body - ling sharir -and comes from the higher worlds.

By cremating the body, the elements are rightfully returned to their respective spheres but the subtle body which stores the “thought-energy” experiential impressions of life continues as a constellation of subtle elements – dispositions, memories, desires etc. Since the Atma –Soul cannot leave the gross body without a vehicle, it is within this subtle body that the Atma, if needed, re-incarnates and takes the form of the subtle body called the Ativahika body. In this body the Atma wanders about in the sky in the shape of air without any support. In order to release the Atma from this stage, the rite of offering pind was introduced. The offering of pind destroys the Ativahika body and creates the Pret body which is an intermediate body between the ‘ling’ or subtle and the ‘sthul’ or gross body. Only when this body is formed can the Pret progress onwards – without it the Pret remains earthbound.

Formation of the Pret body normally takes ten days and, ideally, one pind should be offered every day for ten days to provide nourishment for the formation of this intermediate body. In Britain it has become customary, for practical reasons, for the ten pinds to be offered as part of the tenth day rituals. It is vital therefore that the tenth day rituals are performed.

After the tenth day the Atma is believed to have formed a body. It is then provided food for its journey to the next world. The ceremony performed on the eleventh day, known as Ekaadasi shraadh, is therefore, considered to be the most important of these four day rituals and is usually on a large scale and quite elaborate. Libations of consecrated water are first offered to the deceased and to ancestors through the process known as tarpan: the act of pouring water through the hands with the use of sacred darbha grass, which is believed to grow from Lord Visnu's hair and therefore considered pure. Usually tarpan is performed in conjunction with other rites, water is mixed with barley and poured through the hands as an offering to the Gods. Water mixed with sesame seeds is poured through the hands as an offering to the Pitrus. Many Gods are then invoked and worshipped separately in the name of the deceased. Many oblations – offerings - are made to the deities through the havan- sacrificial fire, a prayer is offered to Lord Shiv and finally pin daan takes place: pinds are offered to provide nourishment for the gods, sages and rishimunis, ancestors and the deceased.

The twelfth day rituals consist of libations of consecrated water being offered to ancestors, prayers being offered to Lord Vishnu and to the deceased and pinds being offered to the gods, sages and rishimunis, ancestors and the deceased.

Rituals known as 'Puchhapani Vidhi' are also performed on the twelfth day to assist the Atma to cross the Vaitarnee river after death. Hindus believe that Lord Yama, whose name means the 'restrainer', is the God of death and it is he who keeps mankind in check by carrying away the Atmas of the deceased to his abode known as Yampuri immediately after death. There he judges Atmas according to the good or bad deeds they performed whilst on earth and metes out appropriate rewards or punishment. However, the river Vaitarnee forms a trench around Yampuri and after death each person has to swim across this river clinging to a cow's tail before Yampuri can be reached. A harmless passage is given to those who have performed good deeds but others who have sinned are made to suffer. Some 33,000,000 Gods are considered to reside in the cow's tail and 'Puchhapani Vidhi' entails revering them by placing darbha grass and money on the cow's tail after first washing the tail with water. Close family members, relatives and friends will do this. This rite is considered not only to reduce the suffering of the deceased whilst crossing the river but also to benefit the performers. Whilst in India a live cow is used for the performance of these rites, in Britain a small silver statue of a cow is used for the same purpose.

The rituals carried out on the twelfth day are performed therefore to further smoothen the transition to the next life. Thus satisfied the Pret is considered to leave the home on the thirteenth day and continue its journey.

Hindus believe that not carrying out these rituals results in the deceased relative not being able to continue his/her journey and remaining as a restless Atma on earth.

(c.f. answers to questions 9, 14, 15 and 21)

Question 8:

Why are new clothes given to relatives on the 12th and 13th days?

Answer:

New clothes are given to the bereaved relatives on the 12th and 13th days and worn to indicate severance of all ties and emotional attachments to the deceased. It is the custom that clothes from the mother's side are given to the deceased's family. Men, as well as women, should, therefore wear the clothes provided by the in-laws. It is customary in India for a widow to wear only white/light coloured clothing after the 13th day for one year.

Question 9:

Are there any rituals that need to be performed after the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days?

Answer:

After the rituals of the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days, the next shraddh ceremony needs to be carried out at the end of the first month. Thereafter, although some people consider that the shraddh ceremonies need to be carried out after three months, six months and twelve months, the shraddh ceremony should, strictly, be performed every month for a total of twelve months – with the last shraddh ceremony being completed by or on the anniversary of the death of the deceased. During this time a total of 16 Ekadaasi shraddhs need to be performed. The last of these shraddhs is known as the Sapindikaran shraddh.

The offerings made during these Ekaadasi shraddh ceremonies are considered vital in enabling the Pret body to be nourished and maintained

and enable the deceased to attain the status of a Pitru and gain a place amongst the ancestors or 'divine fathers' in their heavenly abode called Pitru Lok. This is normally considered to take one year. Until the Sapindikaran or the ritual uniting of the Pret with the Pitrus ceremony is performed, the deceased is not elevated to the status of a Pitru.

Nowadays, particularly in Britain, people may however ask a maharaj to perform all these ceremonies in one go for practical reasons e.g. marriages cannot take place within 12 months of a death taking place in the family if the shraddh ceremonies have not been performed.

In addition to these observances there is yearly honouring of ancestors. The second half –vad - of the Hindu month of Bhaadarvo (September/October) is generally known as the shraddh period and is considered to be particularly mangal – auspicious - for the performance of shraddh for ancestors. In addition to paying homage to the deceased in accordance with his/her tithi - date of death according to the Hindu calendar - the last day of this two week period- Amaavashya - is set aside by Hindus to honour all ancestors –for whom the tithi is not known. The eldest son, or close relative if this is not possible, is required to perform the rites. This annual honouring of ancestors is known as Pitru Paksha/Sarve Pitru Shraddh.

In Britain this generally involves saying a prayer and putting vaas out in the garden in the usual manner for the deceased members of the family and may also involve a family or communal meal.

In India particularly, ancestors are also honoured annually on Makarshankranti day, which may fall on the 13th or 14th January, on Somvati Amaavashya - which may fall one or two times at any time during the year - and on Dhara Ashtami in September/October.

The performance of shraddh rites on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th days and annual honouring of ancestors are specified in the Garud Puran and other sacred Hindu texts as being part of one's ordained duty or obligatory karma and considered to be one of the most important duties that need to be performed by Hindus. Fulfilling these obligations towards one's parents and one's elders is considered to earn special merit both for the deceased relatives – helping them move further along the spiritual path – and for the performer- whereas failure to fulfil them could result in the inner communication between the living members of the family and those who

have departed being severed and could, perhaps, ultimately have a negative impact on the living members and longevity of the family.

(c.f. answers to questions 6, 14, 15 and 21).

Question 10:

Why can't the family of the deceased go out until one of the relatives calls them to their home after one and a quarter months?

Answer:

The family of the deceased don't go out until one of the relatives (generally mami / mama) calls them to their home after 1 1/4 months because this is the formally accepted grieving and condolence period. Visiting the relatives' home, which generally includes being offered a meal, is a formal indication and acceptance of the need to continue with life.

Question 11:

Why can't the family of the deceased visit a mandir – temple - for a period of time? What is this period of time and does observance of this ritual also apply to close relatives?

Answer:

The family of the deceased do not generally visit a mandir or light a divo and do puja –worship - at home for 1 1/4 months because this is the formally accepted grieving and condolence period. If the deceased was married it is generally the spouse and sons and daughters –in- law who are affected by this custom. Daughters and sons-in-law can visit a temple before the end of this time period.

Question 12:

Why do people not visit the bereaved family if a wedding has been fixed in their own family or if they are going abroad?

Answer:

People do not generally visit the bereaved family if a wedding has been fixed in their own family for the first thirteen days after a death – until after the thirteenth day shraddh rites have been completed. This is because a

wedding is considered to be an auspicious occasion whilst a death is considered to be inauspicious. Hence people do not visit the bereaved family if a wedding has been fixed in their own family or if they are going away because this is considered by some to be a bad omen.

Question13:

Why do the family of the deceased donate a steel or copper utensil containing shaakar and some copper coins to relatives and friends?

Answer:

It is customary for the daughter/s of the deceased or grand-daughter/s -if there is/are no daughter/s - to donate a steel or copper utensil containing shaakar and some copper coins to relatives and friends in remembrance of the deceased. The shaakar denotes that the sweetness of life should continue and the copper coins are for prosperity.

The utensil is generally engraved with the names of the deceased and the person/s distributing the utensil as well as the date on which the deceased passed away.

Nowadays some people in Britain may donate other things e.g. give tapes or CDs featuring bhajan-kirtans or recitals of slokas from sacred Hindu scriptures in memory of their loved ones.

Question 14:

What is the significance of the Shraddh month?

Answer:

The Shraadh month is deeply significant for Hindus in that it enables people to observe 'Pitru Paksha' or 'Sarve Pitru Shraddh': remember their forefathers and honour and pay reverential homage to them on a yearly basis during the second half of the month -vad- of Bhadarvo/Bhadrapad (September/October). Performing shraddh during this period is considered to be most auspicious and most worthy of merit – both for the ancestors and for their living family members.

Hindus believe that one year after death, the Atma – Soul of a departed person attains a place among the 'Pitrus' or 'Divine Fathers' in their blissful

abode called 'Pitru Lok' and thus able to partake of the offerings made to them. The Law Books of Manu decreed that rites performed in honour of the Pitrus were more important than rites in honour of the Gods.

In India on each day of the fortnight the eldest son or some other male member of the family performs 'Pitru Yajna': offers oblations of water and pind and sacramental meals to the Pitrus. Part of the food offerings is also given to cows and crows. Priests are fed and given daan-dakshina, for it is believed that whatever is given to the bhramins also reaches the departed Atmas. Dudhpak -a sweet dish made of milk and rice - and puris –small deep fried puffy wholemeal breads - are specially prepared and offered to the Pitrus at this time. On the last day of the fortnight, known as Amavasya, oblations are offered to all those departed ancestors whose date of death or 'tithi' - date according to the lunar month - is not known.

Hindus believe that a family is made up not only of its living members in the inner world but also the deceased members of the family in the outer world and that there is a definite link between family members living in this world and those living in the world in which the ancestors reside. Hence the deepest significance of the shraddh rites lies in the yoking of these inner and outer worlds through the ceremonial uniting of the deceased with his/ancestors and honouring of ancestors annually to keep alive the communication between the living members of the family and those that have departed.

It is believed that the food offered, and devotion shown, to the Pitrus helps to sustain them and also move them on to higher worlds. The Pitrus, pleased and gratified by this homage, bless the living members of the family with a long life, happiness, wealth, learning, progeny and moksha.

In India particularly, it is not unusual for living members of the family to call for help at special times from the Pitrus.

The performance of shraddh rites on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th days, the subsequent shraadh rites during the first year and annual honouring of ancestors are specified in the Garud Puran and other sacred Hindu texts as being part of one's ordained duty or obligatory karma and considered to be one of the most important duties that need to be performed by Hindus.

Fulfilling one's duties and obligations is part of 'Dharma' one of the four goals in human life for practising Hindus and showing respect for and fulfilling obligations towards one's parents and one's elders is considered a most important duty within this. Shradh rites should not be performed, therefore, merely as religious rituals, or worse, a social obligation but to show our devotion to and our respect for our elders.

(c.f. Answers to questions 7, 9, 14 and 21)

Question15:

Are there any other special religious and cultural occasions when the deceased should be remembered?

Answer:

The deceased are generally remembered and shradh rites performed on many occasions such as births, deaths, marriages and investiture of the sacred thread ceremony. It is considered that special merit is earned if shradh ceremonies are performed at sacred places or pilgrimage sites in India.

The performance of the shradh rites serve to remind us at important times in our lives that death does not sever the link between the living and the dead, between the past and the present.

Question 16:

Why do we fast on 'agyaras' ?

Answer:

We fast on 'agyaras' day (ekaadasi) to help provide peace for the departed Atma –Soul and to help it move on to a better next life.

Question17:

Why are the final rites not performed by women?

Answer:

Women do not generally perform the final rites because it is considered the eldest son's duty to perform these. According to the holy Hindu scripture 'Garud Purana' any son who performs the final rites for his mother or father will be greatly blessed and receive much prosperity in all its forms. If the parents do not have a son then the brother's son should perform the

final rites. Failing that, the scriptures say, as a last resort, a daughter can perform the final rites.

Question 18:

Why is a body generally cremated and not buried?

Answer:

A body is generally cremated and not buried because Hindus believe that the human personality is made up of five elements of which four belong to the body and come from this world, namely, earth, fire, water and air, whilst the fifth, ether (fine matter) belongs to the domain of the subtle body and comes from the higher worlds. By cremating the body, the body returns to the four elements from whence it came, while the subtle body along with Atma –Soul returns to the worlds beyond for the continuation of its afterlife.

Also, it is considered that cremation allows swifter, more complete release of the Atma from the body. The flames themselves are also important as they represent the presence of the God Brahma, the Creator.

Scientifically it is considered that cremation prevents the spread of any infectious diseases.

There are exceptions to cremation:

- i) young children up to the age of three are not cremated but buried because their body is considered too tender to undergo cremation.
- ii) young unmarried persons because they are considered not to have any strong attachments.
- iii) sanyasis/sadhus -holy men- are buried and not cremated because they have renounced the material world and attained such a high level of spirituality as to have no attachments – including to the body.

Question 19:

Why are ashes scattered in flowing water?

Answer:

Ashes are scattered in flowing water because Lord Vishnu is believed to live in the ocean and all flowing water flows into the ocean.

Question 20:

What is the significance of the rituals performed on the day of the funeral when the coffin is brought to the family home – for example, sprinkling of abil, gulal, kanku and rice; placing of, tal, jav, on the body; placing of the pinds and ladwas on either side of the feet and hands and on the chest; the placing of the coconuts.

Answer:

The rituals performed on the day of the funeral when the coffin is brought to the family home basically serve to beautify, purify, sanctify, provide nourishment and smoothen the transition for the deceased on his or her onward journey:

A new white cloth is placed in the centre of the room, above which the casket will be placed, and an 'aum' sign is made with kanku in the centre of the cloth because 'aum' is considered to be the most sacred Hindu symbol and the sound of creation. It represents Brahman – the Universal Soul in simple form and is purifying.

5 pan leaves, one for each end of the coffin and one for the middle, which may also be positioned on the cloth above which the casket will be placed represent the five Gods: Lords Bhrama, Vishnu, Mahesh, Yama and Tatpurush and also the five elements the body is made up of: water, air, soil, fire and ether.

Abil and gulal are sprinkled over the heads of the sons, son-in-laws and brothers of the deceased and other immediate members of the family by the designated person to denote that they are the family members of the deceased.

The casket is brought into the home and placed above the aum sign on the white cloth in such a way that the head of the deceased faces north and the feet face south since Lord Yama is believed to live in the South.

A little kanku and rice are put on the forehead of the deceased for sanctification. The kanku is used in particular to facilitate both receiving God's blessings and love and to centering one's life around God in the next life. Kanku also provides fragrance.

Abil and gual are sprinkled on the deceased. Abil increases longevity and gual facilitates the ability for self-enquiry and the need to focus on God in the next life. Abil and gual also provide fragrance.

One garland of sandalwood, one of tulasi and one of flowers is placed around the neck of the deceased for purification and fragrance. The sandalwood also mitigates the effects of the cremation process.

Some tal and jav and 5 flowers are placed on the body. The tal and jav represent Lord Vishnu and are used for purification whilst the flowers represent the 4 pallbearers and the clay pot.

Panchdhattu, pancharatna, tulasi leaves and a little Ganga Jal are placed in the mouth. Ganga Jal is also sprinkled within the casket. The metals in the panchdhattu are used to purify the body, the pancharatna is considered beautifying by providing radiance and lustre- since the Atma -Soul is immortal whilst the tulasi leaves - signifying Lord Vishnu's wife (who has taken the form of a plant) - and the Ganga Jal are used for purification and considered to wash away all sins.

The Panchakpadi - a piece of wood with five holes in it, five dolls made of dharba grass or urad flour - representing Lord Vishnu) and five karoda - small round clay pots - is placed in the casket if the death has occurred during a panchak day -five specific days during every month. These can be identified from a Hindu calendar. The panchakpadi is used to ward off any malevolent forces.

All 6 pindis and 5 ladwas are placed in the coffin. One of each is placed on either side of the feet, one of each on either side of the hands and one on the chest. One pindi is for the deceased, one for Lord Yama, one for Lord Agni, God of Fire, one for local spirits/ghosts and one for spirits/ghosts

who may be anywhere. One pind is also placed in the casket in reverence to the sacred cow. The five ladwas are for the nourishment of the deceased only for his/her onward journey.

If the deceased is a man two shawls are placed over the deceased. The shoulders and head are not covered). The shawls are used purely for covering the deceased. One shawl is provided by the family of the deceased and the other by the in-law family if the deceased was married. £1.25 is tied in the corner of the shawl provided by the deceased's family. If the deceased is a woman, two saris – one provided by the deceased's family and the other by the in-law family if the deceased was married – are placed over the deceased. The money and the saris are to facilitate the after-life.

The 4 coconuts are also placed in the coffin – two beside the shoulders and two by the feet. These represent the 4 pallbearers and the 4 most sacred and oldest Hindu texts, the Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda – which lay down the foundations for Hinduism.

The agarbati and butter or ghee are placed in the coffin to purify the organs e.g. eyes, ears, nose, nails through which the Atma – Soul- is considered to leave the body.

If the deceased was a married man his widow will take off her mangal sutra - wedding pendant - and place it around her husband's neck, signifying her enduring tie to him. She will also discard the other jewellery of a married woman i.e. chandlo, bangles, nose-ring (if worn).

After all the rituals have been completed the eldest son, other son/s, sons-in-law, brothers and close family members walk clockwise around the coffin three times – to ensure severance from all forms of attachment – maya, moh, mamta – to loved ones, to possessions, to everything and everyone within the world generally. They will scatter flower petals in the casket and put a little Ganga Jal and rice in the mouth of the deceased for purification and nourishment for the journey ahead.

The grandson is required to break a clay pot that has string attached to it with his feet before the coffin is placed in the hearse. This signifies that all ties have now been severed between the deceased and his/her family.

Question 21:

Why do we perform the death rites?

Answer:

We perform death rites in order to show our respect for the deceased, enable disposal of the body and to help his/her Atma – Soul to move on to its next life and eventually attain life's ultimate goal: moksha – salvation - liberation from sansar -the cycle of birth, death and and re-birth.

Hindus believe that after cremation the Atma of a recently deceased person takes the form of a subtle body called the Ativahika body. In this body the Atma wanders about in the sky in the shape of air without any support and remains earth bound. In order to release the Atma from this stage, the rite of offering pind was introduced. The offering of pind destroys the Ativahika body and creates the Pret body. This generally takes ten days. The Pret body is also a subtle body and Ekaadasi rites that are performed during the first year are considered to nourish and support the Preta body on its onward journey to Pitru Lok – the heavenly abode in which the ancestors or 'divine fathers' reside. This journey is considered to take one year and, therefore, one year after the death of the deceased the Sapindikaran ceremony which ritually unites the Pret with the Pitrus is performed. Until the Sapindikaran ceremony is performed the deceased is not elevated to status of a Pitru and cannot gain a place amongst the ancestors or 'divine fathers' in their heavenly abode, Pitru Lok. The Sapindikaran ceremony may be performed any time after the eleventh day and should, preferably take place by one year after the death. After some time the journey of the Atma is considered to continue and, ultimately, attain moksha by becoming one with Brahman – the Universal Soul.

Hindus believe, therefore, that if the death rites are not performed for the deceased in the prescribed manner and the requirements of the scriptures satisfied, this will delay the journey of the Atma in its continuation of its afterlife. Hindus believe that failure to carry out the shraddh rituals of the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th days will result in the deceased remaining a restless soul bound to the earth, whilst failure to carry out the remaining fourteen rituals, particularly the Sapindikaran ceremony at one year after the death of the deceased, will result in the deceased remaining as a restless Pret unable to move on and to attain a place amongst the ancestors – Pitrus or divine fathers- in their heavenly abode called Pitru Lok - or to continue its journey thereafter in order to ultimately attain moksha.

The performance of shraddh rites on the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th days, the subsequent shraadh rites during the first year and annual honouring of ancestors –shraddh - are specified in the Garud Puran and other sacred Hindu texts as being part of one's ordained duty or obligatory karma and considered to be one of the most important duties that need to be performed by Hindus.

Fulfilling one's duties and obligations is part of 'Dharma' one of the four goals in human life for practising Hindus and showing respect for and fulfilling obligations towards one's parents and one's elders is considered a most important duty within this. Shraddh rites and shraddh should not be performed, therefore, merely as religious rituals, or worse, a social obligation but to show our devotion to and our respect for our elders to whom we are greatly indebted for our corporeal existence.

Fulfilling obligations towards one's parents and one's elders is considered to earn special merit both for the deceased relatives – helping them move further along the spiritual path – and for the performer. Failure to honour and pay homage to ancestors may result in the termination of the inner communication between the living members of the family and those who have departed and could, perhaps, ultimately have a negative impact on the living members and longevity of the family.

We should note that death rites are also for the living - to allow the family, relatives and friends of the deceased to say a respectable and dignified "farewell", to mourn and formally express grief, loss and the range of emotions that we naturally encounter – thereby also enabling us to come to terms with our loss.

Appendix 1 Summary of Basic Hindu Beliefs pertaining to Hindu Death Rites

The Nature of God

Hindus believe in one supreme God – Brahman (also known as Supreme Lord, Supreme Being, Supreme Soul, Universal Soul, Universal Self, Ultimate Reality) – who is the cause and foundation of all existence in the known and unknown universe – in the past, the present and the future yet to come.

Brahman is both transcendent (impersonal) and immanent (personal).

In the impersonal aspect Brahman is all-pervasive – there is nothing other than Him and there is nothing that is outside of Him. He is infinite and without form - without a beginning and an end and He is eternal – imperishable and immortal.

In the personal aspect Brahman not only assumes the forms of the Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (also called Shiv) –whose cosmic functions are creation, preservation and dissolution respectively – but also manifests Himself in innumerable forms and roles to uphold His entire creation with His unlimited powers.

In the abstract Brahman is Truth, Consciousness, Bliss.

In the individual being Brahman exists as the Soul – Atma.

Belief in the existence of Atma –Soul

Hindus believe in the existence of the Atma - the individual Soul, as the microcosmic aspect of the Universal Soul, Brahman. The Soul is eternal, invisible, imperishable and unchanging and exists deep within all beings - since Brahman is considered to exist in all living things and all living things in Him.

The Law of Karma

This concept is central to Hindu belief and is the law of cause and effect whereby each person creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds. Essentially all actions (karma) have corresponding results –good thoughts, words and deeds have positive results and bad thoughts, words and deeds have negative results. A person's actions do not necessarily bear fruit immediately and catch up with the person later on – sometimes in later lives. Past actions of previous lives are known as 'samchita karma' and suffering in this life can be caused by sinful actions in the past-'paap'. 'Agami karma' are the actions performed in the present life and these go on to affect the future.

Sansar – The cycle of birth, death and re-birth

Sansar - belief in re-incarnation: the transmigration of the Soul-(the movement of the Soul from one body to another) - is another key feature of Hinduism. Hindus believe that the Soul re-incarnates and evolves through a continuous cycle of birth death and re-birth until all karmas have been resolved and moksha is attained.

Moksha

Moksha is the ultimate goal of Hindus. It is release from bondage and worldly existence, the attainment of salvation and true peace through the liberation of the Soul from the recurring cycle of birth, death and re-birth and the spiritual union of the Atma, the individual Soul- with Brahman, the Universal Soul.

There are three paths to Moksha: the spiritual – which involves acquiring spiritual knowledge through yoga and meditation; the path of devotion to god and the path of working selflessly for the good of society.

Appendix 2 Puja - Paath.

Hari Om Tatsat

Hari Om Tatsat shri Narayan tum, Purushottam Guru tum,
Siddha Buddha tum, Skand Vinaik, Savita Pavak tum,
Brahma Mazad tum, Yahav Shakti tum, Ishu Pita Prabhu tum,
Roodra Vishanu tum, Ram Krishna tum, Rahim Tao tum,
Vasudev Gau, Vishvarup tum, Chidanand Hari tum,
Avitiya tum, Akal Nirbhaya Atmaling Shiva tum,
Hari Om Tatsat shri Narayan tum, Purushottam Guru tum,
Siddha Budha tum, Skand Vinaik, Savita Pavak tum,
Am Savita Pavak tum, Om Savita Pavak tum.

Asatyo Maanhethi

Asatyo maanhethi, Prabhu Param satye Tun layi jaa,
Oondaa andhaarethi, Prabhu Param Teje Tun layi jaa,
Mahamrutyu maanthi, amrut samipe, naath layi jaa,
Tun hino, hun chhun toh, Tuj darshanaa daan dayi jaa.

Gita Vani

Aa Gita karm kahani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.
Ae Arjun-ne sambh-davi chhe, kalyan sada karnari chhe.

O Arjun sambh-al dhyan dhari,
Aa mamta dukhni sejaldi,
Ae janmo janam dhar-nari chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Aa maat, peeta ne nari chhe,
Ae-nee preet jagat-thi nya-ree chhe,
Ae anth samaye farnari chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Aa jagat-ma koinoo koi n-athi,
Koinee saathe koi m-artoo n-athi,
Ae tan, man-ni bimari chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Sukh detoo man-vi jiyare mare,
Ae-ni pachhad sarve roodan kare,
Ae sarve jeevo-ni kahani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Aa jeeve jagat-ma janm dhare,
Dukhi man-vi-na kalyan kare,
Ae anth samayni kamani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Tun sarve jagat-ne chhodi-de,
Ek mara-ma cheet jodi-de,
Ae reet sada kalayani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Ma-n, vani, karm-nu nee-yam kare,
Sukh-dukh-na ud-vegg dhare,
Ae tan-man paavan-kari chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Je jan aa Gita-paath kare,
Te bhav-sagar-ni paar tare,
Gita shar-ne shanti samani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Kahe indu antar-yami prabhu,
Taru varsa-vi-de vahal vibhu,
Taara char-ne cheet jodani chhe, ae Krishna Prabhujini vani chhe.

Gita G-nan

Bolya, bolya shri bhagwan (2), Arjun sambh-lo-re!
Tam-ne kahun chhun Gita g-nan (2) Arjun sambh-lo-re!

Atma marto nathi, amar chhe, ae-voov samje te g-nani chhe,
Te 'sankh-ya-yog' kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re!
S-at kharm dharm, kahe-vai, aachar-tan cheet shoo-dhi thai,
Te 'karm-yog' kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
S-at karm sada aach-ri-ye, f-al hari-ne arpan kari-ye,
Te Brah-ma-pan kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Jem kamal-patr pani-ma te-m ra-he chhe je duniya-ma,
Te san-yasi kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.

Po-teh po-ta-na guru bani-ye, narayan-nu dhyan dhari-ye,
Te saian-mi kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Vasudev sar-ve vya-pak chhe, hazaro-ma ko'k ja-ne chhe,
Te vi-g-nani kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Aakha vishwa-tano sh-ai thai, ma-ru naam akshai kahe-vai,
Akshar-dham te kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Sarjun, palun ne sanharu, maa-te bhojan karo ta-me maru,
Te 'raj-yog' kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Hun anant-roope vasnaro, jag-ne dharan kar-naro,
Aa chhe 'vibhuti-yog' maaro, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
An-tar-ni aankh kholo, Man-eh saghde ha-ve ta-me joi-lo,
Te vishwa-roop kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Ana-n-ya chin-tan maru kar-se, te mrutyu-sagar tar-se,
Ae-vu 'bhakti-yog' samjaveh, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Deh pra-k-uti kahe-vai, jeeve ma-ro ansh kahe-vai,
Shetr-shetr-sh kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Jya-re bhed-bhavana ja-ye, tya-re sa-ma-nta a-ve,
Te tri-guna-teet kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Jag-vruksh ta-nu je mul chhe, jud chetan-thi uttam chhe,
Te purshottam kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.

Sa'd -budhhi dev kahe-vai, ku-budhhi a-soor kahe-vai,
Te deva-soor kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Je-vu a-nn te-vu m-an, te-vi shra-ddha je-vu m-an,
Te shra-ddha-van kahe-vai, Arjun sambh-lo-re.
Sagh-da dharmo chhodi do-ne, maara shar-ne aav-ne,

Mu-kt san-yasi th-ei-ne, Arjun sambh-lo-re.

Geet-amrut paan je kar-se, te-ne jeevan-muk-ti mal-se,
Te-no thaa-se jay-jay-kar, sau jan sambh-lo-re!

Bol-ya, bo-lya, shri bhagwan, (2) Arjun sambh-lo-re.

Anjali Geet

“ Hey naath! Jodi haath paaye, prem-thi sahoon lagi-ye,
Sharnoo male sa-choo tama-ru ae hrah-dai-thi mangi-ye.
Je jeeve aa-vio aap sharne, charan-ma apnavjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo (2)

Va-li karma-na yogee kari ne, kul-ma je avt-re,
Tyi-an purn preme, O Prabhujee! Aap-ni bhakti kare,
Lax-chorasi bandhano-ne , lax-ma la-ye kaap-jo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo (2)

Su-samp-ti su-vichar-ne sat-karm-no d-ai vaarso,
Janmo-janm tum bhakti-thi kirtar paar utar-jo,
Aa loko-ne parlok-ma tum prem ra-ge-rag viya-pjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Ma-le mox, ke sookh swarg-na, aasha u-re evee nathi,
D-yo deh dur-labh manvi-no, bhajan kar-va bhav-thi,
Sa-choo bata-vi roop, shree Ran- chod roo-dh-ae stha-pjo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Ma-nav tan, aa chhodi-ne te, aap dwa-re aa-vio,
Karm-na dhagh ho bha-le Prabhujee poon-ya thi ugar-jo,
Apra-dh maaf ka-ri sa-hoo, am vin-an-ti- swi-kar-jo,
Parm-atma! Ae atma-ne shanti saachi aap-jo. (2)

Hey naath! Jodi haath pa-ye, prem-thi sahoon mangi-ye,
Sharnoo male sa-choo tama-roon, ae rah-dai-thi mangi-ye.

Mangal Mandir Kholo

Mangal mandir kholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Jeevan van a-ti vege vataavyu,
Dwaar u-bho sishu-bholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Timir ga-yu ne jyoti prakaash-yo,
Shishu-ne ur-maan lo lo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Naam madhur ta-m rat-yo nirantar,
Sishu sah preme bolo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Div-ya trushaa –tur aavyo baalak,
Prem - ami-ras dholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.
Mangal mandir kholo Dayaamaya, mangal mandir kholo.

Shanti Paath

Om dhy-o	shanti;	Vanas-pat-i shanti;
Antariksha	shanti;	Vishva-deva shanti;
Pruth-vi	shanti;	Brah-ma shanti;
Aap	shanti;	Shanti-rev shanti,
Au-sha-dha-ya	shanti;	Ksha- ma shanti;

Om shanti, shanti, shanti.

