

अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रजावादांश्च भाषसे। गतासूनगतासूश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः॥

While speaking learned words, you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor the dead.

5. When death takes place, there is a separation of the body of flesh and blood, from “something” which is the owner and the occupant. We call this “something” the Atma (Soul) by whom the sense experiences seem to be either enjoyed or suffered during the life time. The Atma is also the self. The separation of the body from the soul is the first stage after death. The soul now exists in a world or Loka which HE sees. The soul is still in a state of being. It must be stressed that the Atma, being beyond everything material, is eternal. It leaves the body in a subtle form, unseen by material eyes. The Garuda Puran (9, 38) states:

अपानान्मिलितप्राणौ यदा हि भवतः पृथक्। सूक्ष्मी भूत्वा तदा वायुर्विनिष्क्रामति पुत्तालत्॥

The vital airs termed Apān and Prāna, having separated, the Atma leaves the body in a subtle form. The physical body made up of the five elements finally disintegrates, the material elements go back to the sources from which they emerged. The Bhagavad Gita (2, 20) confirms:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन् नाय भविता वा न भूयः। अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥

For the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor having ones been, does it ever ceased to be . It is unborn, eternal, ever existing, undying and primeval. It is not slain when the body slain.

6. The second stage of existence of the Atma after death is Preta Loka. In this stage, the recently separated soul has not got over the “shock” of removal from the temporary abode, the body. After passing through this initial experience of the other state of being he sees reality and realizes that he is alive, and that the body which was abandoned, was just an outer sheath or covering of his real personality or soul. The length of time spent by the departed soul in the Preta Loka, varies from a minimum of 10 days, to, in extreme cases, several months or years, before passing to the next state of being, after death. This is, among others, the main reason for observing Satak for 10 days. According to the Garuda Puran (1, 49 to 54) the Atma which leaves the earthly body, attains another body called the पिण्डज शरीर (Pindaj sarira) in the next world; and the formation of the complete body, including hunger and thirst takes, 10 days. Hence the 10 day ceremony and the offering of 10 pindas symbolizing each of the 10 sections that constitute the whole human form. On the thirteenth day the departed soul reaches the path of Yamraj.

7. The shaving of the head by the relative who undertakes to participate in the shrāddha and by the immediate, male, blood relatives of the deceased, is a purificatory act. Garuda Puran (11, 38) enjoins

दशमे दिवसे क्षौरं बांधवानांचमुंडनम्। क्रिया कर्तुं सुतस्य पि पुनर्मुण्डमाचरेत्॥

On the 10th day blood relatives belonging to the same Gotra, must shave their heads, and the person who has elected to do the rites, must shave his head again.

8. The calculation of the number of days for carrying out the rituals, is based on the time of cremation or burial, a fact which could be deduced from the Garuda Puran (10, 21):

चितामाशेष्य तं प्रेतं पिण्डौ द्वौ तत्र दापयेत्। चितायां शवहस्तेच प्रेतनाम्ना खगेश्वर॥

The corpse is placed on the pyre and two pindas are offered; from the time the Pinda is placed in the hand of the corpse, the departed soul assumes the name (Preta), until the Sapindi is concluded.

9. Satak is a period of defilement occasioned by the onset of disease and death. It is observed for 10 days. During the period special care is taken to limit contact with the public as far as it is possible. The ancient Hindus, from times immemorial, took precautions against the spread of diseases by the practice of isolation; there was also the fear that contact with the public would violate the strict discipline and special lifestyle adopted by the bereaved family, especially in respect of cleanliness and hygiene, eating, moral life, etc.; this practice is reminiscent of the 10 day period of quarantine/incubation that was imposed to fight off certain infectious diseases.

10. It would be appropriate to emphasize the fact that it is the physical body that dies while the spirit soul has an eternal nature. When death occurs, the life that lit the body at once leaves. What is the Atma? From where did it come? It has come into the body as a subtle part of that Supreme Consciousness we call God. The Bhagavad Gita states:

ममैवांशो जीवल्लोके जीवभूतः सनातनः।

The living entities in this conditioned world are my eternal fragmental parts Further in 2.24 of the Gita the Atma is described as unbreakable, insoluble; it can neither be burned or dried; it is everlasting, all pervading, unchangeable, immeasurable and eternally the same.

In the Katopnishad (1-2) the secret of death is revealed to the young Rsi, Nachiketa, by Yamraj, the Lord of death. It is confirmed that the Atma, on the demise of the body, having passed through different states and endowed with temporary bodies, finally finds existence in new bodies on the basis of Karma; after death the perpetrators of sinful actions, attain bodies of the lower forms - animals, birds, insects, worms, etc. In this respect Isopanishad (1,3) warns of the plight of human beings who do not pursue the divine path:

असुर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसा ऽऽ वृताः। तांस्ते प्रतेयाभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः॥