

The forms of life of demoniac beings is characterized by suffering, strife and ignorance; whoever destroys the self by sinful actions, attains the bodies of most terrible species of life in keeping with their Karmas. The human form should be used for spiritual advancement, not merely for sense gratification which will surely lead to hellish conditions.

11. Sapindi is the name given to a special shrāddha which symbolically unites the Atma of the deceased with those of the immediate, past three generations of ancestors. The ceremony is performed on the twelfth or thirteenth day, after which the departed one is no more referred to as Preta but Pitṛ. The Pitṛs are hereafter worshipped as divine beings. It is only after the completion of the 12th-thirteenth day shrāddha that normal, routine daily prayers are resumed. In this regard the Garuda Puran (13.20/21) instructs: Offering of Ashirbaad, deity worship, sleeping on a bed, and direct contact with the public are not permitted during the Satak period i.e. up to the 12th/13th day; also are not performed daily Sandhya, giving of daan, japa, hawan, study of Vedas, tarpana, fasts and Brahman bhojan. It must be pointed out that this period should be used to perform the special prescribed rituals relating to the recent death.

12. Especially during a shrāddha it is the practice to place part of the prepared food, which has been first offered to God, in a clean place outside the home. In actual fact this is a prescribed routine (Panchbali) to be performed daily by householders, before eating meals. Charity does not consist in the giving of food only to human beings. Panchbali means the giving food to the cow, to the guest, to ants, to the dog and to the birds. The five creatures represent GOD' S creation and charity to them becomes a spiritual duty. There must be concern and kindness for all beings. The Panchbali is counted as a Yajna (sacrifice). The Yajna, rain and the production of food grains is the divine arrangement for the maintenance and support of creation. Bhagavad Gita (3, 14) emphasizes the importance of this cycle.

अन्नं भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नं संभवः। यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः॥

All living beings subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced by performance of Yajna, and Yajna is born of prescribed duties.

### 13. What is Pitṛ Paks Shrāddha

The Sanskrit word Pitṛ embraces God in all His aspects, the earliest holy sages (Rsis) and our immediate ancestors to the third generation, and all our departed friends and relatives. Pitṛ Paks is a period of 15 days, in the dark half of the month of Asvin (about September), set-aside as Memorial and thanksgiving to the departed souls, who, when on this earth, made some contribution to make it a better place. We acknowledge our indebtedness to these ancestors of the world. It is an observance accompanied by intense Bhakti to God. The followers of Sanathan Dharma (Hindus) express their gratitude and devotion by oblations of water in memory of these; oblations are also made to God, to Devas (Angels), and Rsis. The offerings are made daily for 15 days. The spiritual activity termed Tarpana is also performed on festive occasions. It is observed that Christians place wreaths on monuments in remembrance of the departed; similarly Muslims place flowers on the graves of dear ones to remember them. During the Pitṛ Paks period devotees are expected to purify themselves internally and externally. Physical purification comes from disciplined living -which includes abstinence from meat eating, alcohol, sex, etc. (just one or two days observance is not sufficient); mental and physical purification is considerably enhanced by prayer, chanting of holy names, participating in bhajans and Kirtans, reading of the scriptures, etc. The first link in the unending chain of departed souls is the parents; then come grandparents; great grandparents, relatives, friends and associates, until the devotee arrives at a stage when the whole universe becomes one large family to which he is indebted. This is real universal brotherhood. It is difficult to forget beloved ones who have departed, and people in all civilizations and religions try to remember them in a variety of ways; and it should be more difficult not to show gratitude to those who have contributed to our progress and welfare. Love and devotion know no bounds.

#### Is Pitṛ Puja Necessary?

Some people are of the opinion that Pitṛ Puja has not to be done because the Atma (Soul) may have taken re-birth. It might have been born as an animal, bird, insect, human, from the 8,400,000 species that a soul can get in accordance with Karmas of previous lives. After the Sapindi ceremony, Pitṛ Puja becomes obligatory on descendants. Every human being has to pay three debts with which he is born -indebtedness to God, indebtedness to Rsis and indebtedness to Pitṛs. What does it matter if the soul is reborn. A simple analogy from everyday life will make it clear. A person, say Ramsunder, owes a sum of money to Gopal who was residing at a certain address, at the time when the debt was incurred. Subsequently, Gopal changes his place of residence, and begins to live at another place. Does this absolve Ramsunder from his indebtedness? After all Death is the leaving of one body by the Atma and birth is the taking on of a new body. Bhagavad Gita (2,22) aptly describes the process.

वाससि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि। तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही॥

“Just as one removes old clothes and puts on new ones, so does the Jivatma abandon an old body and obtain a new one.” For further elucidation we may liken transmigration of the Soul to one abandoning a house which is old and beyond repair and taking residence in another home. Besides, Pitṛ Puja is a memorial service in which the devotee remembers as well as prays: addressing the departed he says - In whichever form you may be, wherever you may be, we wish to remember and pray for your peace and welfare. Special mantras are chanted for the welfare, prosperity and peace of all beings.