
Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Sep 2021

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Living Our Traditions

Śrāddhā (pitṛ yajña [1])

By Swamini Brahma Prajnananda

We are here because they were here before us and for us.

We may not even know their names or their life stories especially our great grandparents and the preceding generations. Yet, we owe them our lives. With the passage of time and the passage of generations **we have happily received** the wealth, privileges and traditions of our ancestors. But, much of it is one sided. As with all things in life, the balance must be restored.



Our sages recognised that all of us have a *pitṛ ṛṇam*, a sacred debt woven by an intricate tapestry of karma across lifetimes, that we must honor. *Pitṛ-s* include one's parents whether they are here or if they have moved on, grandparents and other ancestors. We have a **deep connectedness** to our *pitṛ-s* through:

- Our genetic connection,
- Our family traditions,
- The values imparted – *dhārmika* values of integrity, strength of character, truth, humility, valor, equanimity, commitment, and love.,
- The wealth passed on,
- The stories that live, long after they have passed on,
- And most importantly, the thread of gratitude that runs through the rich tapestry of all that our *pitṛ-s* have blessed us with.

This year ***Pitṛ Pakṣa***
is from 20th Sep – 6th Oct

Every year, generally in the month of September comes a fortnight, *Pitṛ Pakṣa* dedicated to making our offerings to our departed ancestors. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* talks about how the *jīva* moves to *pitṛ loka* and also the details of the ceremonies to be conducted. *Pitṛ loka* is a realm of experience where

our ancestors may have gone to, or they may have gone to *svarga loka* or they wait in *pitṛ loka* until going to *svarga loka* or being reborn.

This period is a reminder that our **connection and responsibilities** to our parents, our grandparents and our great great grandparents during their lives have not ended with their death (as the case may apply). Our connection, responsibilities and acknowledgment of their roles ends with our death, not theirs. And, hence as Hindus we use this time to acknowledge their roles in our lives, offer prayers for their well being (in whichever realm they are). This can also be done daily. We perform *Śrāddhā* rituals if our parents are not alive. Please contact a Purohit who can guide you.

The *Śrāddhā* involves *piṇḍa dāna*, which is an offering to the ancestors of *piṇḍa-s* (cooked rice and barley flour balls mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds), accompanying the release of water from the hand. It is followed by the worship of Vishnu and Yama. The food offering is then made, cooked especially for the ceremony on the roof. The offering is considered to be accepted if a crow arrives and devours the food; the **bird is believed to be a messenger** from Yama or comes because the spirit of the ancestor has moved on and is no longer present here. It is considered to be auspicious to perform the *Śrāddhā* rituals on the banks of holy rivers and even holy places such as Varanasi, Gaya etc. During this period, auspicious events like weddings, new ventures are avoided as it is a time to mourn if our grieving process is not complete or make these offerings in a solemn manner.



What do you do if you belong to another culture? Every culture has a **process to honor the ancestors** and we either follow it or adopt the Hindu way of honoring the ancestors. An astrologer may be consulted to find the appropriate way forward. Perhaps our parents or grandparents or elderly relatives instructed us to not perform any rituals for them. It does not matter, as they did not know enough about the realm of the beyond. The *Śāstra* shines the light on the nature of rituals to be performed, we trust it and hence perform these rituals.

Other ways are to offer food on their anniversaries, make donations, institute awards or make offerings in their name, make available their stories which can inspire the future generations etc.

Some people ask – If our ancestors are already reborn, should we still offering prayers? Yes, for at least **three generations**. Our prayers transform into *punya* for our reborn ancestors. No prayer ever is a waste. It is likely that much of our *punya* exists because of our descendants across previous lifetimes. Quite a heartening thought.



The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* reminds us – *Mātr devo bhava, Pitṛ devo bhava*. May we grow into people who consider our parents as manifestations of the divine. Some of us have had disturbing relations with our parents. In much of therapy we find that many problems faced by people currently are traced to difficult relationships with their parents. Then, how can one follow this teaching? We aim to make our peace with our parents and grandparents recognising them as fallible and yet being the instrument which delivered us into this world, being **co-creators of Ishvara**. Surely that is something to be deeply grateful for.

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa says that if the ancestors are content with the *Śrāddhā* -s, they will bestow health, wealth, knowledge and longevity. In many astrological readings people are seen to have '*pitṛ-doṣa*', defect related to the offerings to the ancestors and hence no blessings from them. Perhaps some families have not honored their ancestors enough. Perhaps there was ill treatment. This *pitṛ-doṣa* which is a reflection of one's own karma or generational karma shows up as difficulties in family life, many obstacles in career and relationships and needs to be rectified. Amends need to be made. There is no reason to incur *pitṛ-doṣa* if we offer our care and attention to our ancestors while they are alive.

We are here because they were there for us.

We are here because they blessed us through their presence and many actions.

We are here because they continue to bless us.

In honoring them we honor and express our gratitude for an unbroken bond.

In honoring them we honor their legacy - us.

May we live upto dharma and be worthy *pitṛ*-s for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren such that they can see and live the meaning of *Mātr devo bhava, Pitṛ devo bhava*, when they see us.

Om shanti shanti shanti.

[1] *Pitṛ Yajña* is one of the five reverential offerings that is the responsibility of every Hindu. The others are - *Deva Yajña* (Offerings to Ishvara and deities), *Brahma Yajña* Offerings to Brahma/rishi (Teachers and Vedic culture), *Bhūta Yajña* (our eco system) and *Manuṣya Yajña* (Offerings to our fellow beings).

For those who want to make these offerings themselves please click [here](#) for *tarpaṇa* manual.

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