

Should we conduct Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) or not?

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Vimal: - Yes. We must do conduct Shraaddha (श्राद्ध). We must serve living parents, grandparents, teachers, scholars, faithfully and well. This alone constitutes real Shraaddha (श्राद्ध).

Kamal: - Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is done for the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) i.e. deceased parents. Does Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is done ever or anywhere for the living?

Vimal: - First think over the meaning attached to the term Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर). Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) means protector. The Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) who is living alone is capable of protecting the other. Only the living can guide their children. Rich with experience, they could part with their worldly knowledge for the benefit of children. Only the living parents could protect their issues completely. Once dead the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) ceases to be the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) for the reason that it is neither a soul nor a body. When the soul, when integrated with the body, the resultant being could be a Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर). Once this soul-body union is broken, could there be a Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर)? If on the other hand, if a soul is treated as Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) then the soul ceases to be eternal or deathless. In that case the issue of soul being senior to one or to another requires to be settled. Further, we may have to visualize a situation where one soul is born after another. In case you do not agree with this situation then there arises no relation between the soul and Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर). When

such relation does not subsist to whom Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is to be done? Now, everybody agrees that the soul is deathless and hence there could be no age difference either being elder or lower to somebody. Then what is left out is the Body? This also cannot be called as Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर). Firstly, when the Body with the soul left is called as corpse. If the body were to be Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) then the person who manages to cremate the corpse will be blamed of committing a sin. It is no good deed to burn or cremate a Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर)! The fact however is, people consider it as an act of nobility to dispose off the dead body either through burial or cremation.

As a matter of fact, the biological bond that exists among human beings is relevant and stands confined to this physical world only. Once dead, he or she is nobody. Human beings are born in this world to enjoy the fruits of their deeds (कर्म). Once born, their mutual relationships begin to occur. If the relationships in the form of mother, father, sister, brother, were to remain intact for ever (i.e. even after their expiry) possibility of marriages between those who were a son, mother, sister, brother in their earlier births becomes a possibility. This is unthinkable for the reason the Soul has nothing to do with the relationships like mother, father etc. Relationships keep taking place only when the body is in union with the soul. Therefore Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) could be only for those who are alive.

Kamal: - 15 days are earmarked in a year for Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) purpose. At one time Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is done for one Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) and for other at another time. Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) visit on Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) day. It is said that Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) visit with their subtle bodies. They partake food with the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण). If for any reason they cannot come, the food is given to Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) so that it reaches them.

Vimal: - Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) is not the name of आत्मा (soul). Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर), as already made clear represents the merger entity of body and soul and it is false nay height of indiscretion to say that Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) arrive with their subtle bodies to receive the food. Let us for the sake for argument, accept the view that Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) would arrive in their subtle bodies. In that case how would they eat without their gross bodies? Is it possible that they take food with the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण)? If they were to take foods along with the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) will they take food first? If Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) were to take first will it not Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) be eating the left over food? If they i.e. Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) and Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) were to eat together then both of them are sharing the same food and leftovers. This is condemnable from the hygienic point of view. If Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) were to take food first then why feed the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) at all? Why 15 days only is earmarked in a year? Don't they feel hungry for the rest of the year? Does the food given in the 15days is enough and completely satisfies them for a whole year? Is it ever possible? If considered possible then show a person who is fed for 15 days only and remaining alive for the rest of year? Even among these 15 days the relatives fix only a day. If feeding Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) could reach the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) how is it the stomachs of Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) are full? If everything were to reach the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) then the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) must be feeling hungry all the time even after their food. How can they feel satiated when the food has reached the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर)? Where the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) to whom the Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) food is sought to be given reside? Are they healthy or sick? If sick, what is the use of heavy sweets? They require light food and bitter medicine when sick.

In fact they become sicklier with heavy food. We should enquire them about this. When nobody knows where the soul resides or where the soul has entered after death, what is the use of giving heavy foods for them through Brahmins (ब्राह्मण)? If they had taken birth as lions or tigers then will Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) be satisfied with these sweet dishes? If the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) were to arrive from some other योनी (body) then that body should die. Please think over. Supposing a person by the virtue of good and noble deeds had attained Salvation what use is there with these mortal foods? On the hand if the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) had been born as a gutter/dirt worm because of deeds (कर्म) what use is there with these sweet foods? Each species is having its own taste and preferences. Human food is not pleasing to all animals.

Look! Is it a wise thing to post a letter without writing the address of an addressee? Does the letter have any chance of reaching the concerned? Never. Unaware of where the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) reside, does feeding of the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) with food reach the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर)? This is superstition plain and simple. If food could reach somebody by feeding the other then what is the need of taking food while on tour? It is enough that a Brahmin (ब्राह्मण) is fed at home and the hunger of the person on tour is satisfied! Could you call this as a wise thing?

Sister! If the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) had attained Bliss or Salvation by the virtue of good knowledge backed by good deeds (कर्म) then there is no need whatsoever for conducting Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) for him. Even when he takes a rebirth there is no necessity for Shraaddha (श्राद्ध). Even when he had no Salvation and not taken rebirth and remains suspended no Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is needed here. If he had died as a sinner, doing Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) for him will not

absolve of his sins and he does not get improved status (सद्गति). On the other hand if he had died after doing good deeds he would not be condemned to a lower status (दुर्गति) for want of Shraaddha (श्राद्ध). A Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is immaterial here. Each Soul is destined to get the fruits of his deeds (कर्म) and therefore doing Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) for the deceased parents is sheer waste of time, labour, money and above all, it is a self-deception.

Kamal: - Sister! You have logically established that there is no need to do Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) and what is given to one does not reach the other. O.K. Kindly clarify the matter litter further. A debt-ridden father is survived by his son. The son pays off the debt. Now tell me, whether by this act of his son, the soul of the deceased became free from the guilt of debt? The father no longer remained a debtor now since the debts have been cleared by his son. If the son thereby could liberate the soul of his father from the guilt of being died a debtor, similarly will not the feast given to the Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) has the effect of creating happiness to his father associated with a feast?

Vimal: - What is to be borne in mind here is that, the fruits of deeds (कर्म) of the father is not shared by his son and so also the vice versa. The Sanskaars (संस्कार) of good and bad work done by the person leaves impression on his subtle body. These Sanskars (संस्कार) alone are the determining factors of his destiny (प्रारब्ध) containing the elements of happiness and sorrow. The destiny (प्रारब्ध) cannot be wiped off without undergoing the experience. It is true, from the point of mundane world that the son has cleared the debts of his father. But how the son could wipe off the Sanskars (संस्कार) of debt taken and not repaying thereby which had been imprinted on the soul of a debtor (father). The son of

course could settle the worldly loan account of his father but could he settle the loan accounts relating to the subtle body of his father? Further by treating that the repayment of loans will have the effect of wiping out the debt related guilt belonging to the soul of the other, a natural question that arises here is, supposing there is a father who had made property through rightful means, did lot of philanthropy when alive and bequeathed property to his son. Now visualize a situation where his son has squandered away that property and leaves a highly sinful life. He could lead such immoral life because of the property left behind by his father. Now tell me since the son could lead a sinful life on the strength of the money left behind by his father, will the son's sins would reach the soul of the deceased father? No will be the answer. If the sins of the son could not affect the soul of deceased father how the Sanskars (संस्कार) of the loanee father are wiped out by the act of repayment of loans by his son? The reason why the son had repaid the loan is he is the beneficiary of that loan. When the son could inherit the property associated with the loans taken by his father who else other than son should repay it? The receiver of the benefit (son here) should repay. This is the rule of human society. However this rule is not observed in many countries. There are no joint families in these countries. They take care of their children until the latter acquire the strength to live independently. Once the children become strong to be independent enough, they are separated and relations between them become nominal. Here nobody is indebted to the other. No question of payment/non-payment of Loan arises here. The loanee is alone accountable for the loan taken by him. That the son is an inheritor of the property is the underlying reason why the son should repay the amount borrowed by his father. If there were to be no such rule then there is no reason why the son should repay the amount borrowed by his father. This is only social law, and has no bearing on the spiritual world. Hence to say that the son wipes out the adverse Sanskars (संस्कार) imprinted on the soul of father has no meaning whatsoever and it is a myth. Who is indebted to whom and in what manner is a thing that rests in realm of knowledge of God. He alone arranges a

system where mutual debts accounts are wiped off. In the realm of Creation a thing which is an end to one becomes the means to the other. However it is certain that the fruit of deeds (कर्म) of one person is not shared by the other.

Look! A story goes on Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) day. Karna (कर्ण) who was donating gold while being in this world got only gold in Heaven. But that did not satisfy his hunger for food and therefore he took 15 days leave from Heaven and came back to the earth and feasted Brahmins (ब्राह्मण). It is only there afterwards he started getting food in Heaven. This story which is popular is 100% false and opposed to law of creation and yet has a message that he reaps what he sows. Since Karna (कर्ण) donated food he got the same in Heaven. If the system of Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) were to be true then the relatives of Karna (कर्ण) should have arranged food for him in Heaven via by throwing a feast to Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) in this world!

Kamal: - If food is not got by the Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) so be it. However what is wrong in providing food in name of parents? At least some दान (donation) is made under this pretext. At least some merit (पुण्य) is achieved in their memory.

Vimal: - It is totally wrong! The ancient wholesome Vedic practices get ruined here. Do you want to know why? PitruYajnya (पितृयज्ञ) is one of duties to be performed everyday. Five Yajnyas i.e. PitruYajnya (पितृयज्ञ) (honoring the living parents) DevaYajnya (देवयज्ञ) (to purify the atmosphere), BrahmaYajnya (ब्रह्मयज्ञ) (worship of God), BalivaishvadevaYajnya (बलिवैश्वदेवयज्ञ) (helping the poor and needy) and AthithiYajnya (अतिथियज्ञ) (honoring the learned scholar guests) are to be done to the best of ones capacity. This is a Vedic command. Instead of doing

these Vedic Yajnyas (वैदिक यज्ञ) and setting apart of 15 days in a year and calling it as ancestral fortnight (Pitru Paksha - पितृपक्ष), does it not defame the daily duties? Further, even when done on the day of death of Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) on every year all the said faults continue to persist as such.

Even if you examine from the angle of Varnaashrama (वर्णाश्रम) (Four-fold Varna system) system the Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) for the dead makes no meaning. When the son remains in Brahmacharya order (ब्रह्मचर्याश्रम) the father would be in Grihasthaashrama (गृहस्थाश्रम) (householder). When the son gets into become householder the father would be in Vaanaprasthaashrama (वानप्रस्थाश्रम). When the son gets into Vaanaprasthaashrama (वानप्रस्थाश्रम) the father would be in Sanyaasaashrama (संन्यासाश्रम). At the time of death of father son would be in Sanyaasaashrama (संन्यासाश्रम). Now think over how a sanyaasi (संन्यासी) could do Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) for the departed Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर)? He would have become a Sanyaasi (संन्यासी) after giving up all the worldly desires/aspirations. Family bonds are not sync with a Sanyaasi (संन्यासी). On becoming a Sanyaasi (संन्यासी), he is a neither a father nor to son to anybody. Then whither Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) here? Further, a sanyaasi (संन्यासी) is always on the move and he is called परिव्राजक preaching good things. His whereabouts is not known to his son or to others when he dies. The question whether Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) was not possible when the father had died while the son was still a householder and not had become either a vaanaprasthi (वानप्रस्थी) or Sanyaasi (संन्यासी) is also irrelevant, since the conduct of Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) is itself untenable and unvedic.

Now, about the issues of दान (Charity) or indulgence in philanthropy. Arranging or offering food for the fully deserving in memory of deceased parents and making donations or दान is not bad by itself. But please note that doing so under a pretext will not yield good results! This is so because, honest intentions are not involved here and therefore no good imprint is left on the doer soul. Only such deeds are considered meritorious which are done prompted by honest thinking, matched by saying and action. Otherwise no merit is earned here. Any work for that matter should be done with sense of dispassion, and honesty. The thought that feeding Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) would satisfy the deceased parents is a wrong notion. Further to say that feasting anyway is meritorious also does not point out to honesty. Making donations recklessly to the undeserved would only promote the number of lazy and indolent men. This does no good to society. If feasting and making donations were considered absolutely necessary then why make it only on Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) days? And further why to Brahmins (ब्राह्मण) only? Should we not help poor, hungry, sick, and blind of whatever might be their caste? Similar to the way we celebrate the festivals of birth anniversaries of great men like Ram and Krishna, if we could celebrate the birth events of the departed Pitru/Pitar (पितृ/पितर) in token of offering our respects then Shraaddha (श्राद्ध) indeed could be accepted. Otherwise it is mere a shame.

Courtesy: - Dr. Vivek Arya
