

# The crux of family karma and 'sharaadha'

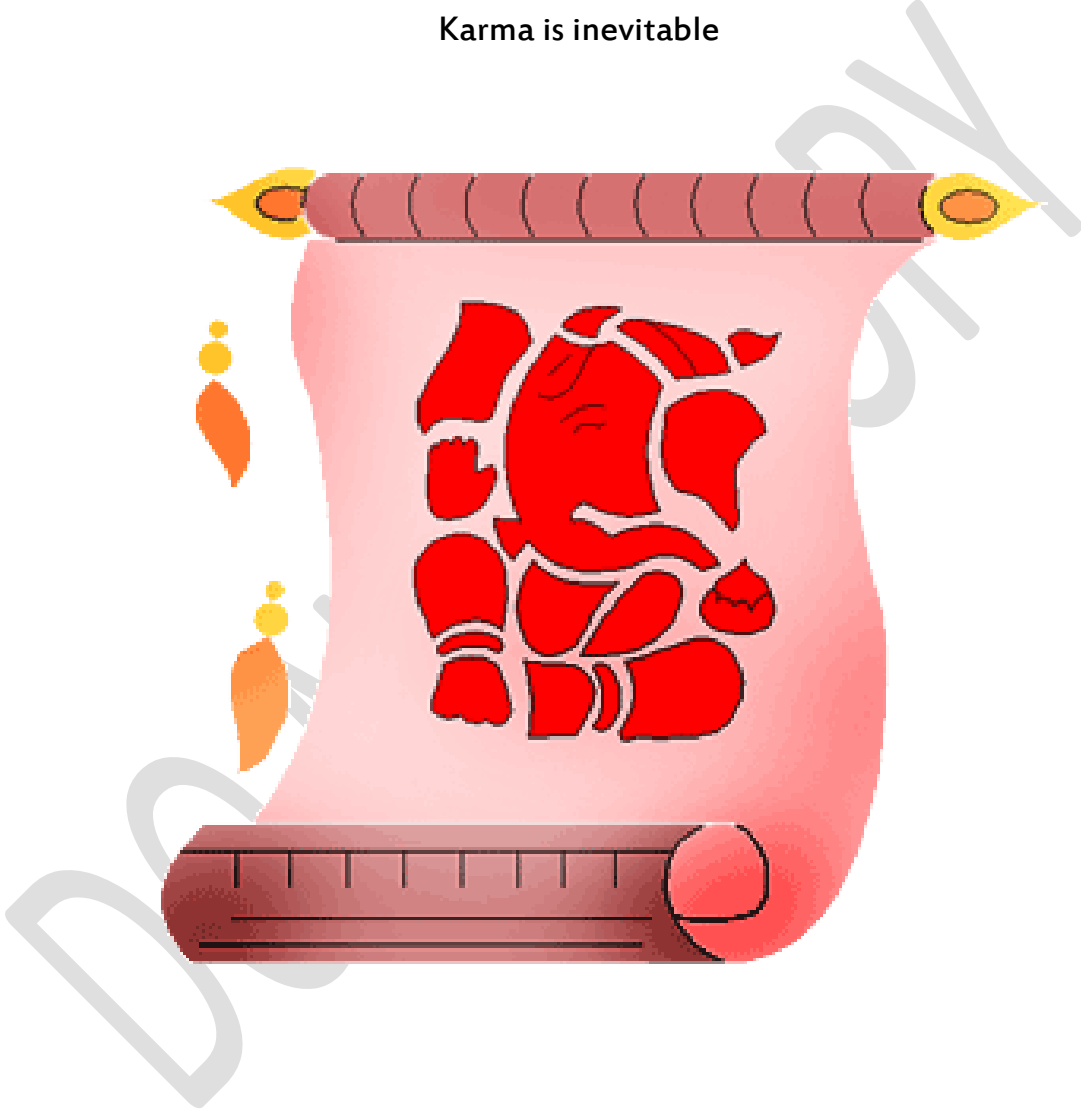
Fortune and misfortune are due to karma of our collective family

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Karma is inevitable



*"Aum namastasyeh namastasyeh Vibhum Vishvampattim; Namasye Sarva Lokaanaam Vishwasya Jagathpatim, Yayimankurutey bhaavam Srishti rupam pradhaanavit/ Loka krullokattva jneyoga maasthaya yogavit, Asrujasatsarva bhutaanishtha varaani charaanicha, Tamamjim Vishwa karmaanaam chitpatim Loka saakshinam, Puraanaakhyaana jijnasurvajaami sharanam vibhum VishvamJagadaParamaEishvara Aum Tat Sat."*

(My salutations to Sacchinaananda Parameswara who is the Supreme Scriptor of Srishti Rupa, the Pro-active Visualiser and Designer of the Universe and the Creator of 'Chaarachara' Lokas).

We in Hindu religion [dharma], believe that "Vidhatta" [the fortune give] writes our fate on the sixth day after our birth. Our fate is written subject to the collective family karma or the collective family dharma ['kull-parampara]. Our family karma plays a significant role in culminating our future.

As rivers merge into the divine ocean losing their names and forms, so do we lose our names, fates and forms into the destiny of death. However, the life of after life is a journey spiritually mystical and unknown. More and more inclinations are favoured towards the human karma and awareness that is more spiritual generated in the recent past.

From the divine Wisdom, that we have received from our preceptors, our beacon light in the Vedic Sanatana [universal] dharma, is a great solace to our earth, our mortal life, and our karma here and now. From the crux of vikarma [falsity] [bondage of maya], the 'Gajendra Moksha' stotram tells us that the crux of emancipation from the vicious cycles is undivided focused devotion to "Hari", "Shiva", or resolute transforming energy of celestial Vedic God.

In constant, consistent, persistent devotion the Gajendra elephant prays to Lord Vishnu, who eventually comes to rescue the elephant from the control freak ridiculously stubborn crocodile who would not undo its jaws from the leg of the elephant. When Lord Vishnu Bhagavan appears on Garuda, Bhagavan releases both the wrong-doer the crocodile from its curse and the victim of the wrongdoer Gajendra. Whatsoever we do, we do to eliminate our vikarma, our negative karma and our karmic bonds that are based on wrong reasons and wrong causes. Similar example pertains to humble devotee Prahlad and his arrogant ruler father. The victory finally becomes of Prahlad.

In Gita, Arjuna albeit defeated with Pandavas initially in a game of dice and malicious canny manipulations of karmic bondages, gains back their lost empire eventually with the help of Lord Krushna. In the process of realising and overcoming loss, Arjuna declares divine wisdom and lessons learnt from his experiences with maya, illusion of family falsity, and family ties that are apt to be detached from in order to attain God.

Karma construed as 'vikarma' means negation or negative karma or collective sins [paapam].

Karma elaborated as 'satt-karma' means [punyaham] servitude and concern for the welfare of humanity. Whatsoever we have we have received from Ishvara prabhu.

Such divine wisdom was first contained in 'Padma Purana' [Bhagavan Vishnu's lotus like heartiest wisdom]. Naradji says:

*'Shorascha Shaiva Ganesha Vaishnavaaha Shakti Pujakaah, maameva Praaptu vantih varshaapi Saagaram tathaa, Ekoham panchadha jaataah trudeya naamahikila/ Devadattho Yatha kaschit putraadyahvana naamaamabhih'*

(Devotees of Surya, Shiva, Ganesha, Vishnu and Shakti reach me only like rain water flows into the Seas; basically, I am the same manifesting in the above Forms for fun; like a Devadutta addresses his father or children with different names)!

*'Srishtisthyanta karanaad Brahma Vishnu Shiv-atmikah, sa sanjnaam yati Bhaagaaneka eva Janardana!'*

(The Unique Bhagawan is manifested in all the Forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to perform the Tasks of Creation, Preservation and Annihilation!)

### **Family karma**

It is NOT a coincidence that some suffer adverse misfortunes whilst others enjoy pleasures of fortunes in their life time. In the recent past, during my practice as spiritual vedic astrologer, I have had many subjects approach me with the crux of difficult "misfortunes" which were a result of collective family karma bank.

One may slag this as 'mambo jambo' . Of course, your ancestors can and do leave behavioural and attitudinal legacies that help us actualise our innate potentials spiritually.

Modern psychology offers little to us to help us with our adversities, hurt, grief of loss, misfortunes and life's batter. Mingled with ancestral legacies we discover our blessings as well as our curses.

One can take a major step toward maturing when one can see and accept both the good and the bad in other important people in our life and lineage. One should be able to interpret grief of hurt as means not an end to reach BRAHMA that divine soul of ours hidden away for seven generations by ego, intellect, pleasure senses, enjoyments, and lure of material comforts in gross fiery ambitions, aggressive competitions, desires and more desires.

Life is a series of choices. Choices lead to actions. Actions carry consequences. Action plus consequence is what we call karma. The results of many of our actions affect not only us, but others as well. The consequences of many of our grandparents' and our parents' actions reverberate in our lives today.

We use the term "karma" to refer to our ancestors' and our own actions and the consequences that necessarily follow. A lot of karma spans three or more generations. That is why we call it "family karma."

One may ponder endlessly and one may argue intellectually on this subject matter offensively, defensively, debate wise. However, the truth of the matter remains unchanged.

Karma is a deliberate choice of action, whose reaction and influence perpetuate in cycles of life and death like the tides of the ocean. Our lives never end in spiritual sense because there is life after life.

However, we are unable to see the life after life. Such imminence can be felt and only be vaguely perceived in our dreams or intuition or insight or inner feelings. Moreover, every sequence of perception and value-based, goal-oriented action creates an outcome that is itself a situation, resembling or differing from the earlier situation in which take action. Thus, we can see how our life is an unending cycle of actions and outcomes, all based on what we value and what we perceive.

Three sources of karma that each of us must address in order to reach our fullest and highest soul potential: individual, family, and past-life karma.

First, we must retire or reverse the karma we have generated in our present life-time. This is our personal karma.

As we recognise and realise conditions and situations we have created that are uncomfortable, that do not serve us well in relation to others, that cause us distress and anguish; we must take the steps necessary to change those conditions and situations.

This is called deliberating on positive divine willpower, positive divine grace and positive divine spiritual practice. Such reversal can transpire from becoming good and kind and compassionately loving, forgiving our foes and letting go of our past.

Perhaps we find that this kind of nonsense does not really suit reality of practical intellect. Maybe one may have become obsessed in an activity, a cause, a relationship or vocation or position or power. Power when false can hurt others and one's own self. One may have hurt others and only the person who has caused the hurt or began that karma or vikarma [negation] the most can alleviate that pain through sincere words and actions.

Whatever it is, wherever one sees the undesirable fruits of one's actions, it is up to us to reflect, to reverse and to retire our vikarma [or negation or bad speech, bad hurting words or hurtful slander] by taking remedial actions that will lead to more desirable pacifying outcomes. One must learn to pacify negation or negative karma instantly. One must constantly ask for forgiveness out of gestures as this humbleness releases one from the bondages of curses of misfortunes.

The strongest karmic ties are imminent in the nucleus of our family. The strongest ones for example are between husband and wife and between parent and child.

We all DO NOT choose our birth and death destination, it is chosen for us, based on our karma bank, to come down in these respective relationships.

For many lives we come down in different permutations and combinations. If a very good friendship is established in one life, one of them may decide to be born as a son or a daughter to the other in the next life.

Husband and wife relationships in the past may not always be happy ones. In fact, quite often it is the opposite. In most cases, there is karma to resolve between husband and wife. Very few couples marry because of previous harmony or due to elevated spiritual growth. They do occur, but they are very few in numbers. The couples that marry because of sexual passion very often end up in divorce, because there is no karmic force to keep the marriage going. In the case of the couples that marry due to karmic ties, there is a motivation to continue with the marriage, because of the necessity to resolve the karma between the spouses.

A parent can curse a sibling with bitter wishes and such curses can become imminent to an extent on the sibling's life. However the sibling cannot curse the parent or elders. Curse cannot necessarily be uttered. Mere thinking of someone with immense anger and immense rage can produce bad energy.

Psychologically proven, one who constantly gets angry at another loved one usually ends up destroying two lives, one's own and that of another loved one. Like smoking, one who smokes causes risks to one's own health and the health of the passive smokers are even at greater risk. So who is selfish?

Second, one has to work on the karma of 'collective family' [sarva-samma-kutumbha] -- parents, grandparents, and other fore-bearers -- to free our soul from their unintended karma.

Perhaps we are fulfilling the ambition of a grandparent rather than our own. It sometimes happens that we deal with situations in "family-typical" ways that we later realise and appreciate that it does not suit us; that may even be contrary to what we deep-down feel is authentically our way.

We reign in our ways, we never like to let go of our ways. Or we might engage in behaviours that we consciously recognise as self-defeating but that we feel powerless to overcome.

Many of my subjects have experienced great relief when they have been able to trace such patterns in their lives to their ancestors who had similar patterns, attitudes, complexes, illnesses, relationship styles, and so forth. But one cannot change what one has not successfully identified.

One must identify, pin point the crusade of ancestry influence on one's life. Recognising the blessings and curses of our ancestors -- our family karma -- is the first step and often a revelation to greater and much more happy spiritual life.

Third, we have to retire and reflect the karma generated in our previous lives, our past-life karma.

In the last few years, researchers have compiled persuasive evidence that supports the idea of past lives and karma deriving from them. For some people, past lives are an article of belief; for other people, the idea of past lives is nonsense. But if the empirical evidence so far accumulated continues to be supported by future research, more people will have to take the possibility of past life karma seriously.

When we realise that the results of our own and other peoples' choices, or the residue from a past life encumber our life, we can begin to make different choices. Those choices would be positive choices that heal wounds, put right the wrongs, remedy the misfortunes we suffer in our family and we hope with the divine grace we will experience a fuller reality in which we live with greater integrity and authenticity.

We make choices in the pursuit of wealth, relationships, power, success, or other goals that often result in our neglecting some other possibilities and innate potentials that do not fit neatly in our chosen success program. Both what we have devoted our energies to and what we have neglected generate our individual karma. I call this deliberate karma. In realising and appreciating that what we attain often amounts to less than we had envisioned, we can harvest important insights. It is often in the margins of life that we discover the path to the centre. Actually most of re-discover the paths anew. We find the gold in the garbage when we have been wondering in the wrong places. So, the key crucial point is let us not burn the bridges and let us never say never again for we might now know when we may cross each other's paths.

In any case, rejections should not be taken personally. It is not our problem that our beloved family members have been influenced psychologically, emotionally and mentally against us by our own kind; it is the issues of the one who sees us in this manner.

Nevertheless, the problem of hatred, rage, anger, rejection, hurt, can remain grief because it is eventually a breakdown of the link of holding together the unity of solid, healthy cultural family.

When a family is together, culturally solid and strong, no difficulty of life will shake or move or break the family.

However when the unity is not there how would one pluck the resources of courage, strength and determination of spiritual force? It is only futile to say that one can and should struggle to survive. However what is it actually that we are struggling against; something or someone that never was ours? Somethings are never understood, somethings are never said and done, and hence, we have a gap, a bridge between the dead and the live. We have sudden tragic death, sudden demise and sudden separation. Our family gradually disintegrates and we lose our herald of cultural heritage.

Disintegration in family is sure sign of depleted divinity and depleted traditions and cultural customs and ancestry rites and rituals. When in a family ancestral rites and rituals are not practices, such a family crumbles in fragmentation of core values and beliefs.

Individual karma is our responsibility: we set it in motion; we pay the price and we pay for our own consequences.

Friendship is a two-way street. To find a true friend in life, is a rare blessing indeed. One true friend is enough to overcome million foes.

It may seem weird that we bear the consequences of what our ancestors did. But we do. Our older brothers, our parents, our uncles, our family, extended families, have some influence on our lives. Most obviously, if they immigrated to the U.S., we were not born in the country of their birth. If they made it big and set up a trust fund for us, we benefit from it now. But our ancestors made other choices and took other actions that established patterns or energy fields that may continue to affect our thoughts, emotions, choices, and karma. The idea underlying the concept of family karma is that the choices we make affect our children and possibly our grandchildren as well as us. Vice-versa, our parents', grandparents', and sometimes other ancestors' choices likewise carry consequences with which we still have to deal -- as curses or blessings. We are the bearers of an ancestral karma that we must manage, either by retiring the curse [negation] or by enhancing the blessing [fortune]. Each generation must carry forward the evolutionary trajectory of the family line, making the best use of the ancestral blessings and dissolving the ancestral curses [negation] or vikarma or "assatt". As long as we are unaware of ancestral patterns, we cannot modify their influence on us. In other words, we are unconscious of a lot of family karma. To put it more precisely: much family karma operates outside our awareness from the psychic unknown, unconsciously.

This mystical loop of karma associated to our family ancestry is known as "Pitru-karma".

During the five days of the dark cycle of the moon from the ekadashi-krushnapaksha to the amavasya [darkest night of the moon cycle], are days of the spirit world. Every month, one can perform remedial shraadhya or offer peace and resolution of prayers to one's ancestors in very simple manner of the way called "Tarpana-Trupttyam". This rite and ritual is for those who find it difficult to adopt a formal shraadhya ceremony or who cannot obtain family support to perform expensive travel to India.

In lighting slanted cotton wick made out of sesam seed oil, one can place this in rose water container, and offer flowers in south corner of one's home placing the mandala of sampoorana kaal sarpa yantra and the picture of the pitru that died tragic unexpected death. On the darkest day of the moon cycle called amavasya, pour sesame seeds, rice, pearl barley, wheat, urad lentils, jaggery and cane sugar to the running waters or birds or sea. Recite the mantra: "Aum Namoh Namah Shivah Shivayah Namah Aum" when pouring it to the river, or sea. In one's mind offer peace mantra thrice to the pitru: Name the pitru and say the shantih mantra.

For every ekadashi and amavasya, of the dark cycle of the moon, one can recite the "Aum Shree Raama Sharrannamm mamma" with the index finger without covering the mala made of Tulsi beads [such a mala must NOT be used by anyone for any other purpose]. Doing one mala, or more is beneficial.

Offer water to the photo of the pitru and offer the rose water to plants. Offer milk to children every Mondays in the name or nimiti, or in the confluence of our departed soul. Offer blanket and some money to old man/woman during the five days of the dark cycle of the moon. Perform Rudra-abhishekha on Amavasya.

Every Saturdays recite Hanuman chalisa to the departed spirit. Every Saturday also offer Urad and black sesame seeds to birds. Offer birds food everyday [juwar seeds].

In reciting the kshama or the forgiving prathana or prayer, one gets support anchor from Shiva. Shiva is the God of death and God of dissolution of the decay. Our misfortune or adversity is decay which Lord Shiva will destroy.

In many experiences, Narmada Shiva Lingham, worship has given beneficial results as much as reciting the Maha Mrutyunjaya mantra has.

Meerabai was once asked when is deepavali, she replied, "..in my house, every night is deepavali as my Girdharinath lights my heart with million delights and my ghungroo capers to the melodies of my girdharinath..". So consistency, constancy, and sincerity of intention accomplishes more divine grace than any other expensive elaborated mammoth ceremony.

Our day, our life, our all, is allocated in thirds. One third of our all belong to the spirit world. If we appreciate this, we will remove all our burdens and encourage those of us who are trapped with the crux of karma to be freed from negation, negative karma and merely helping and wishing others is in itself "shraadhya" according to padma purana.

***"If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life a sorrow and a suffering enough to disarm all hostility." - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow***

Our soul is seeking its own path home, returning to its dwelling, and the needs of the soul, not the desires of personality, orchestrate our human lives here and now. So, our karma, our life, our dharma, our fate, our collective family karma decided our present fate and our present lifetime of fortune and misfortune. The opportunity to act on the un-lived gifts of our family legacy is a gift. And what a challenge it is to redeem what was lost through ignorance, lack of courage, arrogance, or willful unconsciousness or even egotism, or even hatred.

Through our clarity, humility and willingness to accept limitations, we have the chance to bring forth the gifts that are longing to be expressed through us. By looking at the patterns in the family history line one can't help but stand in awe of the patterns that say:

"this was my hope and fear for myself and my children"

The connection between soul and ego always has this mystery, a conflict; a dilemma unanswered this uncharted territory, created by the contract made pre-birth by our soul. Misfortune and sorrow is often the soul's last resort in moving a person closer to the right path for them. And who is to say what is truly misfortune? The soul's path is not easy to describe, and rarely simple to resolve. But we try.

In *satapatha braahmanna* it is stated that three seasons namely the spring, the summer and the winter seasons belong to Devas. These three seasons together make the *Uttaraayana* or the time when the sun is on the northern hemisphere course tilted towards the *ishana* disha or the north-eastern hemisphere. As one may have noticed, this is the time of increased light in the northern hemisphere. In contrast, the autumn, early winter and late winter belong to the fore fathers. These three seasons comprise the *dakshinaayana* or the time when the sun is in the southern hemisphere course. The dark side of the month of bhadrapada one will be particularly aware that performance of Vishnoo puja and Vishnoo bhagavattam and *shraadh* produces best merit and results.

The month of Bhadrapada begins tomorrow/or September 8<sup>th</sup> 2010 and finishes on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2010. The first part of the bhadrapada month belongs to the spirit world of the devas and Vishnoo Narayana. The bhagavattam is a very auspicious ekadashi [eleventh day of the bright cycle of the moon] on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010, whence by observing this vratt one it is believed in the Garuda Purana that one would replenish one's sins here and now. Every year one must observe vratta on this day.

The five days from the sud-ekadashi [eleventh day of the bright cycle of the moon] to the full moon and the vad-ekadashi [eleventh day of the dark cycle of the moon] to the amavasya [darkest day of the moon cycle]; are verily days attributable to self and karma. One who suffers from kaal saarpa dosha [the crux of entrapment from karma] and pitru dosha [the crux of negation of karma in the ancestry karmic bank], these five days are best days to offer obeisance and replenish one's karmic bank.



Bhagavan says in Garuda Purana and Srimad Bhagavattam that, whatsoever one may deposit or sow into the karma bank, the divine intention is more relevant than the amount of karma deposited. So, it is irrelevant what one is in life, but more relevant as to what one can contribute divinely towards the collective karma bank of one's family.

In a family that has lesser deposits and lesser religious divinity and lesser humbleness, one will notice that the family is disintegrated in many bitter separations. One who suffers from the crux of karma is tormented by sudden tragic death of a youth, or accidental misfortune of some kind. This is evident of families in which there has been emanation of vikarma.

To remove the vikarma or the sins of our fore fathers and ancestry karma, we give in this human life our share of debt or our share of bhakti or our share of devotion such that through our devotion, we eventually convey solace, peace and freedom to the entrapment of the spirit world of our family ancestry.

Misfortune and fortune as result of "punyatti-bhag" or luck as a result of family is attributable to collective family value. Our duty in the present is to replenish our vikarma or our wrongful burdens from the wrongfulness or imbalance from seven previous lives. Some of us are indebted towards collective karma of our family tree more than others are.

Fortune and misfortune in the present sense implies that Arjuna and Duryodhana both had to be subjected to hell. However, Bhagavan Shree Krushna having divine love and divine affection for Arjuna, suggests to him that he suffers misfortune now than later. So, Arjuna is subjected to plight of fourteen years of sufferings with his brothers, and two further years of humiliation due to rahu-ketu.

From suffering for the first half of one's life, one is given adversities unbearable just as Raama and Sita were subjected to fifteen years of straight adversities. Do we then claim that bhagavan re-incarnation Shree Raama and Arjuna and the Pandavas are unlucky? We never even think like Raama and Sita were born unlucky.

Nevertheless, we straight away think that we are born unlucky or our fellow who goes through severities of misfortunes is unlucky and we begin to reject our own kind as foes. We run a mile away from a fallen broken out on a limb. We claim we are better, blowing our own trumpet, praising our siblings and making ourselves more prestigiously important without realising it is wrong actually to do so. We become so judgemental about others and then when we suddenly lose someone we love so much or we encounter severities, we realise that eventually we are all going towards the same destination. We fail to make time for our own kind, when we should be considering it as our obligation. I acknowledge full responsibility of my dosha [imbalance in karma], hence I shall endure my sufferings kindly in devotion and mercy of humanity servitude. This is the crux of karma. If God granted me with the opportunity to rectify my karma in this lifetime, i will do all i can to enjoy whatsoever God has ordained for me.

One must feel like Arjuna, one must feel so close to one's Krishna, one's soul divine Guru-Tattva, one's dearest and fondest true loving Krishna-who in reality is beautifully sparkling purple not dark.

For seven previous lives, we need to understand that we are suffering the grief of hurt in one form or another and such a grief of hurt may become imminent by evidential symptoms like sudden misfortunes, sudden tragic unexpected deaths in our family,

The first precept of worshipping the ancestors and fore fathers is contained in the Rig-Veda and Garuda Purana. Both authentic sources are our guide and religious "samskaras".

In Kaliyug, one cannot possibly offer Brahmans food and feast and expect to satisfy the spirit world, because it is believed that there is no Brahman with divine intentions of blessing the one who conducts such a shraadh or feast in the name of fore fathers. Also, food or "Annah" Brahman is food comprising multiple impurities and paradoxes of conflicts.

To conduct feast and feeding Brahmans therefore is a psychological more than spiritual significance to elevate and to feel good that we have fed others in the name of our fore fathers or our beloved ones who have deceased. Even the food that we prepare ourselves must be offered to Lord Bhagavan Krishna as VishnuRam. Vedas have more than one form of observing ancestry worship. One of the more promising is the Rudra-Abhishekha.

Some rishis say that observing silence and offering mantra-jaapas to the pitris using the index finger is the best form of prayers coupled with offering of rice balls and flowers to the running waters.

In Vedas, The *pitri-yajna* is a kind of *sraddha* wherein one's family ancestors as well as the general class of *pitris* are worshiped. Hindu *shastras* prescribe a variety of such ceremonies.

It is not a coincidence that when Sun enters Libra, on the purnima of the bhadrapada month on 22 and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2010, autumn season or the season for the darkness to elongate commences. These first fifteen days until 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010 are *shraaddh* days observed in commemorating the loving memories of our ancestors, deceased, and beloved ones who have died tragic sudden death.

We offer the Purusha Sukta path and the Bhagavatt Vishnu hymns to the spirit world by placing the photograph of our beloved one who have passed over into the spirit world in the southern point in our house. By keeping a sesame seed oil cotton wick in rose water and offering flowers everyday for fifteen days, reciting hymns and bhajans, feeding of children and feeding of Brahmans, we satisfy our spirit world. By reading Purusha sukta, we give relief to the spirit world.

Purusha in Vedas is associated with the divine cosmic soul, the grandeur of the atman, the spirit, the soul divine "*yaacca kinccitt jagat sarvam*" the manifest and the unmanifest all is cosmic divine soul of sri bhagavan. This whole is divine consciousness. During the pitri shraddh, we recite the Narayana Vishnu Sahastranamavali [the 1000 names of Lord Vishnu] and the Vishnu stuti aloud at the samndhya or the dusk. Dusk is a time for the spirit world prayers. Prayers at the dusk for the spirit world, reaches the spirit world.

In Katha Upanishad, Lord Yama answers to Nachiketa:

*"All Jeevas originate from the Supreme Reality, like sparks from a fire. They are pure to start with. The Jiva changes due to environment and circumstances, just like pure rain-water is contaminated coming down due to gravity. The Atman, though a passive passenger, gets involved, but still in its essence is pure. It is the contaminants which are carried by it, much as desires and actions contaminate the intellect and ego-enity. Atman exists in us as the passenger. Our ego is the charioteer. The rein is the mental process and horses are our senses as well as motor organs. It is the ego which drives us either in right or wrong direction. The directions are 'Sreya' (good) and 'Preya' (pleasing). Most drive to the latter. Some, who direct the ego to the former, are fit candidates to know the Atman. Atman exists in the body and even without it. Usually people with an active conscience appreciate Atman and lead righteous life and opposite is true about people without conscience."*

The cycle of creation, sustenance and dissolution end in death, for all beings are born out of death and dissolution. In our holy Gita, just as a human discards worn out cloths, and puts on new garments, the spirit of life, casts off worn out bodies, material casements and enters the new shrine or embodiment of form. The abode for deceased ancestor's souls remains vacant until the Sun moves from Virgo and Libra onto Scorpio.

The abode for deceased ancestors souls remaining vacant during this period implies that the deceased ancestors souls come closer to their descendants for blessing them and if *Shraddh* is not performed, they curse their descendants and return. Due to this it is important to perform *Shraddh* during this period.

The purpose of performing *Shraddh*

- The ritual of *Shraddh* helps departed ancestors who are in the nether region (*Pitru-lok*), to go forward to higher sub-planes.
- Departed ancestors who have not been liberated due to their unfulfilled desires and are stuck in the lower sub-planes in nether region, cannot elevate themselves to higher sub-planes. The ritual of *Shraddh* (*Shraddh vidhi*) fulfils their desires and aspirations.
- *Shraddh* ritual (*vidhi*) liberates departed ancestors who have become ghosts due to their evil deeds.
- 'It is equally important to repay the debt of ancestors along with debt of God, sages and society (*dev-runa, rushi-runa* and *samaj-runa*), . To show respect for our ancestors, it is the obligation and duty of the living family member to donate in the name of their ancestors and perform deeds which would please them. Performing *Shraddh* is part of following our Dharma', advises an ancient scripture.

- Brahmavaivarta Puran says, 'Activities related to deceased ancestors are more important than those related to God.' Therefore every sacred ceremony begins with *Nandi Shraddh*.
- If the soul of a deceased person wishes that 'someone should perform *Shraddh* for him' and if this does not get fulfilled from the expected descendant, then the soul becomes unhappy. Such a soul can transform into an evil spirit (a type of negative energy) and cause distress to its relatives for not performing the ritual of *Shraddh*.
- Some people feel that *Shraddh* is meaningless and that nobody should perform *Shraddh* for him after his death.
- But after death because *Shraddh* has not been performed, he experiences that he is trapped and he cannot convey this feeling to anyone.
- He could become unhappy because of his wishes remaining unfulfilled. Taking this point into consideration, it is absolutely necessary to perform *Shraddh* for every deceased person.
- By performing ritual of *Shraddh* for a deceased person, the give-and-take account with that person gets nullified.
- For example, if we owe something to a person and he dies before we could repay him, then by the virtue of performing *Shraddh*, the loan can be repaid. However, the repayment is not in terms of money, but in terms of oblation, offerings, and rites and rituals. Vedas recommend Pinda- shraadh, Narayan bali, and Pitru Hommam.
- In the ancient Vedic times, Shiva-Rudra Abhishekha was best form of offering oblations. Shree Raama offered oblation to pitru by reciting the rudr-rudra namak chamak. This is evidently the best 'upaya' or remedy for the pitru-dosha. One must conduct the Rudra-Abhishekha for fourteen days and on the fifteenth day conduct a maha-shiva Yagna or hommam for the pitru. One Brahmin alone cannot conduct such a mammoth occasion.
- Shraddha has to performed by the son (usually the eldest son) or male relative for paternal section family, limited to preceding three generations, however on *Sarvapitri amavasya* or *matamaha*, the daughter's son can offer Shraddha for his maternal side of the family if a male heir is absent in his mother's family. Some *castes* only perform the shraddha for one generation. The male who would perform the rite, should have undergone the *sacred thread ceremony* or *should wear sacred janoy blessed by Shiva Rudra Abhishekha*.
- In families, where there has been sudden tragic unexpected death, the shraadh is observed on fourteenth and fifteenth day of the pitru-paksha. Namely: the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010.
- Unfortunately, this year, the inter-woven tithis have resulted into adhik tithis and broken tithis. Hence, the shraadh is extended to 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2010.

- Pitru tarpanam is best done to the flowing rivers with black sesame seeds, urad, darba grass, pavitram, water and milk.
- In a clay container one may put cotton wick made out of sesame seed oil. And put it in the river together with offerings and mantras.
- One may recite mantras daily or on the last five days or on the last two days depending upon one's available time and convenience. But one should try harder to at least observe the last two days of the shraadh.
- Om Ayeim Sarvapitrabhyo Svadhaa

In the current age people do not perform rituals like *Shraddh* or do spiritual practice the way it used to be done earlier.

Therefore, most of the people experience distress due to unsatisfied ancestors' souls. Only the spiritually evolved (saints), can tell us if we are suffering due to distress caused by ancestors souls or if we might face such distress in future.

By performing *Shraddh* one gets relieved from the distress caused by the departed ancestors as they get satisfied, and if they are trapped in a particular region, they get momentum to progress to higher sub-planes and in turn the descendants are able to obtain their blessings.

### **Necessity of the ritual of *Shraddh***

According to Rig\_Veda, the cosmic deity 'Agni' was invoked to carry the mortal departed spirit of life called 'jiva-atman' to the realm or loka or sphere of 'Yama' the God of death. We offer prayers to the lokas to unblock the spirit of life and to let it's onward journey into the 'pitru-loka'. In the 'Puranic-Ved' [ancient vedic] times, sacrificial pyre of fire was ignited by Brahmins uttering the mantras of cremation. Complex detailed 'kriya-puraka' post cremation rites performed after cremation for 10, 11 or 12 days, depending on the traditions of a particular family. After performance of complicated panda-shraadh, the concluded grounds are wiped, leaving some foods for crows, dogs, birds, fish, and water, peepal plant and other living animals.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The timing of these sixteen *sraddhas* is as follows. The first *sraddha* is performed on the eleventh day after death. After that twelve *sraddhas* are performed in each lunar month on the *nakṣatra* anniversary of the death. Two further *sraddhas* are performed on the six-month anniversary of the death. These are usually performed on the day before the regular sixth month and twelfth month *nakṣatra sraddhas*. The final *sapindi-karṇa-sraddha* was performed on the day after the last *nakṣatra sraddha*. In this way a total of 16 *ekoddista-sraddhas* were performed. A brief description of an *ekoddista-sraddha* is as follows. A clean area is selected so that the performer can face the southern direction, the realm of Yama. The area is washed with cow dung and a seat made of sacred grass (*kuṣa*) is prepared. The performer wears his sacred thread over the right shoulder (*praçinavitin*) and performs a series of rituals and prayers that offer water, cloth, rice cakes (*pinḍa*) and other articles to the deceased. In his left hand the performer holds a vessel containing black sesame seeds and

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water, and in his right hand a special brush made of sacred grass (*kuṣa*). This was called a *kurca*. He pours water through the *kurca* and names the deceased person saying (in Sanskrit), "May this ablution be acceptable to thee." Afterwards he takes a rice cake (*pinda*) mixed with clarified butter and presents it saying, "May this cake be acceptable to thee." He serves out the food with the following prayers, "Ancestors, rejoice. Take your respective shares and become strong." He walks counterclockwise around the consecrated spot and says, "Ancestors be glad, take your respective shares and be strong." He returns to the same seat and again pours water on the ground over the *kurca* while reciting, "May this ablution be acceptable to you." The whole affair concludes with the feeding of invited *brāhmaṇas* in a feeding ceremony call *brāhmaṇa-bhojanam*. The process of pouring water and black sesame through *kurca* is called *tarpana*. The food that is mixed into cakes is made of boiled rice mixed with ghee and sesame seeds. These are called *pindas* and they are similar to the *puraka* cakes used in the *puraka* ceremony. The *sapindi-karaṇa-sṛaddha* is the last of these sixteen *sṛaddhas* that are meant to elevate the departed soul to the rank of a *pitṛ*. It is performed in a similar manner to the previous *sṛaddha* with the following additions. The performer sets out four vessels with water, sesame and fragrance. Three are for the standard hierarchy of *pitṛs*, the father, the grandfather and the great grandfather, and the fourth is for the recently departed soul. The performer then pours the vessel meant for the recently departed soul into the vessels of the three standard *pitṛs*. Similarly, four cakes of rice (*pindas*) are prepared and the cake belonging to the recently departed soul is broken up and added to the three cakes belonging to three standard *pitṛs*. After the performance of this rite the *preta* being becomes a *pitṛ* and joins the assemblage of fathers in their abode (*pitṛ-loka*). For the remaining term after the first shraadh, whence the puraka-rite will end by submerging the sapida-kriya with the ashes in the river Ganges or sea, and then holding ceremonial rites and rituals puja, the spirit of life is released into the spirit world to merge with the pitru in the pitru-loka. The offering of kriya, prayers, 'pinda', sesame seeds, and five elements to the flowing rivers after the first year, giving charity in the name of the spirit of life, to old poor man/woman, like umbrella, clothing, shoes, money, gold, grains, salt, sesame seeds, etc, the peace offering ritual is observed to offer prayers to the departed spirit of life. Thereafter every year, the departed souls are offered prayers during the bhadrapada-krishna paksha. The aspects of pitru-shraadh, entails offering of oblation in sacrificial hommamm, sacrificial deepam, and tarpana of rose water and ganga water. We have made reference to the offering of libations of water during the sixteen *ekoddista-sṛaddhas*. This process is called *tarpana* and along with the use of fire it is an essential component of the *sṛaddha* process. The word *tarpana* is derived from the Sanskrit root *trp* which means to please or to gratify. *Tarpana* is the act of pleasing (*trpyanti pitaro yena*). Specifically, *tarpana* is the act of pouring water through the hands with the use of sacred grass called *kuṣa* as a symbolic gesture of recognition, thanking and pleasing three classes of beings: gods, sages, and fathers. Usually the *sṛaddha-tarpana* is performed in conjunction with other rites. Water mixed with barley is sometimes poured through the hands as an offering to the gods. Water mixed with black sesame is poured through the hands as an offering to the *pitṛs*. Different parts of the hand are used for pouring water when worshiping the different classes of beings. According to Manu, the area in the center of the palm is called the *brahma-tīrtha*, the area below the little finger is called the *prajapati-tīrtha*, the region at the tips of the fingers is called the *daiva-tīrtha*, and the space between the bottom of the thumb and the index finger is called the *pitṛ-tīrtha*. See the diagram. *Devas* should be gratified using the *daiva-tīrtha*, *ṛsis* using the *prajapati-tīrtha*, and *pitṛs* using the *pitṛ-tīrtha*. During the *tarpana* ceremony, the sacrificial thread is worn in different positions around the shoulders and neck for worshiping the different classes of beings. A twice born is called *upaviṭin* when the sacred thread rests across the left shoulder, he is called *niviṭin* when the sacred thread lies down straight from the neck, and he is called *praçinaviṭin* when the sacred thread rests across the right shoulder. The *devas* are to be worshipped in the *upaviṭin* position, the sages and exalted human beings in the *niviṭin* position, and the *pitṛs* in the *praçinaviṭin* position. Similarly, different directions correspond to the different classes of beings. When offering libations of water to the gods, one turns

According to Vedas, it does not matter what walk of life one comes from, or what background or culture, or tradition one comes from. What matters to the core dharma or core religion or core human conduct and code of truthful life is that one adheres to one's family values, one's family traditions, one's family cultural values, one's family togetherness. This is the centrifugal teachings of Vedas.

In essence, our Vedas are scientific because they reveal the Surya as the sound and light of the whole entire world. It forms the soul of the existence. To this divine light of God, universal prayers, hymns and mantras are organised scrupulously some ten thousand years ago, as revealed by seers and sages of the great Himalayas. Gayatri mantra is a mantra in the worship of the Sun, the Surya Narayana.

O nourishing Sun, solitary traveller, controller, source of life for all creatures, spread your light and subdue your dazzling splendour so that I may see your blessed Self. Even that very Self am I!

O God, Thou art the giver of life, the remover of pain and sorrow, the bestower of happiness;

O Creator of the Universe, may we receive thy supreme, sin-destroying light; may Thou guide our intellect in the right direction."

Such authenticity of religious worship dates back to ten thousand years ago. Yoga of the Sun is the communion with God. The goal is to find the way out of this cycle, curtailing constant transmigration of our souls through a possible 8,400,000 species of life. The criteria for establishing truth should be based on family values, family culture, family hope, family awareness, family education, family knowledge, family customs, family traditions, family welfare and family peace. If we are able therefore to bring peace and happiness within our homes, and our children, we have managed to form a confluence of togetherness and communion with GOD. In our children we must invest in knowledge and wisdom of divinity at large, the core fundamental principles of good humanity and good dharma.

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the face towards the east, when offering to sages one turns the face towards the north, and when offering to the fathers one turns the face towards the south. These differences in thread, hand and face positions are used simply to distinguish the gods, the sages and the fathers from each other. The general order in which *tarpana* is performed is as follows: First the *devas* are gratified, then the *ṛsi*, then the divine *pitrs*. After that, starting with the most recently deceased, those fathers who belong to the paternal are worshiped followed by those on the maternal side. Later commentators attempt to explain why water is used during *tarpana*. Water is said to be a neutral substance, therefore it can most easily be converted into the various foods needed to satisfy the respective *pitrs*. For those ancestors who have entered heaven, nectar is said to be their food. For those ancestors who have entered into an animal species, grass may be their food. For those ancestors who had returned to this earthly realm, rice may be their food. Water, being a neutral substance, can easily be converted into nectar, grass or rice, etc. The matter is also explained in another way. When a friend or relative presents food to a lady who is pregnant she eats the food and satisfies herself. At the same time the child within her womb is nourished. The food is converted into a substance suitable for the child. Similarly, when *tarpana* is offered to the divine fathers, they accept it by first gratifying themselves and then gratifying the fathers over whom they preside.

*Tarpana* is perhaps the most important of the *śraddha* rites and can even substitute for the rest of the *śraddha* process.

When *Shraddh* is performed and food is offered on the Hindu lunar death anniversary (*tithi*) of the departed ancestor, the offering is sufficient for the subtle body for the entire year. As long as the ancestors have desires and aspirations, they expect their descendants to offer food to them on that day. By performing *Shraddh* not only their *jiva-atman* [prêt] wishes are fulfilled, but they also get energy to move ahead in their after-death life process, which is tiring and dark.

Even if one of the desires of our ancestors is very strong, the energy received through *Shraddh* can be utilised for fulfilling that desire and it can help them to move ahead in their after-death life.

Thus if *Shraddh* is performed regularly, then gradually the desires start reducing and this way they gain momentum in their after-death life. According to ancient science, it is advised to express gratitude towards our ancestors and perform *Shraddh* every year as long as we are alive.

*Vedas distribute one third of all our wealth to spirit world. Therefore, one third of the tenth of all our earnings must be allocated to the pitru-pujan or feeding of Brahmins during shraadh.*

If the ritual of *Shraadh* is not performed, then the embodied soul (*jiva*) cannot move ahead in their after-death life.

A point to note is that even if the ritual of *Shraddh* is performed at some holy place (pilgrimage), only those ancestors whose time to get liberated has come, get liberated. Hence we should perform this ritual every year for other ancestors who are yet to reach that level.

We should perform this ritual even for ancestors who are spiritually evolved as it is mentioned in our ancient scriptures and to set an example in society that it is more important to follow Dharma rather than having a higher spiritual level.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Worship of Nandi

The cow [per Vedic Hindus] is a mother to mankind. Her milk is the source of liquid life food for growing children. It is futile to imagine children without mother's milk. Such is the philosophical perception of Cow. The divine sacred cow is known as the nature's bounty mother, and is characterised by various nakshataras [constellations]. For example, her universal spirit is represented by Kritika nakshattara whilst her resourcefulness is associated to rohini nakshattara, as she pulls the cart. Bhumi devi, matru devi, etc. The Nandi bull or the Gaumata – the sacred divine cow is the vehicle of Lord Siva and Mata Parvati respectively, and a symbol of strength and endurance. Vishnu's avatar form of Krishna, took the incarnation of a cowherd who enchanted cows and other living beings with his flute playing. His association with cows highlighted the importance of protecting and respecting the earth and its creatures. In the Vedas, one can find the story of the divine cow Kamadhenu, "the wish fulfilling cow" who is the dear treasure of the seven celestial sages. She emerged from the churning of the celestial ocean, along with many other treasures including the divine nectar of immortality, amrita ". As she is greatly desired for her endless gifts and bounty she remains under the care and protection of the sages. In all ancient cultures cows have played an important role in helping man understand his duty and relationship to the natural environment. Especially on Ekadashi shraadh and Amavasya Shraadh, one can perform Tarpana to the Nandi Cow, a symbolic cow, and offer sesam seeds, water and milk mixed in copper or silver kalash. When offering the tarpana, one may recite the tripyantam mantra:

Brahma Tarpana

Deva-Devi tarpana

Rishi Tarpana

Pitru tarpana



The original concept of performing the ritual of *Shraddh* was conceived by Sage Atri, the son of Lord Brahma. Sage Atri narrated the ritual of *Shraddh*, as laid down by Lord Brahma to Nimi, one of His descendants. This established ritual has continued till today. Manu was the first one to perform the ritual of *Shraaddh*. Hence he is called the deity of *Shraaddh*.

In Ramayan it is mentioned that Lord Ram later performed the ritual of *Shraddh* for His deceased father at an appropriate time.

Historically established phases of *Shraddh* and its nature in the current era

**Agnoukaran:** During the era of Rugveda, deceased ancestors were worshipped by offering a certain kind of wooden stick (*Samidha*) and a rice ball (*pinda*) to the sacrificial fire.

**Pindadaan (worship of pinda):** The ritual of *Pindadaan* is mentioned in the holy scripts of *Yajurveda*, *Bramhane*, *Shrout* and *Gruhya sutra*. The ritual of *Pindadaan* was put into practice during the period of *Gruhya sutra*.

**Offering food to priests (Brahmins):** During the post *Gruhya sutra* and *Shruti-Smruti* period, offering food to priests (*Brahmins*) was considered mandatory and became an important part of the ritual of *Shraaddha*.<sup>3</sup>

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One may refer to the following manual and one may not even need a Brahmin Priest to conduct the shraadha:

Follow the internet link: <http://www.vedicastrologer.org/tarpana/tarpana.pdf>

In short: After offering tarpana: One may recite the Gayatri Mantra 11 times, then the Shantih Mantra thrice: then the Aum namah Shivaya mantra 108 times.

In Padma Purana and Garuda Purana, it is stated that our beloved one's who have left for the spirit world do not get satiated and do not get moksha unless we offer tarpana shraadha to our ancestors and spirit world. To conduct shraadha, offering of water in conch to Lord Surya Narayana therefore reaches the pitru, the departed souls, the spirit world and the seven lokas or spheres of light. Simple gestures like lighting slanted deepam made of sesame seed oil and cotton wick placed in rose water container, offered with flowers to the spirit world, and prayers for the spirit world at the dusk reach our ancestors. During the dusk time, between the hours of 18-30 and 19-00 hours it is stated that the sun sets gently as the winds alter their direction and tides change their courses and birds return back to their hidings. This is an auspicious time for giving our prayers to the spirit world. Offering of food, water and help to anyone who knocks our doors are simple gestures of making our ancestors happy. Reciting sankirtans, bhajans, and hymns and shlokas during the Amavasya, Ekadashi, and poornima, never fail to reach spirit world. Contemplation, reflection and rectification of our lifestyle so that changes are made qualitatively to improve our daily routines bring positive divinity to our collective human life here and now, in the present lifetime.

### <sup>3</sup> Information related to the term 'Shraaddha'

#### A. Meaning and Scope

The term 'Shraddha' has originated from 'Shraddhaa' (faith). It is impossible to repay the various favors, which our deceased forefathers have done for us. The ritual performed for them with complete faith is known as Shraddha.

**B: Definition:** The definition of Shraddha as given in the 'Shraddha' chapter within the Brahmapura. Meaning of the verse: "The offerings (food etc.) made to the brahmins (priests) with the intension being received by the deceased ancestors, after taking into account the aptness of country, time period and place and with complete faith and abiding by all the rules is known as Shraddha.

#### C: Associated words

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Shraddhattva Pinda, Pitru Puja (ritualistic worship of deceased ancestors), Pitru Yagna (sacrificial fires performed for deceased ancestors)

2. 'Shraddha' means not just 'remembering ancestors with a sense of gratitude', but is also a ritual to be performed.

3. *Historical details of the ritual of Shraddha.*

A. The original concept of performing the ritual of Shraddha was conceived by Sage Atri, the son of Lord Brahma. Sage Atri narrated the ritual of Shraddha as laid down by Lord Brahma to Nimi from his lineage. This established ritual has continued even today.

B. Manu was the first one to perform the ritual of Shraddha. Hence he is called the deity of Shraddha (2).

C. After Lord Ram, Goddess Sita and Lakshman left for their stay in forest, Bharat met them in the forest and apprised them about the death of their father. The epic Ramayana has a mention that Lord Rama later performed the ritual of Shraddha for His deceased father at an appropriate time.

4. *Three historically established phases of Shraddha* and its nature in the current era

A. Agnoukaran

During the era of Rugveda, deceased ancestors were worshipped by offering Samidha (a kind of wooden stick) and Pinda (a rice bowl) to the sacrificial fire.

B. Pindadaan (worship of Pinda)

The process for Pindadaan is mentioned in the holy scriptures of Yajurveda, Brahane, Shrou and Gruhya sutra. The ritual of Pindadaan was put into practice during the period of Guhya sutra.

The information regarding the time period when the worship of Pinda started is documented in the holy text Mahabharata (Shantiparva 12.3.345) – God Varaha, incarnation of Lord Vishnu, introduced Shraddha to the entire world. He created three Pindas from His molar tooth and placed it on a Darbha (dried grass twig) towards the southern direction. Lord Varaha advised 'Let the 3 Pindas be considered as a representation of the father, grandfather and great grandfather' and then He vanished after performing the ritualistic worship of the Pindas using sesame seeds in a scientific manner. Thus began the worship of Pinda for deceased ancestors as per the guidance of Lord Varaha.

C. Offering food to priests (Brahmins)

During the post Gruhya sutra and Shruti-Smriti period, offering food to priests (Brahmins) was considered mandatory and became an important part of the ritual of Shraddha.

D. All the three phases together

In the current era, all the three phases mentioned above are included within the 'Parvan' Shraddha. The science of Dharma prescribes that householders should perform the ritual of Shraddha as their duty.

What are the presiding deities and results of Shraddha?

1. *Presiding deities of Shraddha*

1.1 Pururav-Aardrav and Dhurilochan

Pururav-Aardrav and Dhurilochan are deities of ancestors' souls. They are referenced in the ritual of Shraddha.

1.2. Vasu-Rudra-Aditya

1.'Shraddha is associated with the benevolent deities Vasu, Rudra and Aditya of the ancestors' souls. The mantras chanted during the Shraddha and the rites performed enables one to connect to these deities.' (6)

2. The deceased person for whom the ritual of Shraddha is being performed, is considered as a follower of Vasu, his parents are considered as followers of Rudra and his grand parents are considered as followers of Aditya. Therefore during Shraddha, the names of father, grandfather and great grandfather (or mother, grandmother and great grandmother) are pronounced as representatives of Vasu-Rudra-Aditya respectively.

2. *Types of Shraddha*

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2.1 Main and commonly known type: Matsya Puran mentions, primarily there are three types of Shraddha – one performed daily, periodically and with purpose (Kamyā). In addition to these, Yamasmruti defines Nandi Shraddha and Parvan Shraddha as additional main types.

#### 2.1.1 Daily Shraddha

The ritual of Shraddha performed daily is known as Daily Shraddha. This Shraddha can be performed just by offering water or sesame seeds to deceased ancestors.

#### 2.1.2 Periodic Shraddha

The shraddha performed for deceased ancestors with a single objective and other such types fall under periodic Shraddha.

#### 2.1.3 Purpose oriented (Kamyā) Shraddha

Shraddha performed for achieving a specific objective is termed as purpose oriented (Kamyā) Shraddha.

From the point of view of deriving fruitful result, if the Shraddha is performed on a specific day, date (as per Hindu calendar) and taking into consideration the position of stars (nakshatra), then the desired result is achieved.

#### 2.1.4 Nandi Shraddha

The ritual of Shraddha performed during the start of any joyous ceremony and performance of any of the 16 religious rites, and recitation of specific mantras for success of the ceremony is called Nandi Shraddha. In this ritual Satyavasu (or kratudaksha) are the vishve deities and the father-grandfather-great grandfather, mother-grandmother (mother's mother) – great grandmother (mother's grandmother) and mother-grandmother (mother's mother-in-law)-great grandmother (mother-in-law of mother's mother-in-law) are invoked.

1. Karmanga Shraddha: This Shraddha is performed during the religious ritual of Garbhadhan.

2. Vruddhi Shraddha: Shraddha performed at the time of birth of a baby.

#### 2.1.5 Parvan Shraddha

The Pindapitruyagna (sacrificial fires related to deceased ancestors) mentioned in the Shroul lineage is to be performed by a Sagnik (one who performs the ritual of Agnihotra). Alternative to this is the Parvan Shraddha mentioned in the Gruhya sutras. Once the deceased ancestors get listed as Parvans, then this shraddha is performed for them.

(Detailed information on Parvan is presented under the heading 'Terminology of Shraddha' and in point '3 B' of volume 2.) Ekparvan (single Parvan), dviparvan (double Parvan), triparvan (triple Parvan) are the three varieties of this shraddha. Mahalay Shraddha and Tirtha Shraddha are the types of Parvan Shraddha.

1. Mahalay Shraddha (fortnightly): It is a Parvan Shraddha performed starting from the eleventh day of dark fortnight of Bhadrapad (Hindu calendar month) till the no moon night.

2. Tirtha Shraddha: The ritual of shraddha performed at Holy places like Prayag or at the banks of a sacred river is termed as Tirtha Shraddha. While performing Tirtha Shraddha, all the Parvans of Mahalay are invoked.

2.2. Other types. Apart from the main types mentioned above there are 96 types of Shraddha namely, 12 no moon nights, 4 eras, 14 manvantars, 12 sankrants, 12 vaidhruti, 12 vyatipat, 15 mahalays, 5 first, 5 ashtak and 5 anvashtake. (Detailed information about these is present in the books related to science of Dharma.)

Brief information about few of the other types of Shraddha

#### 2.2.1. Goshthi Shraddha

The Shraddha performed by the group of priests (Brahmins) and scholars at a holy place with the intention that, 'Deceased ancestors' souls should get satisfied and let happiness and prosperity preside', or while discussing the topic of Shraddha, if one gets inspired all of a sudden and performs Shraddha, then such Shraddha is termed as Goshthi Shraddha.

#### 2.2.2 Shuddhi Shraddha

Offering food to priests (Brahmins) for acquiring purity is called as Shuddhi Shraddha. This is the 'undergoing of punishment' part of Shraddha.

#### 2.3.3 Pushti Shraddha

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Shraddha performed for increasing physical strength and prosperity is called as Pushti Shraddha.

#### 2.2.4 Ghruta Shraddha (Yatra Shraddha)

Shraddha performed using ghee (clarified butter), in remembrance of deceased ancestors, before embarking on a journey to holy places with the objective of completing the journey without any obstacles is called Ghruta Shraddha.

#### 2.2.5 Dadhi Shraddha

Shraddha performed after returning from a journey to holy places is termed as Dadhi Shraddha.

#### 2.2.6. Ashtaka Shraddha

Shraddha performed on 8th day of the bright fortnight of the Hindu calendar month. Ashtaka means the 8th day of bright fortnight of any Hindu calendar month. During the era of Vedas, the Ashtaka Shraddha used to be performed specifically on the 8th day of bright fortnight of Margashirsha, Poush, Magh and Falgun months. It was a practice to offer vegetables, meat, bondas, sesame seeds, honey, rice kheer, fruits and underground vegetables to deceased ancestors. Vishvedev, Fire (Agni), Sun, Prajapati, Ratri, Stars (nakshatra), season (rutu) etc. were considered as deities of Shraddha.

2.2.7. Daivik Shraddha: Shraddha performed with the objective of obtaining the grace of God is termed as Daivik Shraddha.

2.2.8. Hiranya Shraddha: This Shraddha is performed without offering food and only by offering money (dakshina) to the priests (Brahmins). If food is in scarcity, then gold, equivalent to four times the cost of the food grains, should be offered.

2.2.9. Hasta Shraddha: Shraddha performed by offering food to the priests (Brahmins) designated for Shraddha. If cooked food is not available then the Shraddha is performed by offering money or dry food grains. (7)

2.2.10. Aatma Shraddha: Those people who do not have children or whose children are atheists, they should perform Shraddha for themselves when they are alive. The rites for such Shraddha are explained in the science of spirituality.

Even though various types of Shraddha are mentioned above, based on the calendar days, the Shraddha performed for a dead person from the first day to the eleventh day, monthly shraddha, Sapindikaran Shraddha, Shraddha performed on one-year completion, Shraddha performed every year from the second year and Mahalay Shraddha are the only ones that are commonly practiced.

### 1. Objectives of performing Shraddha

A. Providing momentum to the deceased ancestors present in the Pitru region so that they can progress to a higher sub-plane of existence, through the means of Shraddha.

B. Satisfying wishes and desires of the souls of the deceased ancestors from ones' family who are trapped in the negative regions due to unfulfilled desires and providing momentum for their further progress.

C. Some deceased ancestors, due to their evil deeds, become ghosts and reside in hell instead of nether region. Through the medium of ritual of Shraddha, one can relieve them from being trapped in this form.

The process through which the above objectives are met through Shraddha is documented under the title 'Effects of Shraddha' in Volume 2.

### 2. Importance and need of performing Shraddha

A. Repaying the debt to ancestors is as important as repaying the debt to God, Sages and the society. It is the duty of descendants to respect their ancestors, make donations in their name and to undertake activities that will please them. Performing Shraddha is a part of obeying Dharma, as per science of Dharma.

B. Ancestors' soul becomes satisfied only after receiving pinda and water from their son. In relation to this, following is a verse in the holy text Mahabharat that describes 'who qualifies to be called as son': The son protects his ancestors' souls from the Hell named 'Putra'. Therefore Lord Brahma himself has named him as 'Putra'. As per the above verse, to enable the deceased ancestors to progress to a higher sub-plane, to relieve them from experiencing severe and everlasting distress and to initiate them to bestow grace on their descendants, every son should perform ritual of Shraddha. It is amply clear in the verse that the one who is believed to be a son, he should perform these duties.

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- Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11: One should not commit mistakes in any task performed towards God or ancestors' souls. One should not avoid these rituals.

- Shrimad bhagwatgita 1.42: Due to the non-performance of rituals like pinda shraddha and offering water to deceased ancestors etc, the ancestors of such people (who do not perform Shraddha) have to reside in the Hell region. This results in stagnation and no progress of the descendants.

E. Sage Sumantu has said that nothing is as superior as the ritual of Shraddha. Therefore, a person having a pure intellect to discriminate between right and wrong should never abstain from performing Shraddha.

F. Brahavaivarta Puran says, 'Activities related to deceased ancestors are more important than those related to God'. Therefore every sacred ceremony begins with Nandi Shraddha.

G. Brahma Puran says, 'One who performs the ritual of Shraddha diligently and in accordance with ones financial state, he satisfies everyone right from Lord Brahma to the insignificant blade of grass. No one in the family of the person performing Shraddha remains unhappy.' (4)

H. If soul of a deceased person wishes that 'someone should perform Shraddha for me' and if it does not get fulfilled from the expected descendant, then it becomes unhappy due to non-fulfillment of the desire. Such soul can transform into an evil spirit (a type of negative energy) and cause distress to its relatives for not performing the ritual of Shraddha. At times, souls of deceased persons manifest in their relatives and they start talking.

When should the Shraddha be performed?

1. In general appropriate dates for performing shraddha

Normally, no moon night, 12 sankrants in a year, solar-lunar eclipses, Yugadhi and Manvadi dates, Ardhodayadi parva, date of death, arrival of Shrotriya priests (Brahmins) etc dates are considered appropriate for performing shraddha.

2. Hindu Dharma does not give any chance to anyone to say that the shraddha was not performed due to non-feasibility in a particular period!

Normally every year Shraddha should be performed on the date of death of the person (as per the Hindu calendar and not as per the English calendar.) If the date is not known and only the month is known, then in that case the shraddha can be performed on the no moon night of that month. If both, the date as well as the month is unknown then the shraddha can be performed on the no moon night of the Hindu calendar month of Magh or Margashirsha. If the definite date of death is not known then the shraddha can be performed on the date when the news of the death was received.

Shraddha for deceased ancestors' souls should be performed everyday and it can be achieved just by offering water (tarpan) to them. If it is impossible to perform Shraddha daily, then Darsha Shraddha should be performed. This fulfills the requirement of doing the Shraddha daily. Darsha means no moon night. Therefore Darsha Shraddha is the one, which is performed on the no moon night of every month. If it is not possible to perform Darsha Shraddha every month, one should at least perform it on the no moon night of Hindu calendar months of Chaitra, Bhadrapad and Ashwin months. If it is not possible even to perform Darsha Shraddha on no moon nights of Chaitra, Bhadrapad and Ashwin, then at least the ritual of Mahalaya should be performed in the Pitru fortnight of the month of Bhadrapad. If this too is impossible then Shraddha should be performed on the no moon night of the month of Bhadrapad (sarva pitri amavasya) (11)

3. Appropriate time of the day: If the day is divided into 5 parts, then the fourth part is called the 'Aparanha' period. This period is most appropriate for performing shraddha.

4. Special dates for performing Shraddha and the benefits derived after performing shraddha for deceased ancestors' souls on these dates

4.1 Kalpadi date (tithi): Lord Brahma's day is considered as the day of origin. This is also called as Kalpadi tithi. The 1st and 5th day of Chaitra, 3rd day of Vaishakh, 7th day of Kartik, 9th day of Margashirsha, 13th day of Magh, 3rd day of Falgun (all days from the bright fortnight) indicate the start of the era (kalpa). As per the science, if shraddha is performed on these dates, the deceased ancestors' souls get satisfied.

4.2 Akshayya Trutiya (3rd day within the bright fortnight of Vaishakh): Akshayya Trutiya indicates the start of the Kruta era. The benefits derived by performing rituals like Shraddha, Tarpan for deceased ancestors' souls and donations on this date is everlasting. Therefore, one should at least perform Apinda Shraddha or Tarpan for their deceased ancestors' souls. The holy texts of Puranas say that, on the day of Akshayya Trutiya one should donate uncooked food (aamanna), a water pot, a fan made of mint grass, an umbrella, footwear etc with the intension of offering them to the deceased ancestors' souls. It is mentioned in Garud Puran that, once the donations are made with the intention of offering them to deceased ancestors' souls on this day, the messengers of Lord Yama do not cause distress to the ancestors' souls.

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Meaning: When clothes and ornaments are donated, the dark, brown eyed, cruel messengers of Lord Yama having sharp and long teeth do not cause distress to the deceased ancestors' souls.

### 4.3 Pitru fortnight (Pitru paksha) (Mahalaypaksha)

#### 4.3.1 Importance

1. The dark fortnight in the Hindu calendar month of Bhadrapad is called as 'Pitru paksha'. This fortnight is very dear to the deceased ancestors' souls. If Mahalay Shradha is performed for the deceased ancestors' souls during this fortnight, they remain satisfied for the entire year.

2. The householder who does not perform shraddha during the period when the Sun is in the Virgo sign, how will he earn money and be gifted with a baby boy as he would have enraged the deceased ancestors' souls? Additionally, the abode for deceased ancestors' souls remains vacant till the Sun moves from Virgo and Libra sign to the Scorpio sign. The abode for deceased ancestors' souls remaining vacant during this period implies that the deceased ancestors' souls come closer to their descendants for blessing them and if Shradha is not performed, they give curse to their descendants and return. Due to this it is important to perform Shradha during this period.

The deceased ancestors that arrive at the occasion of Mahalay Shradha

1. Father, grandfather, great grandfather (Pitru trayi)
2. Mother, grandmother and great grandmother (matru trayi)
3. Step mother
4. Mother's father, grandfather and great grandmother (matamahatrayi)
5. Mother's mother, grandmother and great grandmother
6. Wife
7. Sons
8. Daughters
9. Paternal cousins
10. Maternal uncle
11. Brother
12. Father's sisters    13. Mother's sisters
14. Sisters
15. Father-in-law
16. Other relatives
17. Guru (if the Guru-disciple relationship exists)
18. Disciple (if the Guru-disciple relationship exists)

#### When can Females perform Shradha?

##### 1. Importance of performing Shradha by oneself

'Ideally, the host should perform the ritual of Shradha by himself. However, since we do not know how to perform it, we get it done through the priest (Brahmin). Nowadays, it has become difficult to get priests for performing Shradha. As a solution to this, one can procure the holy texts that describe the ritual and learn it by heart. This text is in Sanskrit. Akin to learning other languages, one should also try and learn Sanskrit, which is considered to be God's language. Also, it is easy to learn Sanskrit.

(Although the point mentioned above is correct, considering the complexity in pronouncing certain Sanskrit words and limitation to understand the rites mentioned in the science, it may not be possible for everyone to perform the ritual as prescribed, by themselves.

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In such cases one can get the ritual performed through priests and if they are not available, then the ritual can be performed with the help of knowledgeable people in society. One should remember that making the ritual of shraddha is more important – Compiler).

2. Hindu Dharma that does not give any cause for excuse for not performing shraddha due to the absence of a particular person!

Son (including the one whose threading ceremony has not been done), daughter, grandson, great grandson, wife, daughter's son (if he is one of the heirs), real brother, nephew, cousin's son, father, mother, daughter-in-law, son of elderly and younger sisters, maternal uncle, anyone in the seven generations and from the same lineage (sapinda), anyone after the seven generations and belonging to the same family domain (samanodak), disciple, priests (upadhyay), friend, son-in-law of the deceased person can perform Shraddha in that order. In case of a joint family, the eldest and earning male person should perform Shraddha. In case of the unit family, everyone should perform shraddha independently. Hindu Dharma has made arrangement so that for each and every dead person the shraddha can be performed so as to give momentum to that person to progress to a higher sub-plane. Holy text Dharma Sindhu mentions that, 'If a particular dead person does not have any relative or a close person, then it is the duty of the king to perform Shraddha for that person'.

3. Performance of Shraddha by females

1. In point 2 it is mentioned that the daughter, wife, mother and daughter-in-law of the deceased person have the authority to perform Shraddha. In spite of this, in the current era, the priests who conduct Shraddha deny their consent for females to perform Shraddha. This could be because in the earlier days the thread ceremony was performed for females, and in current era, this practice has been discontinued in all classes. Therefore, in accordance to that, even performing of Shraddha has been disallowed for females. In emergency conditions, however, if no one is available for performing Shraddha, then it is better for it to be performed by females instead of not performing it at all.

2. The female performing shraddha should place a clean cotton cloth on her shoulder while performing 'Savya-Asavaya'. In the current era, all the three phases mentioned above are included within the '*Parvan' Shraddh*'. The science of righteousness (Dharma) prescribes that householders should perform the ritual of *Shraddh* as their duty.

Types of shraddha performed in Pitrupaksha:

Bharani shraddha: Performing shraddha on the chaturthi or panchami on the Bharani asterism in the Pitrupaksha has a special importance. If possible doing the shraddha on the Bharani asterism in addition to the tithi of death of the person helps the subtle body of the dead to be liberated from the form of being of the dead. Reason underlying getting fruit equivalent to doing shraddha in Gaya by doing it on the Bharani asterism: There is a subtle cover of desire-frequencies associated with the Absolute Earth and Water Principles on the gross structure of the land of Gaya. This cover is contained in a triangular structure. Hence, performing shraddha at this place is more beneficial for the deceased ancestors' whose inferior level desires have remained unsatisfied. The Bharani asterism that falls in the Pitrupaksha is also made of a triangle of three stars. The Deity of this triangle is Lord Yama. The Yama frequencies active in the Universe in higher proportion on this day are associated with desire-energy. When performing shraddha on this tithi, the desire-frequencies on Earth associated with this asterism are activated. Due to this, the place of shraddha becomes akin to that in Gaya. In the ritual of shraddha performed on the Bharani asterism, the Yama frequencies are activated in higher proportion. The deceased ancestors benefit from these frequencies.

Avidhawa Navami: The woman who dies before her husband is called 'avidhawa'. Her shraddha is performed on the tithi of Navami of Pitrupaksha. So this Navami is called 'Avidhawa Navami'. Method of performing the shraddha of a dead married woman on Avidhawa Navami: The shraddha of a dead married woman should be performed on the Navami of the Pitrupaksha by the son or the husband. In this shraddha married women are served a meal and ritualistically offered a coconut, sari and a blouse piece. As long as the husband is alive, both the Avidhawa Navami and yearly shraddha should be performed.

Trayodashi and Chaturdashi of Pitrupaksha: On the tithi of Trayodashi, a ritual of Kakabali is performed for the dead children. On the day of the Chaturdashi of Pitrupaksha, the shraddha of those who died in accidents is performed.

4.4 Importance of Sarvapitri Amavasya: The Amavasya that falls in the Pitrupaksha is the last tithi of Pitrupaksha. If it is not possible to perform shraddha on any day of the entire year, it is very essential that a shraddha be performed for all the dead on the tithi of Sarvapitri Amavasya. According to the Scriptures, the Amavasya of the Pitrupaksha is the most appropriate tithi for the ritual of shraddha. One who performs shraadh on sarvapitru amavasya, is liberated from the sins of the forefathers and frees one's spirit of life from the karma of the ancestor. One may conduct the tarpana shraadh on the sarva-pitru amavasya. One whose father and mother is alive must NOT conduct the ceremonial rites and rituals of one's 'Pitri'. One may however conduct special shraadh for one's specially departed spirit. Spiritual experience - By performing shraddha on the Sarvapitri Amavasya, one overcomes financial difficulties, debts, and the obstacles in spiritual practice (sadhana).

## Conclusion:

In conclusion, our current life is the result of what we did in the past and the future will be the result of what we are doing now.

Many of us may be able to conduct everything according to the traditions and customs of the family. However, some of us whose family have departed from the traditions and customs into the alienation of mix-cultures, mix-races, and mix-traditions would not necessarily get together to perform oblations and ceremonial rites and rituals.

For those of us who are less fortunate than others we must not give up hope. There are alternative other avenues available in the Vedic guidance.

The Vedas guide everyone alike, without the barriers of culture, creed, race, caste, or colour of the skin. It is believed in Vedic Astrology therefore, that, certain days are more relevant in connecting to the spirit world and certain periods are more convenient to offer our prayers, our solace, our divine sacrifices to the spirit world.<sup>4</sup>

One in whose household, traditions and customs have not been followed by the elders, the Vedas recommend that offering of rose water, sesam seeds and Ganga water to lord Surya, Narmada Shiva Lingham, and feeding of birds take place daily. As with the ceremonial rite, the ritual of lighting a deepam with slanted cotton wick be offered to the kul-devata and pitru in the south corner of the kitchen or near the kitchen tap. One could offer a blanket, some money and gold to an old man or woman on every Amavasya day which is the darkest day of the moon cycle. Oblation to the pitru loka, offerings to the ancestors or departed spirits will bring much comfort to us during our last stage.

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Pitru fortnight (Pitrupaksha) (Mahalaypaksha)



In my experience, I found that the dusk and the dawn are most beautiful moments to worship the pitru-loka. More importantly, the dusk brings a beautiful opportunity to light a glow of deepam to the spirit world. It is said in Padma Purana that the pitru can see us but we cannot see them. One may offer jaapa malas with the index finger not covering the jaapa mala, reciting the following mantras:

Aum Namah Shivaya

Aum shree Raama Sharannamm mamm

Aum Namoh Narayanaya

Aum Namoh Bhagavatey Vasudevayah

Aum Shree Krushna Sharannamm Mama

Aum Sarva pitre shantih

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate that there are alternatives to traditional Hindu customs on pitru rites and rituals. One must offer as much as one can to the spirit world for we are all travelling into the same destination in time, called mortal death. our turn is next.

Feeding of old people, young children, on Mondays, and Wednesdays in particular during the five days of the dark cycle of the moon, offering of flowers, giving blanket in donation, all contribute towards the complicated shraadhya rite and ritual.

Of all the rites and rituals, one who is poor in financial circumstances may even recite the Garuda Purana, Vishnu sahastranaamavali, conduct shiva –ruda abhishekha every amavashya [the darkest day of the moon cycle], to the pitru.

One who observes every ekadashi [eleventh day of the shukla and krushna paksha] that is two ekadashi's a month, tantamount to twenty four in a year, reciting the Aum namah shivaya mantra for the deceased accomplishes the sixteen shraadhas.

One who worships lord Shiva daily on narmada-shiva lingham, sends one third of one's daily prayers to the pitru. One who lights a candle of sesame seed oil and cotton wick reaches to the pitru world.

For mantra-rites and rituals, refer to transcripts under dharma awareness articles [www.hanss.co.uk](http://www.hanss.co.uk)

Aum Tat Sat.

Namaskaram Prannamm: to all my elders - Jyotikar Pattni

September 30<sup>th</sup> 2010

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