

# Death - Procedures, Rituals and Mantras

Suggestion: Call it “Dealing with Death” Understandings, Procedures and Mantras

## Dedication

This book is dedicated at the lotus feet of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who revealed to the whole world how to maintain Kṛṣṇa consciousness always, particularly at the time of death.

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## Foreword

## Illusion

As we step into the 21st millenium, we can look back and query the phenomenal changes of the 20th century. Einstein’s ideas catapulted modern man into a world of applied physics. Scientists were able to manipulate sub-atomic particles and create atom bombs and silicon chips. Biotechnology ushered in a new dimension when James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the self-replicating structure of DNA. Their successes in manipulating DNA has led to the production of everything from customised drugs to animal clones. Human clones are no more a pipedream.

However mankind’s so-called successes have simultaneously spawned local and international rivalries, bitterness, hatred, ethnic cleansing, wars, diseases and social degradation. Facilities for intense sense gratification have unleashed an extensive decline in spiritual and moral values.

The obvious result is that the members of modern human society are rapidly forgetting their eternal relationship with God. Very few people are spiritually awake to understand the importance of human life. We are inclined to wholly identify ourselves with our gross material bodies and are not aware that the body and the ‘self’ are different. Bewildered by the illusory energy, we consider ourselves a permanent part of the material creation.

Very few people can really understand that we are spiritual beings and that, by nature, we are full of happiness. This inherent trait for happiness has transformed into a tenacious desire for material sense enjoyment and has doused our sense of responsibility. In a bid to fully satisfy the senses, we have become entrapped by the stringent laws of material nature.

Most of us have no inclination to inquire about the 'self', beyond the body and the mind. Hence we while away our precious time, with no desire to go back to Godhead.

In the interim, things change from one stage to another by the unfailing influence of time. The darkness of death is inevitable and pampers no person. Death devours living entities at every moment, snatching them without hesitation. You and I are fully(?) aware of this, but such thoughts are cast to the distant recesses of the mind. We prefer to generate a feeling of security by encircling ourselves with friends and family. We seek bodily comforts and strive for an increase in personal wealth. Perhaps these would counteract the invasive material nature; inducing a release from the certainty of disease, old age and death.

All this is nothing but an illusion. The mighty empires of history have flickered and disappeared. Nothing can save one from the onslaught of time. Nothing (?) (material) is permanent. Our foolishness is truly amazing. We think that we are independent; that we can do whatever we like; that we will not meet death in the near future. Despite the presence of our loved ones, we cannot be protected from misery, disease and death. No one can help. Our only shelter is the Lord. He guarantees our protection. Lord Krsna says (Bg 9.31) "O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that My devotee never perishes." We should depend fully on the causeless mercy of the Lord.

### **Fear of death**

In Bhagavad-gita the Lord clearly says, *mṛtyuḥ sarva-haras caham*: "I am all-devouring death." Quite an unnerving statement. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, the all-loving Father, the personification of Absolute Love, also displays a frightening countenance. Yes! He does. As the blazing fire of death the Lord causes great fear in the lives of those who have not surrendered to Him.

Danger lurks everywhere. There is danger at every step. Everyone is caught in the jaws of the crocodile of eternal time. At any moment death will strike, plundering one's treasured possessions and shattering the precious relationships of family members, wife, children, society, country and many other things. Nothing endures. Death will come. Every member of every family is fallible. No one can save us from the cruel claws of death. Our children will also die. No material body will ever survive in this struggle with material nature. Death will finish everything. After death one will forget everything about the present bodily relations. One is compelled to enter another body to begin another chapter of life.

Death is the weapon of *kala*, the time factor. Time is destructive. Everything in this material creation is subject to destruction and dissolution. Hence practically everyone fears death. Death has no consideration for any person's desire. You may have the most grandiose plans for the eternal benefit of humanity. But Yamaraja (?) does not spare your life even for a moment, not allowing a second beyond what one is destined to enjoy. No one can enhance our short period of life even by a fraction of a moment.

In terms of cosmic time, our lifespan is merely a flash. Yet for this brief moment we are simply too busy, plotting and planning. Such is our degree of ignorance. Death severs all family bonds. At death one changes families, moving into another, and another, and another...

You must know that:

You are an eternal, spiritual being.

Your body is definitely temporary.

Your body will definitely perish.

One who surrenders to Lord Krsna is fully protected by Krsna. After giving up the present body such a person will not again receive a material body.

### **The soul**

A small spiritual spark is the basic principle of any material body. It spreads its influence all over that body as consciousness. This consciousness is limited to a single body. You are conscious of the pains and pleasures of your body. The pains and pleasures of my body will be unknown to you. Each body is the home of an individual soul.

The *Mundaka Upanisad* (3.1.9) explains that the soul is atomic in size and is much smaller than material atoms. It is therefore invisible even in (?) (to) the most powerful electron-microscope. The *Svetasvatara Upanisad* (5.9) confirms that the dimension of the soul is one ten-thousandth of the tip of a hair.

You and I are individual souls. In fact, so is every living entity. The individual soul always remains a separate identity and is different from the body. It is never the body. The spirit soul is *sac-cid-ananda*: eternal, full of knowledge and full of bliss. As individual souls we remain infinitesimal in comparison to the Supreme Soul. We can never, either individually or collectively, become equal to the infinite Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The qualities of the soul are truly amazing. The spirit soul exists permanently and does not undergo any change. The soul has no by-product. The passing of time has no effect on the soul. It does not at any time become old and does not deteriorate like a tree or anything material. The so-called old man, therefore, feels himself to be in the same spirit as he was in his childhood or youth. The changes in his body, the dwindling and the decay of his faculties, have absolutely no effect on the soul.

The soul is primeval; it is never born. It is eternal and imperishable. It can never be annihilated by any scientific device. In fact, it cannot be cut, nor burned, nor moistened, nor withered. It is eternally spiritual and constant. It can just as easily power the body of a gigantic being as it does that of a microbic germ.

Any body, irrespective of species, can only develop because of the presence of the soul. The soul leaves the body at death, transmigrating to another body. With such a lucid background to our eternal nature, is there any need for us to grieve for any living being?

### **Transmigration**

Even sceptics have to agree that our bodies undergo continuous change. From the body of a little child we change to that of a youth; then to that of an adult and finally to that of an old person. Simply page through your family photo-album to confirm this truth. You can see yourself in many

different situations, in a variety of shapes and sizes. Yet you are able to identify yourself in practically all of them, although there are many changes in form. Your identity remains constant for you are the spirit soul. It is at the moment of death that the next change occurs and the soul transfers to another body.

It is really not difficult to understand such a change. Just as I would wear a set of clothes today and change into a fresh set tomorrow, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. This transfer of the atomic soul to another body is done by the grace of the *Supersoul* a localized form of the Supreme Lord. The *Supersoul* fulfils the desire of the atomic soul just as one friend fulfils the desire of another.

The consciousness we have created during our life is of utmost importance. Our present body and present activities are the background for our next type of body. If we have promoted our animalistic tendencies then it is quite likely that we will receive a suitable animal body to properly fulfil our desires. If we have fixed our consciousness on godly activities, we are sure to receive a much higher form of life. If one has fully committed oneself to Krsna consciousness, then one will be transferred to ***Krsnaloka*** in the spiritual world to associate with Lord Krsna.

This constant transmigration of the soul from one body to another is the cause of material existence. One takes birth according to one's activities in life. After finishing one term of activities, one has to die to take birth for the next. The soul thus remains entangled in a continuous cycle of material existence called *samsara*, a chain of birth and death in the 8 400 000 species of life. Only devotional service to the Lord can stop this process of conditional life. Without the mercy of the Lord, one cannot stop the cycle of birth and death. Bhagavad-gita (4.9) states that one who knows the transcendental nature of Lord Krsna's appearance and activities, does not take birth upon leaving his body but attains the eternal abode of the Lord.

### **The Time of Death**

At the time of death one's physiological condition is completely disturbed. The body malfunctions and is racked with severe pain. One is overpowered by mucus and bile and the throat chokes up. One can see the messengers of death standing before him, their eyes full of wrath. This precipitates an onset of great fear. The mind becomes bewildered and the person becomes totally helpless.

The moment of death is critical. Thoughts accumulated during the course of one's life gush out at this crucial moment, each clamouring for attention. One's state of being at the end of one's life can only be successful if one has developed one's love for the Lord and has made a habit of chanting

*'Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare  
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.'*

A devotee of the Lord is most fortunate. Despite any disturbing condition, the mind of a devotee will fix on Krsna. Even though it may be very difficult to vibrate any sound, simply by the divine grace of the Supreme Lord will one remember Krsna at the time of death.

For such a devotee death takes place exactly like lightning, and illumination follows simultaneously. The spirit soul will immediately transfer to one of the *Vaikuntha* planets in the

spiritual sky. For the non-devotee the mind, intelligence and ego will carry the soul to another gross body.

### **Mourning**

We are inclined to search for happiness in matter. This is especially true in our relationships with our family and friends. Our strong attachments come to the fore upon hearing of the death of a loved one. This lamentation can grow like a blazing fire. Seeing someone merged in great sorrow kindles pain in the hearts of those present. You have surely observed this whenever we (?) (you) attend a funeral. The relatives will weep for the person that (?) (who) has 'gone'. They do this although the body of their beloved is still there, lying in state before them. This means people do have some understanding that the spirit soul is different from the body. It is the spirit soul that has gone.

The great saints Angira and Narada explain the reality of family relationships. By the arrangement of time, these relationships exist only in the present. This temporary arrangement of father, mother, son and daughter is made by the Supreme Lord. These relationships did not exist before, nor will they stay in the future. Everything in the material world is transient. Think of the small particles of sand on a seashore. A few grains come together for a while and are then separated by the force of the wind or the waves. Living entities also sometimes come together as a family unit. They remain for a while but are soon separated by the force of time.

We should consider the body to be like a dress. The body has no eternal relationship with the soul, which is eternal. A change of dress is taking place all the time. These relationships are temporary. The personality that you love is really the spirit soul, which never dies. This being so, why should anyone lament? The body is made of material elements and will always perish. That is why Lord Krsna says that one should not mourn for what is not worthy of grief.

One who has grown wise in Krsna Consciousness will not lament either for the living or for the dead. We can never restrict the coming and going of happiness and distress. Happiness and distress are nonpermanent. They appear and disappear like the winter and summer seasons. We must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

### **Bhakti-yoga**

*Bhakti-yoga*, devotional service to Lord Krishna, is very practical for self-realization. It is a special process that revives the lost relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme Lord. Only the Supreme Lord can deliver one from all sins. He extends His mercy and nullifies the results of one's *karma*. We need to be humble and:

seek the shelter of Lord Krsna;  
offer our loving service to the Lord;  
think of Krsna with great faith;  
worship Him with love.

Lord Krsna is the Supreme Absolute Truth. He is the fountainhead of the *visnu-tattva* (?) (*all forms of God*). He is Mukunda, the giver of liberation. To know Krsna is to attain eternal life.

Let us learn to forget our designations as Indian, American, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and so on. Instead, day by day, let us become more aware of religious principles. Let us happily perform some simple sacrifice to please the Lord each day. We can do so with whatever we have available. The Lord is willing to accept (Bg. 9.26) a simple offering of a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water, provided it is done with love. Our children, spouse and home are natural objects of affection. Krsna consciousness is the best process to make your home pleasant and your family very happy. This process of Krsna consciousness is very easy. There are four things to make one happy:

- 1) Chant 'Hare Krsna';
- 2) Offer your food (vegetarian) to Krsna;
- 3) Discuss books like *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*;
- 4) Worship Sri Sri RadhaKrsna.

The whole family can grow together in Krishna Consciousness. Sit down together, every morning and evening, and chant the "*Hare Krsna Maha-mantra*."

*'Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare  
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.'*

You can sing the *mantra* in many, many blissful melodies. In this way one can mold any family to develop Krsna consciousness.

Your spiritual progress in life will be tested at the time of death. By the grace of the Lord a devotee can chant His holy name at the time of death. *Bhagavad-gita* confirms that if one can remember Krsna at death, he is immediately transferred to *Goloka Vrndavana*, or *Krsnaloka*, without even perceiving the pains of death.

*Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu* says our main concern in life should be to increase our attachment and love for the Supreme personality of Godhead. He endorses the chanting of the holy names of the Lord as the only means of deliverance. The *Hare Krsna maha-mantra* is recommended for every person, even those who commit major offenses. As one continues chanting one will gradually decrease one's offenses. By chanting the *Hare Krsna maha-mantra* our love for Krsna increases. The transcendental name of Krsna, even though uttered unconsciously or by force of circumstances, can help one obtain freedom from the greatest hurdle. By chanting the holy name of Krsna one becomes free from the complicated meshes of birth and death.

### **Sraddha-kriya**

According to Vedic teachings we owe a debt to the forefathers of our family. To fulfil our obligations we are expected to offer our respects to them in a *sraddha* ceremony. This *sraddha* is meant to please Lord Visnu, the Supreme personality of Godhead, with offerings of *prasada* food (it is only *prasada* after it has been offered). In a first-class *sraddha* ceremony *bhagavata-prasada* is offered to the forefathers.

*Sraddha* is specifically performed to bring relief for one's forefathers. Sometimes the forefathers may be suffering from various types of sinful reactions, and sometimes some of them cannot even acquire a gross material body and are forced to remain in subtle bodies as ghosts. The *Pindopanisad* states that the soul does not have a physical body (*sthula-sarira*) after death. It

wanders in a subtle body (*linga-sarira*) and can neither eat nor drink. In this state the soul is called *preta*. The *Preta Khanda* section of the *Garuda Purana* explains further. A human being that has been very sinful is denied a gross physical body after death. His soul is trapped, earthbound, accompanied by the subtle body composed of mind, intelligence and *ahankara*, false sense of identity. The *preta's* mind is agitated by the urges of lust which he is unable to satisfy because he does not have the material facilities to do so. *Pretas* have no bodies of their own so they hunger for vicarious pleasures.

This ghostly position is very painful. The *preta* is in an intolerable situation, unable to fulfil any desires, and only able to create disturbances. You and I have no way of determining the sinful activities performed by any person. The *sraddha-kriya* is, therefore, a special rite that caters for the welfare of the deceased as well as that of the forefathers. To prevent the deceased from wandering like a ghost in the ether, with only a subtle body, one must make offerings to him and the other *Pitrs*.

At this point I wish to emphasize:

1. A *vaisnava* (a devotee of Lord Krishna) is not obliged to perform such duties, and
2. These rituals do not erase the *karma* accumulated by the living entity throughout his past lives.

*Sraddha-kriya* is usually performed by the eldest son. In the absence of a son, a male member of the immediate family takes the responsibility. The death of any person brings about a period of contamination. During this time, water is offered to the deceased each day. When the period of contamination (refer to page 22) is over the house is purified. The '*pinda-dana*' ceremony begins on this day. Offerings of food are made to the deceased and the forefathers. The *Garuda-Purana* (11.34.44) explains that the offering of *pinda* helps to bestow a temporary body to the deceased. This *pinda* ceremony is repeated every month for eleven months. On the sixth and twelfth months two special *sraddha* ceremonies are held. The *pinda* ceremony ends with a last offering, during the twelfth month, known as *sapindadi-karana* which enables the *preta* to obtain the body of a *Pitr* to enter the heavenly *Pitrloka* planet.

Option:

The *sraddha* ceremony can also be performed during the twelve days following the death of the deceased. In this instance, one offering is made every day.

Special note:

The *Brahma-Vaivarta Purana* states that the *sraddha* ceremony should not be performed on *Ekadasi*. Srila Jiva Gosvami confirms that the *sraddha* ceremony should be held on the next day, or *dvadasi*. If one performs the *sraddha* ceremony of oblations to the forefathers on the *Ekadasi tithi*, then the performer, the forefathers for whom the *sraddha* is observed, and the *purohita*, the family priest, all go to hell.

**Thoughts on Sraddha-kriya**

Those people that do not engage in regular devotional service to the Lord are bound by the rules and regulations of fruitive activities. They are obliged to offer periodical food and water to the forefathers of the family.

When death occurs in the family, some people go on pilgrimage to the sacred Ganges, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Sarasvati, the Narmada or the Kaveri River in India. Here they offer prayers to Lord Krsna (Visnu), beseeching Him for benedictions to ensure the well-being of the departed soul. They offer oblations to their forefathers using sacred water. They then bathe in the holy waters for their personal purification.

Thousands of men gather daily at a very famous Visnu temple in Gaya, India, to offer *pinda* to the lotus feet of the Lord. They pray that their forefathers will attain material bodies to enjoy whatever material enjoyment is due to them. It is interesting to note that, following this principle, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu went to Gaya to offer *pinda* and respectful oblations to His forefathers.

The *sraddha* ceremony is not meant to be a grandiose occasion. Narada Muni has been emphatic about this. Even though one may be very rich, it is not necessary to make expensive arrangements. Rather than inviting three brahmanas, one should invite a first-class Vaisnava. One should arrange for a recitation of the wonderful activities of the Lord.

The *Caitanyamangala*, *Madhya-khanda*, describes that when Srivasa Pandita was performing the *sraddha* ceremony of his father, Lord Caitanya ordered him to read the *Sri Visnu-sahasra-nama-stotra* [the thousand names of Lord Visnu].

For *Kali-yuga*, the scriptures command that *sankirtana-yajna* must always be performed: *kirtaniyah sada harih*. Every ritualistic ceremony recommended in the *sastras* must be preceded and followed by *sankirtana*. Chanting of the ‘*Hare Krsna mantra*’ and distribution of *prasadam* are essential. This is the recommendation of Srila Jiva Gosvami.

### **Krsna consciousness and Sraddha-kriya**

A Krsna conscious devotee does not need to perform ritualistic ceremonies such as *sraddha*. There is no description of this ritual in the *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* (*what is this?*) but it does have brief mention in the *Samskara-dipika* (*and this?*). The *Caitanya-caritamrta* says that a person fully conversant with Krsna consciousness does not perform any rituals. He knows that all rituals are automatically performed simply by serving Krsna in full Krsna consciousness.

*Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.41) states that “*One who has fully surrendered to the lotus feet of the Lord is no longer a debtor to his forefathers, the great sages, human society, the common man or any living entity.*” All obligations are automatically fulfilled by performance of devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* (9.308) states the following:

1. There are many people who worship the Supreme Lord daily.
2. They have no need to offer oblations in charity.
3. They do not have to perform a *sraddha* ceremony .

Therefore, simply by surrendering to Krsna, one can liquidate all obligations at one stroke. By always engaging in devotional service for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord, one’s ancestors who might have been in difficulty are automatically relieved. Simply by performing devotional service, one can deliver hundreds and thousands of forefathers from all kinds of misery.



Srila Prabhupada has stated that we should:

1. hold a memorial ceremony three days after the death of a Vaisnava;
2. offer a feast to the Lord, on behalf of the deceased.

*Vaisnavas* have taken a vow to worship Lord Krsna everyday. Any Vaisnava who worships Lord Krsna does not have to worry about the future. The Lord will ensure a proper situation for His devotee. Always remember that by taking the *prasadam* of Lord Visnu one will not become a ghost or anything lower than a human being. By eating the remnants of food offered to Krsna one is delivered from all kinds of sinful actions. The secret to success is:

1. Chant the “*Hare Krishna Maha-mantra*”.  
     ‘*Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare*  
     *Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*’
2. Eat only ‘*prasadam*’.
3. Worship Lord Krsna.
4. Always serve Lord Krsna, and His devotees, with love.

Nevertheless, *samskaras* help us to mold our existence so as to always remember the Lord at every step. There are *vaisnavas* that desire to have a *sraddha* ceremony when they have a death in their family. The *sraddha* ceremony must be performed by a *vaisnava* priest. Only *visnu-prasada* must be offered to the *pitrs*.

1. Continue with your ‘*bhakti*’.
2. Do your daily worship.
3. Chant your ‘rounds’ of “*Hare Krsna Maha-mantra*”.
4. Chant extra ‘rounds’.
5. Have your ‘*artik*’.
6. Offer *bhoga* to the Lord.

A *vaisnava* understands the importance of distributing *prasadam* and transcendental literature. On behalf of the deceased person you can make a monetary donation to facilitate any of the following:

*Anadana* : To offer foodstuff to the Deities of Sri Sri Radha Krishna or Sri Sri Nitai Gaurahari in your local *Hare Krsna* Temple.

*Puspadana* : To offer flower garlands to the Deities.

Deities *puja* for that day.

*Prasadam* for the ‘Food for Life’ program.

*Prasadam* for the Sunday Love-Feast.

Free distribution of books.

## PART TWO

### *Anyesti-kriya: Funeral rites*

We learn from Sukadeva Gosvami (SB.1.19.24), that the highest perfection of human life is to remember the Supreme Personality of Godhead at the end of life. All the prayers and rituals we participate in during our lifetime are meant to bring us to this goal, remembering Lord Krsna at death.

The Anyesti-kriya is the last ritual associated with the body. It is a necessary *samskara*, the ritual to purify the body for the last time. This ritual is performed to help the soul to become detached from the body. The soul is assisted in not taking a ghostly form and in moving on to a better situation.

You should mention that for devotees, if there is a death in the family, they should request a qualified devotee priest to perform the funeral ceremonies

The following is a guideline to what you may do when someone in your family passes away.

### Decorum

1. This is a period of mourning for the family.
2. The family undergoes intense emotional pressure.
3. It is a period that warrants dignity and gravity.
4. The culture of the entire family comes to the fore.
5. Relatives and friends must ensure befitting respect.

### Custom

1. There should be no cooking. Small children can eat elsewhere.
2. Close relatives and friends can provide simple meals.
3. If one's father, mother or spouse has died, one is expected to fast for three days.
4. This fasting can be also done by immediate family members.
5. One may eat fruit if fasting is not possible.
6. During the period of *asauca* (see page --) one should eat just one simple meal a day.
7. There must be regular scripture reading.
8. Have regular bhajans and kirtans to glorify Lord Krsna.
9. Definitely no forms of entertainment.

### Before death

1. A dying person must hear the *maha-mantra*.
2. You can loudly chant the *maha-mantra* for the person's benefit.  
'Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare  
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.'
3. You can play a recording of the *maha-mantra*.
4. *Prasadam*, in the form of *tulasi* leaves, *caranamrta*, or Ganges water, must be put into the dying person's mouth. Recite:

*ya vai lasac-chri-tulasi-vimisra-*

*krsnanghri-renv-abhyadhikambu-netri  
punati lokan ubhayatra sesan  
kas tam na seveta marisyamanah (SB 1.19.6)*

The river Ganges carries the most auspicious water, which is mixed with the dust of the lotus feet of the Lord and tulasi leaves. Therefore that water sanctifies the three worlds inside and outside and even sanctifies Lord Siva and other demigods. Consequently everyone who is destined to die must take shelter of this river.

5. One may give a gift of a cow.
4. One may donate some money to serve the deities of Sri Sri Nitai-Gaurahari or Sri Sri Radha-Krsna.
5. Gifts of land, grain or ghee may also be made to the deities.

### **Upon death**

Outline of basic procedure:

1. For convenience the body is removed by an undertaker to his premises.
2. A 'Death Certificate', endorsed by a registered medical practitioner, is required.
3. The undertakers are well equipped to offer advice and assistance on the legal formalities that have to be taken care of before cremation.

Note: The *Jayakhya-samhita* states that boys under five years and girls under seven years may be buried.

### **At the funeral parlour**

The corpse has to be prepared for the funeral rites. Excellent facilities exist at most modern premises. Trained staff are in attendance to ensure that the corpse is properly laid-out. The following has to be done.

1. The eyes should be closed.
2. The limbs should be straightened.
3. The body is shaved (optional) and then bathed.
4. Smear ghee over the body while reciting:  
*Om gayadini ca tirthani ye ca punyah silocayah  
Kuruksetram ca gangam ca yamunam ca sarid-varam  
Kausikim candra-bhagam ca sarva-papah pranasinim  
Bhadravakatam gandakim sarayum panasam tatha  
Prthiviyam yani tirthani saritah sagarams tatha  
Prthiviyam yani tirthani saritah sagarama tatha  
Dhyava tu manasa sarve krta snanam gatayusam*

“Having meditated upon all the holy places, rivers, oceans, the deceased has bathed in all these rivers.”

4. Sprinkle a few drops of sacred water on body.

(Ganga, Jamuna, Radha-kund, Sahasra Jal, etc)

5. Apply tilaka on the body of a vaisnava.

Chant each mantra and apply *tilak*.

*Om kesavaya namah* (mark the forehead)

*Om narayanaya namah* (the lower abdomen)

*Om madhavaya namah* (the chest)

*Om govindaya namah* (the neck)

*Om visnave namah* (right side of the stomach)

*Om madhusudanaya namah* (right arm)

*Om trivikramaya namah* (right shoulder)

*Om vamanaya namah* (left side of the stomach)

*Om sridharaya namah* (left arm)

*Om hrsikesaya namah* (left shoulder)

*Om padmanabhaya namah* (upper back)

*Om damodaraya namah* (lower back)

*Om vasudevaya namah* (back of head - the 'sikha')

6. Place *tulasi* beads around neck.

7. The body should be dressed in two pieces of cloth.

Use silk/ new clothes/ clean clothes.

A vaisnava must be dressed in vaisnava clothing.

For a *brahmana*, a new sacred thread.

Options:

An old man may be clothed in white.

A middle aged man may be clothed in red.

A young man may be clothed in coloured clothing.

Women may be clothed in coloured clothing.

Widows are clothed in white, black or blue.

Favourite clothing (clean) of the deceased.

8. Place a small piece of gold in mouth.

9. Transfer the corpse from table to coffin.

10. (Chant the) *Maha-mantra*.

‘*Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare*

*Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*’

11. A horse transports the body to the family home.

**Formalities at home**

1. Coffin is carried into a large room.
2. Place on a grass mat or white calico.
3. The head should point north.
4. Light a ghee lamp.
5. Immediate family members are in attendance.

### Homage

Before the public pay their respects, the following is done:

1. Unscrew and remove lid of coffin.
2. Place some dry *tulasi* twigs around body. Recite:

*naitad batadhisa padam tavepsitam  
yan mayaya nas tanuse bhuta-suksmam  
anugrahayastv api yarhi mayaya  
lasat-tulasya bhagavan vilaksitah (SB 3.21.20)*

My dear Lord, although it is not Your desire, You manifest this creation of gross and subtle elements just for our sensual satisfaction. Let Your causeless mercy be upon us, for You have appeared before us in Your eternal form, adorned with a splendid wreath of *tulasi* leaves.

3. Place an ‘offered’ *tulasi* leaf in mouth. Recite:  
*Om vrndayai tulasi devyai Priyayai kesavasya ca  
Visnu bhakti prade devi Satyavatyai namo namah*

“I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vrnda, Srimati Tulasi Devi, who is very dear to Lord Kesava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Lord Krsna and possess highest truth.”

3. Cover the body with a ‘*harinama-chadar*’. Recite:  
*Nama cintamanih krsnas Caitanya rasa vigraha  
Purnam suddho nitya mukto bhinnatvam nama naminoh*

“The holy name of Krsna is transcendently blissful. It bestows all spiritual benedictions, for it is Krsna Himself, the reservoir of all pleasure. Krsna's name is complete and it is the form of all transcendental mellows. The name of Krsna and Krsna Himself are identical.

4. Adorn with a ‘*maha*’ flower garland from the *Hare Krsna* Temple. Recite:

*Tvayopabhukta srag gandha vaso lankara carcita  
ucchista bhojino dasas tava mayam jayema hi*

“Simply by decorating ourselves with the garlands, fragrant oils, clothes and ornaments that You have already enjoyed, and by eating the remnants of Your meals, we, Your servants, will indeed conquer Your illusory energy.” (SB 11.6.46)

5. Offer *chandana* to Srila Prabhupada. Recite:  
*Nama om visnu padaya krsna prestaya bhutale*  
*Srimate bhaktivedanta svamin iti namine.*  
*Namaste sarasvate devi gaura vani pracarine*  
*Nirvivesa sunyavadi pascatya desa tarine.*

6. Place a *chandana* dot on forehead of deceased.

7. Offer Yamuna Water with spoon. Recite:  
*Cid ananda bhanoh sada nanda sunoh*  
*para prema patri drava brahma gatri*  
*aghanam lavitri jagat ksema dhatri*  
*pavitri kriyam no vapur mitra putri (cc.m. 3.28)*

“O River Yamuna, you are the blissful spiritual water that gives love to the son of Nanda Maharaja. You are the same as the water of the spiritual world, for you can vanquish all our offenses and the sinful reactions incurred in life. You are the creator of all auspicious things for the world. O daughter of the sun-god, kindly purify us by your pious activities.”

8. Place *Vrndavana* dust on head of deceased. Recite:  
*yat-pada-pamsur bahu janma-krcchrato*  
*dhrtatmabhir yogibhir apy alabhyah*  
*sa eva yad-drg-visayah svayam sthitah*  
*kim varnyate distam ato vrajaukasam (SB. 10.12.12)*

"Yogis may undergo severe austerities and penances for many births by practicing *yama*, *niyama*, *asana* and *pranayama*, none of which are easily performed. Yet in due course of time, when these yogis attain the perfection of controlling the mind, they will still be unable to taste even a particle of dust from the lotus feet of the Supreme personality of Godhead. What then can we describe about the great fortune of the inhabitants of Vrajabhumi, Vrndavana, with whom the Supreme personality of Godhead personally lived and who saw the Lord face to face?"

9. Replace lid on coffin. Recite:  
**HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE**  
**HARE RAMA HARE RAMA RAMA RAMA HARE HARE.**

10. If the deceased is an elder member of the family, then the eldest son should offer some incense, in arati fashion, to the body.

11. Soft kirtan. (Minimal use of instruments)

12. Chant *Prema-dhvani* prayers.

The body lies in state for several hours before proceeding to the crematorium. Many people will be coming to sympathise with the bereaved family. They can offer some flower petals or pieces of sandalwood.

Allow some time for family members to express their grief.

Intersperse such moments with bhajans selected from "Songs of the Vaisnava *acaryas*". Have 10 minute sessions of scriptural reading. These verses are recommended.

*ante-kale ca mam eva  
smaran muktva kalevaram  
yah prayati sa mad-bhavam  
yati nasty atra samsayah (Bg. 8.5)*

"And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body, remembering Me alone, at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt."

*yam yam vapi smaran bhavam  
tyajaty ante kalevaram  
tam tam evaiti kaunteya  
sada tad-bhava-bhavitah (Bg. 8.6)*

"Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kunti, that state he will attain without fail."

Encourage active participation in the word-by-word recitation of each verse. Beside the spiritual benefits, this helps to maintain proper decorum. Use these verses as a springboard for your discourse. The following themes from *Bhagavad-gita* are excellent for short discourses:

eternal nature: 2.12  
body: 2.16/ 18/ 22/ 28/  
soul: 2.13/ 17/ 20/ 22/ 23/ 24/ 25/ 29  
grief: 2.11/ 14/ 15/ 27/ 30  
no rebirth: 8.15 - 16.

13. Chant *Mangalacarana* Prayers from ....., word by word.

Conclude with: " (Name of deceased) ki jaya! "

15. Kirtan / bhajan.

17. *Santi-dana*:

*om dyauh santih  
antariksam santih  
prthivi santih  
apah santih  
vayu santih*

*tejah santih*  
*osadhayah santih*  
*lokah santih*  
*brahmanah santih*  
*vaisnavah santih*  
*santir astu dhrtir astu*  
*om santih santih santih*

Cremation should be in daylight hours, preferably before sunset. If not, then early the next day, before decomposition sets in. Cremation should not take place on *Ekadasi* or *Maha-dvadasi*.

### **In crematorium**

A hearse conveys the body to the crematorium. The procession from the hearse to the crematorium is solemn. A man, sprinkling water, leads the procession. The pallbearers are usually from the male line of the deceased. They should have bathed and must be barefoot when they carry the coffin. Accompany with soft singing of the *maha-mantra*.

1. The coffin is suitably placed for mourners to offer their final respect.
2. Mourners file past, offering some flower petals or pieces of sandalwood.
3. The priest recites prayers in glorification of the Lord. He can recite *Sri Visnu-sahasra-nama-stotra*.
4. Some family member or friend pays tribute to the deceased.
5. Read from *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* about the nature of the soul. (Refer to verses selected on page ---). By elaborating on the eternal nature of the spirit soul, one can give comfort to the bereaved family members.
6. The priest should elaborate on the specific purpose of human life; the means to return to the spiritual kingdom of the Supreme Lord.
7. Chant the “maha-mantra”.  
     ‘*Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare*  
     *Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*’
8. The coffin then moves into the cremation chamber.

### **Last rites**

#### **Requisites:**

Sandalwood, camphor, matches.

Since cremation is now done in modern incinerators, we need to adjust our final rites. The following simple procedure is suggested.

The last rites are performed by the son of the deceased. If this is not possible, then by a male member of the immediate family.

The claimant to the last rites does the following:



1. Place some sandalwood in a mound on:  
the chest;  
the abdomen;  
the feet of the deceased.
2. Place a piece of camphor on the top of each pile of sandalwood.
3. Recite: *om devas cagni-mukhah sarve enam dahantu*  
“May all the *devatas* with Agni as their mouth consume the body in flames.”  
(Light a camphor and give to the chief mourner).
4. He walks around the coffin, **anti-clockwise**, three or seven times.  
The priest invokes Kravyada Agni.  
*om kravyada nama agnaye namah*  
*om kravyada nama agnim avahayami,*  
*sthapayami agaccha bhagavan*  
*agne smasanau sannidho bhava*
5. The chief mourner touches the flame to the camphor:  
First the chest, then the abdomen, and then the feet.
6. The coffin is pushed into the incinerator while the priest chants:  
*vayur anilam amrtam*  
*athedam bhasmantam sariram*  
*om krato smara krtam smara*  
*krato smara krtam smara* (Sri Isopanisad, mantra 17)

"Let this temporary body be burned to ashes, and let the air of life be merged with the totality of air. Now O my Lord, please remember all my sacrifices, and because You are the ultimate beneficiary please remember all that I have done for You."

*Agne naya supatha raye asman*  
*visvani deva vayunani vidvan*  
*yuyodhy asmaj juhuranam eno*  
*bhuyistham te nama-uktim vidhema*(Sri Isopanisad, mantra 18)

"O my Lord, powerful as fire, omnipotent one, now I offer You all obeisances and fall on the floor at your feet. O my Lord, please lead me on the right path to reach You, and since You know all that I have done in the past, please free me from the reactions to my past sins, so that there will be no hindrance to my progress."

*om kravyadaya namas tubhyam*

"I pay my respects to the personality of funeral fire."

7. Sing Prayers to Lord Nrsimhadeva.  
(Maharaja, is there a need to have a copy of the prayers here? yes)

### **The ashes**

With our modern incinerators we are now able to receive the ashes of the deceased within a few hours. It is usually collected in a tray by the attendant. An earthen pot (*kalsa*) is placed on a

white piece of calico. The ashes are filled into the pot. Any excess ashes are collected in the same cloth. Many crematoriums have the facility to grind the ashes into powder-form. This usually fits into a standard size *kalsa*. The pot is covered with an earthen lid. The cloth is wrapped into a bundle and is ready for disposal in the ocean or a river.

### Disposal of ashes

The family go to the chosen site to dispose of the ashes.

Perform *acamanam*.

*om kesavaya namah: sip water from right hand.*

*om narayanah namah: sip water from right hand.*

*om madhavayah namah: sip water from right hand.*

*om govindaya namah: sprinkle water on your right hand.*

*om visnave namah: sprinkle water on your left hand.*

The chief mourner faces north and does the following:

1. Hold some water in your joint palms.

2. Perform *sankalpa*, saying:

"Today, I throw the ashes of ----- in the Ganga/ Yamuna/ Tugela/ Vaal/ Umgeni River , etc."

3. Drop the water through your fingertips.

4. Hold the cloth with the earthen pot and say:

*om namo 'stu dharmaya : "I pay my respects to dharma."*

5. Enter further into the water.

6. Undo the bundle while chanting

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE

HARE RAMA HARE RAMA RAMA RAMA HARE HARE.

7. Submerge the bundle, saying:

*om sa me prito bhavatu : "May he be pleased with me."*

8. Do not look back. Come out of the river while chanting

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE

HARE RAMA HARE RAMA RAMA RAMA HARE HARE.

8. Face the sun and recite: (SB 10.14.8)

*tat te 'nukampam susamiksamano*

*bhunjana evatma-krtam vipakam*

*hrd-vag-vapurahir vidadhan namas te*

*jiveta yo mukti-pade se daya-bhak*

“My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances, with his heart, words and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.”

### Upon return home

1. The officiating *brahmana* should accompany family members home.
2. He should enter the home first, together with the children.
3. The home may be cleansed by burning dried cow-dung coated with ghee.
4. If this is not available, use *lobhan*.
5. The *brahmana* recites auspicious *mantras*.
6. Place a photograph of the deceased in a prominent place.
7. Light incense.

### Dipa danam

In the evening the chief mourner offers a lamp to the *preta*.

1. Perform *acamana*.

Have some water in a *panca-patra*. Sprinkle some water onto both hands. Hold the *acamanam* spoon in your left hand. Pour a few drops in your right palm. Chant the first *mantra*. Sip the water from the base of the right thumb (*brahma-tirtha*).

Repeat process for 2nd and 3rd *mantra*.

*om kesavaya namah* : sip water from right hand.

*om narayanah namah* : sip water from right hand.

*om madhavayah namah* : sip water from right hand.

*Om govindaya namah* : sprinkle water on your right hand.

*Om visnave namah* : sprinkle water on your left hand.

2. Prepare a ghee lamp. Put in some sesame seeds.
3. Remember Krsna and light the lamp.
4. The lamp should burn continuously for 10 days.

### Sankalpa

1. Pour some water into your right hand.

2. Recite the following:

“O deceased one, surrounded by a terrible darkness, steeped in *tama*. For the removal of that darkness, I offer this lamp to you.”

3. Pour the water out through the *pitr-tirtha*, the space between the thumb and the forefinger. Pour the water next to the lamp.

1. Kirtan.

## 2. Scripture reading.

### **Period of contamination**

When death occurs, the immediate family members undergo what is termed a period of contamination (*asauca*). The period of time generally depends on the status of the family. The *asauca* period is:

- 10 days for a *brahmana*,
- 12 days for a *ksatriya*,
- 15 days for a *vaisya*, and
- 30 days for a *sudra*.

For distant relatives one may observe 3 days.

### **Daily offering**

During the contamination period one offers water to the deceased each day. This is done as follows:

- 10 days for a *brahmana*,
- 12 days for a *ksatriya*,
- 15 days for a *vaisya*, and
- 30 days for a *sudra*.

Some sesame seeds and water is put into a small dish. Water is scooped into the joined palms. A prayer is offered and the water is poured out through the *pitr-tirtha*, the space between the thumb and the forefinger.

### **After Asauca**

The *karma* accumulated by any person is the determining factor after death. Once the period of contamination is over, a program is organised to honour the deceased person. The following ceremonial practices are offered to help the soul to cut off present material ties and to move on to a better situation.

1. The house is thoroughly cleaned and purified.
2. Preparations are made to have a *pinda* ceremony, an offering of *prasadam*.
3. Several varieties of food are prepared.
4. Small balls of rice, cooked in milk with black sesame, ghee and honey, are also prepared.
5. Make the 'offering' before a picture of the deceased.
6. The 'offering' is made to the deceased and then to the forefathers.
7. This is done by the eldest son.
8. A fire sacrifice (*avahana-homa*) may also be performed on this day.

8.1 Perform *maha-vyahrti-homa*.

8.2 The priest chants the *Purusa-sukta* prayers with *svaha* at the end of each verse. *Halava* may be offered into the flames.

9. Kirtan

10. Distribute *prasadam*. The host must ensure that the priest and other *vaisnavas* are served *prasadam* first.

Note:

A common practice is that a feast is held in the soul's honour, after 3 (three) days for a practising Vaisnava, or 13 (thirteen) days for a Hindu family.

### **How to make an offering to the deceased**

#### Step One

All preparations must be made with love. Vegetarian foods should be cooked in ghee to be offered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Never offer anything like meat, eggs or fish in the *sraddha* ceremony. *Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu*, quoting from the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*, confirms that the offering of flesh in oblations to forefathers is forbidden.

#### Step Two

Once all the preparations are ready, you should arrange the offering. It is best to use a special platter that is used only to make an offering to the Lord. Place a serving of each item that has been prepared onto the platter. Also include water and freshly prepared juices. Place this 'sacrifice' on your altar. The offering must then be made to Lord Visnu (Krsna), for His pleasure.

#### Step Three

Offer obeisance.

Humbly request the Lord to accept your 'offering'.

Recite the following *mantras*: (Chant each *mantra* three times)

*nama om visnu-padaya krsna prestaya bhuta-tale*

*srimate bhaktivedanta svamin iti namine.*

*namas te sarasvate deve gaura-vani-pracarine*

*nirvisesa-sunyavadi pascatyadesa-tarine.*

*namo maha-vadanyaya krsna-prema-pradaya te*

*krsnaya krsna-caitanya namne gaura-tvise namah.*

*namo brahmanya-devaya go-brahmana-hitaya ca*

*jagad-dhitaya krsnaya govindaya namo namah.*

#### Step Four

Move away from the altar.

Offer obeisance.

Sing a bhajan or kirtan for about 10 minutes in glorification of Lord Krsna.

Remove the platter of *prasadam*.

Step Five

1. Take half of each serving from the Lord's platter.
2. Return these to the pots in which they were prepared.
3. Now prepare an 'offering' for the deceased.
4. Use the remaining '*prasadam*' from the Lord's platter.
5. Place this onto another plate.
6. Place a photograph of the deceased person on your altar.
7. Offer the '*prasadam*' to the departed soul.
8. Leave this on the altar for a few minutes.
9. This platter of '*prasadam*' must then be removed.
10. It can then be put into a river or the ocean.  
Pray for the well-being of the departed soul.

The *prasadam* that you have so lovingly prepared can then be served for the pleasure of your guests. This is the most perfect and bona fide way of offering sacrifice for the pleasure of *Yajna*, or *Visnu*.