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PREFACE



Our customs and rituals are a part of Shastra (scriptures) called Smriti. In Sanskrit Smriti means (customs and rites) that were remembered” usually by the elders. As would be the case, memory sometimes fails us all. As we raise our children in foreign lands amongst different and sometimes hostile cultures, it is increasingly important that we impart to our young not only the value of our rites and rituals, but also reasonable explanations and methods.

Throughout this book, we have used the term ‘in the West’ to refer to all the countries outside our motherland, India. The deceased person’s Atman (soul) is referred to as He. This is a matter of convenience in writing and applies to both man and woman equally. When referring to Atman, He, Him, etc. are capitalized to show the immortal status of the Atman.

As with our first book on Samskara, this book too will be distributed to many families residing outside India. For families in India, many items mentioned will not be applicable. If you wish to distribute a copy to your community members – please let us know. The page before dedication to our parents is intentionally left blank - so those who wish to distribute copies to others in the memory of their loved ones can paste or attach some related information.

After the death of a loved one, Hindu families who have settled in foreign lands often have two very simple questions: Which ceremonies do we have to do, and what will happen if we do not do them? Then there is another common as well as a justifiable question: What is the right thing to do?

However, these simple questions often require long answers and some background. Yet when someone dies, the grieving survivors may not have the time to acquire the background. To make this workbook as useful as possible, after a brief **introduction**, we have divided the Final Rites portion into three major sections.

Section I - What Needs to be Done - A Checklist.

We have presented a simple checklist of things that need to be done day-by-day, starting with the day of death until after the 13th day. This we felt is most important on the grieving family’s mind. The grieving family may not need to or want to know how it is done or why it is done. There are many family elders who can advise them how to do things (not necessarily always correct, but they would have some input anyway).

Section II - How to Do; Step-by-Step Procedure.

This section is for those who wish to know how these rites should be done. It is presented for each of the rites in the order presented in the Section I- checklist. This can be read as needed or is desired. In this section, we have tried to answer most commonly asked questions. Each rite is stated as Religious, Social, or Financial. This would make it easier to decide which of these rites one wishes to perform. It explains in detail how a given segment from the 'Checklist' section should be performed. There are countless variations to any given rite. It is quite possible that in your family it is done slightly or entirely differently than how we have presented it. To accommodate that there is space for notes that you can make as per advice of elders or others.

Almost all the scriptures that mention final rites also mention that it is important to carry on whatever is the tradition in a particular family. After all the surviving family must not have the guilty feeling of not doing the right thing for their loved one.

Section III - Meanings; Why Rituals are Done - an Explanation.

Here we have provided explanations of why rites are done and what they all mean. For every explanation, there are many versions. We have presented explanations that are generally accepted and commonly cited in many of the scriptures. Elsewhere in the book we have also provided explanations in the body of the text specially if they are brief ones and do not interrupt the general theme. Scatterings and glossary also contain some additional explanations.

We felt that some information if presented in the text would disrupt the general presentation and/or explanation. We have presented such information under specialized subheadings.

Recipes

Because these rites often require cooking of special food, we have detailed specialized recipes. We belong to a Kshatriya community from Gujarat. The Kshatriya communities in general are non-vegetarian. Thus many of the rites presented in this book as well as the recipes in this section also belong to the specific Kshatriya community from Gujarat that we belong to. Although in principal, many of the other recipes will remain essentially the same – such as for the Pind, there are numerous variations within each community throughout India. If you belong to a community that is vegetarian, some of the rites and recipes are not applicable. We have left room for notation along side each recipe to accommodate the same.

Scatterings present a wide range of background information for those who want a deeper understanding.

Glossary presents Sanskrit words and some Gujarati words that we considered best explained but not translated. Initially we thought that there were just a handful of such words we had used and hence glossary was not necessary and we would explain (*albeit* briefly). We soon found that some words such as Atman and Pitra were used quite a few times. We also appreciate the fact that our children in the West are increasingly marrying into different cultures. We cannot assume that either of them would have the necessary background vocabulary to understand often basic explanations. We hope that the glossary by itself would also provide the necessary vocabulary as well as the elementary background.

While it is appreciated that not all readers can understand Devnagari script used for Sanskrit language, we have written Sanskrit as well as Gujarati words and verses in Devnagari and Gujarati script respectively in glossary. For those who can read, it is easier to pronounce more accurately rather than ‘Anglicized phonetic’ words. To those who cannot read either Devnagari or Gujarati script we do apologize for the inconvenience.

Lists and Forms

Finally we have presented some specialized **Lists and Forms** that we hope would make these rites slightly ‘easier’. We really wish you would never have to use it but if and when the need arises, we are sure that you will be pleased that it is there. We have kept the Calendar of Rites page at the end. When you need to use the Calendar of Rites page, you will discover that the last page is perhaps not only the most convenient but fitting as being ‘Antim’ (last).

Although it is customary not to thank members of the family for all the things they do for us, we would be amiss if we did not acknowledge the invaluable contribution made by both our children. Our daughter Minal, a published writer and a poet (*Leaving India, and many others*) put the touch of consistency in our writing as well as making it much more ‘user friendly’. Our son Nayan, an accomplished computer guy (Agile Coach) who willingly and ably took over the running of North American Hindu Association that allowed us time to complete this manuscript. Thanks also indeed to many community and family elders who have over the years contributed knowingly or unknowingly to our knowledge by deeds and words.

If you find any errors or have any suggestions please by all means do contact us (email: info@naha.us).

May the many generations of family use this Antim Samskara Workbook and learn to continue to live life to its fullest after the loved one has left this world.

Bhanu & Bhupendra Rajratwala

P.S. The first book in this series “Our Kshatriya Samskara - I. Simant” is also available as a free download from the North American Hindu Association website: www.naha.us
