

“It is important to perform proper funeral rites for the dead”

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When a loved one passes away, the bereaved family members will need some time to overcome their grief.

However, even while in mourning, it is important to perform the necessary rites in accordance to Hindu religious customs and practices and send off the dead in the proper way, says Geylang East Sri Sivan Temple priest Guruprakash Sharma.

He has been assisting in funeral rites in Singapore for the past three years.

The human body consists of the five elements of nature. When the soul leaves the body, the five elements should be given the due respect and sent to God.

Based on this belief, the body is washed with water considered as holy water. After that, the body is decorated with clothes and flowers and cremated in a crematorium or buried in the cemetery. This is the first day ritual.

“The next day, family members collect the cremated remains from the crematorium.

“The parts that are not burnt fully into ash are used to cool down the ashes. Prayers are conducted with milk, yoghurt, honey and ghee. The ashes are then scattered in the sea. This is the second day ritual.

“After this, the family waits for the 16th day prayers. If the deceased is unmarried, prayers are conducted on the 11th day, and if the deceased is married, prayers are conducted on the 16th day.

“In addition to this, a wake is held at night on the 15th day, and if possible, four poojas should be done.

“Decorations are done with flower garlands, fruits and food are offered and poojas are done at home during the four periods. When the fourth period ends, the offerings are taken to the seaside.

“Other poojas and ‘athma santhi homam’ are completed and the offerings are scattered in the sea. After that, the family member who did the ritual will shave his head or give away a small amount of hair to get rid of the ‘theetu’.

“Then, a ‘punniyathaana pooja’ is conducted at home and water is sprayed in all the rooms as well as the prayer room. A vegetarian feast should be offered to the dead as ‘padayal’. “In the evening, everyone should partake in the ‘moksha deepam’ viewing prayer at the temple.

“After viewing the ‘deepam’, on the following day, you can light the oil lamp in your prayer room at home. You can go to the temple as usual as well,” said priest Guruprakash Sharma.

From the day someone passes away until the 16th day prayers are over, the person who did the last rites should be very careful. They should avoid going overseas, says Sri Sivan Temple’s head priest Chandra Sekara Sadasiva Sivachariar.

Every year, ‘thevasam’ prayers should be done according to thithi’, to ensure continued prosperity for the descendents, he said.