

श्री सनातन धर्म सभा – दक्षिण आफ्रिका

Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of South Africa

Established 1941



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Dakshina or Dāna¹

Introduction

The Hindu community often approaches the Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of South Africa to advise on the amount of Dakshina (money) that should be paid for a Priest's services. While the Sabha is not keen to stipulate a specific amount to be paid, it has decided to provide some guidelines on Dakshina or dāna.

What is Dakshina

The financial remuneration given to priests for Pooja that they perform is called Dakshina. Hindus sometimes question the need to pay the priest, citing that they should be offering a spiritual service to the community. Hindus also consider the giving of money to be demeaning of the sacredness of the Pooja. However, cognisance must be taken that churches, synagogues, and mosques (besides Hindu organisations) employ clergy. Many of these organisations have employment contracts with free housing or subsidised rentals, superannuation, medical insurance, and many other privileges for an employee.

Temple and domestic priests

As far as Hinduism is concerned, there are temple priests referred to as *archakas* and domestic priests referred to as *purohīts*. The priest employed by a Hindu temple is

¹Adapted from Australian Council of Hindu Clergy

<http://www.australiancouncilofhinduclergy.com/dakshina-mdash-honorarium.html>

normally paid a salary with amenities such as housing, electricity, and water. The domestic priest is completely independent and may have no organisational support. Most are householders with dependents to support. Unless they work part-time as priests and have a day job, they have no independent source of income. To survive, the priests rely on the generosity of the public. Everyone living in South Africa is subjected to the same cost of living: rent, mortgages, insurance, travel costs, bills, and schooling for their kids. All priests must pay taxes and make their own superannuation arrangements. Priests need to be self-sufficient in their old age. How are the clergy supposed to survive and continue to serve the sacramental and ceremonial needs of the Hindu community if they are not supported generously by their client families?

Importance of Dakshina

It has been argued that Dakshina is an integral part of all Hindu ceremonies. The Śatapatha Brahmana states that one who hosts a yajña without giving Dakshina to the priests obtains sinful reactions. It states further that no oblation or homa should be offered without Dakshina. The Bhagavad Gita states that any yajña (sacrifice) performed without the direction of scriptural injunctions, without distribution of food, without Vedic hymns, without Dakshina to the priests and faith must be in the mode of ignorance (*tamas*). The Hindu priest is the upholder and teacher of Dharma. They depend upon householders for their livelihood. When householders give generously according to their financial means, they express their heartfelt love of the Dharma and appreciate the work of the priests and gurus.

Method of Giving

Dakshina is offered with fruit, betel leaf, nuts, and a flower. It is placed on a tray one has prepared beforehand. The householder stands with his wife and family, holding the tray with both hands, and humbly requests the priest to accept it. The priest

recites some verses, receives the tray with one hand, and then pronounces the blessing.

Rules of Dakshina

Hindu scriptures abound with rules regarding Dakshina. We share here a few of these rules from different Hindu scriptures.

The Śatapatha Brahmana cautions against any haggling for the fee. In particular, it says priests who haggle for fees are deprived of their place in heaven. The Śatapatha Brahmana states further that the success of a yajña depends on the Dakshina made to the priest. Priests are warned against giving the Dakshina away on the same day since the glory of the priest is the Dakshina. This Brahmana advises that Dakshina must be *yathā śaktyā*, i.e., the yajamāna should give as much as they can afford. The yajamāna, if they so wish, may give more, according to the depth of his conviction.

The Manu Smṛti states that no yajamāna should perform a yajña at which he gives Dakshina which are less than those prescribed in the śāstra. The Smṛiti alerts the reader to the destruction of the merits of a yajña, at which too little is given as Dakshina. However, while Dakshina is an integral part of the yajña, the Āpastambha Smṛti advises that the yajamāna should not choose a priest who is unlearned in the Veda nor one who haggles about his fee.

The importance of Dakshina is further illustrated in the Prakṛti Khaṇḍa of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, where it states that the one who does not give the Dakshina and the priest who does not request it; both fall into hell just as a bucket falls into the well when the rope breaks. When asked, the yajamāna who does not give the Dakshina becomes devoid of all sense and falls into the hellish realm called Kumbhipāka Naraka. The Pancarātra - Pādma Samhita states that Dakshina, however little it may be, should always be given to the priest during the

performance of yajña because any religious activity performed without sacrificial fees becomes fruitless and vain. Therefore, a yajamāna should give according to his means with faith and devotion because Dakshina is a segment of the yajña.

Recommended Dakshina

The giving of dāna throughout one's life and at the time of death is an important aspect of Dharma. The Garuda Purana states that Mahādāna consists of the following eight items: tila (sesame seeds), lohā (iron), suvarṇa (gold), pṛthvī (land), gaudāna (cow), cotton (clothing), salt, and saptadāna (7 types of grain viz. wheat, moong - green dhal, ooradh -black dhal, gram, barley, rice, and mustard). The Garuda Purana also states that:

तस्मादवश्यं दातव्यं तदा दानं विधानतः । अल्पं वा बहु वेतीमां गणनां नैव कारयेत् ॥ ११२ ॥

Dāna is of great value as it benefits the recipient and the giver. The value of dāna given in one's life accompanies one after death. ***It is important to give dāna to a worthy recipient who will use it to promote Dharma.*** Śrī Viṣṇu states that dāna must be in accordance with one's ability, and nobody should be forced to give dāna as the benefit of such dāna is reduced/nullified.

So, while the Mahādāna items are listed above, they must be understood in the context of Śrī Viṣṇu's advice highlighted above. For example, pṛthvī or land is one of the items listed. We cannot afford to donate land. However, if we know of a religious organisation purchasing land or building a temple, we can donate to them according to our means.

Unfortunately, in South Africa, some Priests and family members have instilled fear in us that if we do not donate clothes, gold, etc., something untoward will happen. We believe a person should do charity to worthy recipients according ***to one's means.*** The Bhagavad Gita wonderfully reminds us: ***If one offers Me with love and***

devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I will accept it (9:26). Whatever we give (either to the Lord or in charity to worthy recipients), we should do it with love and devotion.

The yajamāna are encouraged to display their generosity and give to their capacity. Some priests may also require mileage and tolls to be paid in addition to the Dakshina, depending on where you live. This should be discussed with your chosen purohit.

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