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Religious Funeral Ceremonies

Baha'i

Baha'i is a religion with Islamic roots. Baha'is believe that after death, the soul leaves the physical body and world behind for a spiritual one. This spiritual world does not necessarily contain a Heaven or a Hell. Instead, Heaven is being near God, while Hell is being farther away. In addition, the Baha'i religion does not have a particular set of guidelines regarding funeral services. The few practices that they do have are as follows: Baha'is may wear anything from casual attire to formal wear to a funeral. Flowers and contributions in the deceased's memory are also appropriate. However, non-Baha'is cannot contribute to a Baha'i fund. Concerning the deceased, they must be buried within a one-hour radius of the place of death. In addition, they are not to be embalmed or shown in an open casket.

Buddhist

According to the Buddhist faith, individuals pass through a series of reincarnations until they are liberated from worldly illusions and passions. Death is a way to reach the next reincarnation and move closer to nirvana, a state of absolute bliss. Buddhist funerals are often more like celebrations, where followers focus on the soul of the deceased as it makes its ascent from the physical body.

The Buddhist funeral services revolve around the concepts of sharing, good conduct and meditation. The first service is held within two days of a death at the home of the bereaved. A second service is held two to five days following the death, and is conducted by monks at the funeral home. The third and final service is held seven days after the burial or cremation and is meant to create positive energy for the deceased as he transcends to the next stage of reincarnation.

The viewing takes place the evening before the funeral. Guests are expected to view the body and offer a small bow in front of the casket to honor the impermanence of life. Guests should also offer their condolences to the family. The funeral ceremony includes chanting and individual offerings of incense. Guests are not expected to join either part of the ceremony, but should sit quietly and observe the rituals. While the family dresses in white, guests usually wear modest black clothing. Loose clothing is advised for ceremonies at temples where guests must sit on the floor to meditate. Flowers and donations can be sent to the funeral home, but food offerings are discouraged.

Christian Scientist

In 1879, Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Scientist religion in Boston, Mass. Christian Scientists believe that sin, death and disease do not come from God. Instead, they are created by man. They also believe that funeral services are optional.

If a funeral service is preferred, attendees are encouraged to wear formal clothing in muted colors. Services are typically held in private or in funeral homes as opposed to a church. Since Christian Scientists do not have clergy, a Christian Scientist teacher, practitioner, reader or friend conducts the ceremony. The ceremony does not include personal remarks or eulogies. However, it does include readings from one of Mrs. Eddy's books or from the King James Bible. Also, funerals are not typically open casket. In addition, food may be served afterward. However, alcohol is not permitted.

Episcopalian

Episcopalians find their religious roots in the Church of England. They believe in heaven and hell, with the final judgment being made by Christ. Their funeral services can take place alone or as part of a bigger ceremony, complete with Communion. An Episcopal priest conducts the ceremony, during which the casket is typically closed. During the ceremony, the priest reads from The Book of Common Prayer. Non-Episcopalians are encouraged to join in reciting the prayers if they agree with their faith. In addition, only baptized Christians are permitted to take Communion.

Greek Orthodox



The Greek Orthodox Church has many traditions—many of them surrounding funeral services. Members of the Greek Orthodox religion believe that at the moment of death, the deceased receive a partial judgment—they get a preview of heaven and hell. On the final judgment day, the deceased are sent to either heaven or hell.

At the deceased's funeral services, mourners are expected to wear navy blue or black, formal clothing. If mourners choose to visit the grieving family before the service, tradition requires that they say, "May you have an abundant life," or "May their memory be eternal." In addition, making contributions to a pre-determined charity or fund is appropriate. During the actual services, mourners must stand at the appropriate times and pay respects to the family. Funerals are also typically open casket. As a result, both members and non-members of the Greek Orthodox faith are expected to bow in front of the casket and kiss the object (cross or otherwise) resting on the deceased's chest. Later, at the internment, each mourner places a flower on the casket. Afterward, family and friends may head to a restaurant, church hall or private home for what is customarily called a "mercy meal."

Other traditions include that widows wear black clothing for up to two years after the death of their spouse and that a memorial service for the deceased be held on the Sunday closest to the 40-day mark after death. Annual memorial services may follow on the anniversary of the death.

Hindu

Hindus believe that upon death, an individual's soul enters another reincarnation. The reincarnation depends on the individual's karma, which is determined by his actions in his present life as well as his past lives. Once an individual realizes the true nature of reality, the soul will become one with Brahman, the One, All-Encompassing soul. The funeral ceremony serves as a purification process to cleanse the soul for a possible union with Brahman.

After a Hindu's death, the family prepares the body for the funeral and wraps it in a shroud. The body is then presented at the family's home for a viewing. Women place flowers at the feet of the body, and everyone joins in chanting to Yama, the god of death.

Following the viewing, the men carry the body to the crematorium. Hindus cremate the dead because the burning of the body symbolizes the release of the spirit. Prayers are said at the entrance of the crematorium. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or male in the family, offers prayers of goodbye from the entire family. Sometimes, the men will shave their heads as a sign of respect for the deceased. Guests are expected to leave as soon as the cremation begins. The ashes, according to traditional Hindu belief, must be washed or placed into a river for final cleansing.

Family and guests come together for a meal and prayers following the cremation. The mourning period lasts for 13 days when friends may visit the family to offer comfort. Visitors are expected to bring fruit.

Hmong

The Hmong view death as a natural part of the life cycle. All Hmong are given a mandate upon birth that determines the length of their life. When their mandate is up, the soul must leave its body to reside with its ancestors. When a Hmong dies, the entire family comes to the home to pay their respects. Traditionally, the Hmong prefer to die in their own home and hold the funeral there among family and friends. Due to restrictions in the West, the Hmong must store the body and hold the service in a funeral home.

A typical Hmong funeral lasts three days. The funeral is the most important part of Hmong culture and must be done properly to ensure a prosperous afterlife for the deceased. Family members prepare the body for burial and adorn it with objects to protect its soul from evil spirits as it journeys to the other world. They provide the soul with food, wine, clothing and money. The Hmong will also sacrifice a rooster to accompany the soul on its journey. Musicians play a pipe and set of drums to guide the soul in the direction of its ancestors.

The Hmong will perform a ceremony a year following the death to invite the soul back for a final feast. An animal is traditionally sacrificed at this service to ensure that the soul makes its final ascent to its ancestors.

Islam

Supporters of the Islamic faith, called Muslims, believe in an afterlife. Once an individual's soul is freed from his physical body, he awaits the final Day of Reckoning when he must account for his actions. The Qur'an explains both the rewards of heaven and the punishments of hell. Burials are preformed as quickly as possible after the death in order to free the soul from the body.

A Muslim funeral has two purposes: to provide a decent burial for the deceased and to comfort the family. Friends should listen to the family's grief and encourage them to accept God's will so they can return to a normal routine. Funerals are simple yet respectful. Women should cover their heads and arms and sit separately from the men.

Following the service, mourners are expected to walk with the casket to the plot. Everyone should remain silent during the procession. The body is buried without a casket, and turned so that the head points toward Mecca, the

Muslim direction of prayer.

Friends may bring baked goods, fruits or simple meals that need only to be heated. Do not bring flowers.

Jehovah's Witness

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that in death, the deceased are unconscious—sleeping in their graves while waiting for the final resurrection, and that exactly 144,000 of them [the Jehovah's Witnesses] receive eternal life immediately upon their death. In heaven, they will help Jesus Christ in establishing the Kingdom that will bring better conditions on Earth at the time of the final resurrection - Armageddon. The world's remaining Jehovah's Witnesses will continue to live forever on Earth in a new, "earthly paradise."

At a Jehovah's Witness' funeral, mourners are expected to wear simple clothing in muted colors. The funeral services last between 15 and 30 minutes and are typically held at a Kingdom Hall – the place of worship for their faith – or a funeral home. A congregation's elder runs the services. Following the hall or funeral home services are graveside services.

Judaism

Judaism, like many other religions, is made up of different sects. The four major sects of one of the world's oldest religions include (in order of liberal to more conservative): reform, reconstructionist, conservative and orthodox. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews believe that there is no bodily resurrection or physical life after death. Conservative Jews believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead. In the physical sense, there will be a resurrection at the coming of the Messiah. Spiritually, the deceased will live on through the memories of the living. Orthodox Jews also believe that there is a type of physical and spiritual life after death at the coming of the Messiah. The resulting lives are lived in heaven and hell-like places. Nevertheless, these sects follow to a degree many of the same customs concerning funeral services and traditions.

Funeral services take place the day after death. Attendees are expected to wear formal attire in subdued colors. Also, non-Jews are not permitted to wear symbols of other faiths (i.e. a crucifix, etc.). Specifically, men must wear head coverings—either a yarmulke or a kippah. At some conservative services, women must also wear head coverings, while at orthodox services, women are expected to cover their arms and legs to the knee in addition to their heads. Mourners should not send flowers. Food, however, is permitted. Although, if attendees send food, it should be kosher—or food blessed by a rabbi. Rabbis conduct the funeral services. They can be either men or women, except in the Orthodox sect (men only). Funerals are also typically closed casket. Cremation is not permitted (except among some Reform Jews). Additionally, mourners are not permitted to enter during the recessional, processional or reading of eulogies during the services. Funeral services usually last between 15 and 60 minutes. Following the services is internment, where no acquaintances are to be present. At the time of internment, the casket is carried in a slow procession to the grave with seven pauses along the way. After prayers, each person places a shovel-full of dirt on the casket. The immediate family then recites the Kaddish—a prayer about God and His relationship with the mourners. Others in attendance recite only the limited responses. As the immediate family leaves, they walk between two rows—made up of the rest of the funeral procession.

Immediately following internment, the family sits in mourning. This 7-day period is known as a shiva. During the shiva, visitors are expected to stay for a 30-minute visit to eat and express condolences. Visitors must wait for members of the immediate family to eat their meal first, but they [visitors] do not have to say prayers before eating. Visitors must also wait to be addressed by the immediate family before paying their respects. In addition, there are services during shiva—one each in the morning and evening—for 10 to 20 minutes. Non-Jews can silently read English from the prayerbook and stand when necessary.

Also during this time, members of the immediate family sit on small chairs or boxes, wearing a cut black ribbon and slippers or socks to show grief. Additionally, a 7-day shiva candle is immediately lit (following the internment), mirrors are covered, and "luxurious" bathing is prohibited (i.e. no shaving or cutting hair). Conducting business is also prohibited. In this way, family members avoid vanity and express the extent of their grief. Overall, mourners miss work for about a week—social functions with dancing and music, from one month to a year. Family members can mourn (i.e. wear black, attend services, etc.) for up to 11 months after the death of a parent or child with 30 days for other relatives such as an aunt or uncle. During this time (which includes shiva), the Kaddish is recited every day. On the anniversary of the death (yahrzeit), mourners may attend services and light a yahrzeit candle that burns for 24 hours. In addition, there may be an "unveiling" of the tombstone—a simple ceremony that takes place one year later. This ceremony is invitation-only.

Mormon/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints accepts death as an essential part of the plan of salvation. The followers, commonly known as Mormons, believe that everyone who lived or ever will live on earth is a spiritual child of God because they all lived with God before the existence of man. When an individual dies, the soul leaves the body for the spirit world, a place of learning and preparation. Upon the resurrection of Christ, the body and soul

are reunited for eternity.

Since Mormons believe they will be reunited with the deceased in the afterlife, funerals are a time for hope and anticipation. Guests should wear modest clothing and ensure that their hems are near the knees. The service includes sacred music, prayer and a eulogy that remind mourners of Jesus Christ's Atonement and Resurrection. Close family and friends attend a brief graveside service following the funeral.

The family usually hosts a gathering after the service so that all attendees can offer their condolences. Cards and flowers are appropriate gifts.

Pentecostal

When a Pentecostal dies, his body returns to the earth while his soul awaits final judgment. The destiny of the deceased depends on his adherence to the redemptive plan designed by God for sinners. Pentecostals who follow that plan will eventually join God and enjoy eternal life. Ultimately, the soul will reunite with the body during the Resurrection.

The funeral ceremony includes singing, scripture reading and prayer. The minister will offer a sermon and eulogy in honor of the deceased. Guests should wear dark clothing. Flowers may be sent to the funeral home or church where the funeral is held. Guests may also offer food to the family to help them during their grieving period.

Protestant/Christian

Many European leaders including Martin Luther and John Calvin founded Protestantism during the Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants originally differentiated themselves from other Christians by accepting the Bible as the only source of infallible truth. The present-day Protestant Sects include Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalian and Pentecostal.

Protestant funerals have a wide variation of customs and are generally tailored to the wishes of the deceased and his family. Services are meant to comfort the family and guests while also celebrating the life of the deceased. The minister often emphasizes the promise of life after death as a reassurance to the bereaved.

The funeral usually occurs within three days of the death. It is common for the family to host a visitation period prior to the funeral where guests can pay their respects to the deceased and give their condolences to the family.

Guests are not expected to stay for the duration of the viewing. The funeral service usually includes scripture readings from the Bible, hymns and a sermon. A close friend or family member will most likely offer a eulogy in appreciation for the deceased's life. While black clothing is no longer necessary for Protestant funerals, guests should dress in a respectable manner. Guests can send flowers cards or charitable donations to the funeral home or to the church where the funeral will take place.

The family often hosts a gathering following the funeral. The purpose of the gathering is to share memories of the deceased that help the family deal with their grief. Food can be sent or delivered in person to the family's home.

Roman Catholic

Catholic funerals are rich with tradition and sacrament, but vary according to individual, family and church. The religion expands many geographic regions, making personal heritage and tradition a large part of the Catholic ceremony. Irish, Russian and Italian are just a few of the cultures that influence the tone and structure of a Catholic funeral, and each heritage has a unique way of dealing with grief. Typically, the second day after a loved one passes away, friends and family will hold a visitation or "wake," usually held at a funeral home.

Immediately following the wake or on the third day, a Catholic funeral is held. The funeral service may stand alone, or be part of a bigger ceremony known as a mass. The mass is one of the foundations of the Catholic religion, having been conducted in the same manner with the same words and gestures for hundreds of years. Only recently has the mass been changed from Latin to the language of each local parish's members.

During mass, the priest reads from Scripture, leads prayers and administers Holy Communion. Non-Catholics are encouraged to stand during appropriate parts of the ceremony. However, kneeling, singing, or reading prayers aloud is optional. Non-Catholics must also refrain from taking Holy Communion during mass. A funeral reception may also be held after the services, where food and/or drink are often served, depending on the deceased's family's wishes. Additionally, a mass may be held on the annual anniversary of the death.

Scientology

Scientology began in 1954 in Los Angeles, under the leadership of L. Ron Hubbard. Scientology is based on eight "dynamics"—self, family and sex, groups, mankind, all life forms, the physical universe, spirituality, and infinity or the Supreme Being. The ultimate goal is for man to reach the greatest level of understanding or success in each of

these dynamics. Scientologists also believe that man is immortal and spiritual. Therefore, man lives several lives. Scientology gives its parishioners the "tools" to deal with these past lives and to be happy in their current lives.

As a result, Scientologists conduct memorial services, rather than funerals, after death. At these services, Scientology ministers reiterate that the deceased, as a spiritual being, has moved into a new life.

Seventh Day Adventists

Seventh Day Adventists believe the dead sleep until the Second Coming of Christ. On this day, the deceased and the living face a final judgment to determine their salvation. Those who remain loyal to God will enter the sanctuary of heaven to enjoy eternal life.

The funeral for a Seventh Day Adventist usually occurs within one week of his death. Friends are encouraged to call and offer condolences to the family before the funeral. Seventh Day Adventists provide comfort for the family by saying phrases such as, "I sense your grief and share it with you" or "We look for the coming resurrection." It is also customary for guests to offer a brief word of encouragement to the family before the funeral service. Women should wear respectable clothing that covers the arms and falls just below the knee. Guests should wear dark clothing and remove all jewelry.

It is appropriate to pay the family a visit several days following the funeral to assist with difficulties and to offer comforting words that may ease the grieving process. Guests may send flowers or food to the house. Do not make any charitable donations.

Shinto

When a Shinto follower dies, his spirit lives forever under the protection of ancestral spirits and Kami, or Shinto divinities. The Shinto perform daily rituals at shrines in their homes to bring the spirits of the dead back to earth. They offer food, drink and burn incense. These rituals ensure that the dead are always remembered.

While Shintoism is simple in nature, the ceremonies are very complex and do not allow for personalization. Each stage of a Shinto burial is performed according to ancient rituals. A burial contains over 20 procedures. The kich-fuda, koden and bunkotsu are three of the procedures. The kich-fuda is a time of serious mourning where close family and friends wear all black and carry stringed prayer beads. During the koden procedure, friends and family offer monetary gifts to the immediate family to help with funeral expenses. The bunkotsu stage is one of the final steps, where ashes are given to close family members to put in their home shrines.

Sikhism

According to Sikhism, individuals go through a constant cycle of birth and rebirth until their soul breaks free and meets with the supreme soul, God. Sikhs remain continuously aware of death, repeating prayers and performing righteous deeds so they may eventually break the cycle of birth and death. Since death is viewed as an act of the Almighty, Sikhs are expected to keep their emotions under control. Even the closest mourners should appear detached.

Upon the death of a Sikh, the family prepares the deceased with a yogurt bath and dressings that bear the five symbols of a Sikh. The five symbols are a kirpin, the Sikh knife representing compassion and one's duty to defend the truth, kara, a stainless steel bracelet, kachera, a special Sikh underwear, kanga, a small comb and kesh, or uncut hair. The family recites many prayers throughout the preparations to help the soul leave the body and become one with God.

Once the body is prepared, the family carries it to the crematorium followed by a procession of friends and family. Sikhs continue to recite many prayers. Since all of the prayers are recited in Gurmukhi, the original language of the Gurus, guests are not expected to join. Both men and women must wear headgear during all ceremonies. A scarf covering the head is adequate. There is no requirement for color of clothing.

The Sikh mourning period lasts between two to five weeks. The family may decide to hold a number of ceremonies during that time period. Flowers and cards are appropriate gifts. Foods are also appreciated but nothing with meat, fish, eggs or alcohol.

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