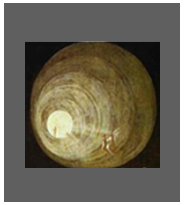


Ealing Agreed Syllabus: guidance for teachers

KS2.7: Beliefs regarding death, 1

Overall aim: to begin to explore various human ideas regarding death.

Introduction	*Pupils will*	understand that there are many beliefs concerning what happens at death; reflect on their own beliefs about/feeling responses to death.
Aim: to explore feeling responses and beliefs regarding death.	*SEN*	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	Suggested resources
Starter: On the IWB, show children a picture of the Monument to the Dead and/or other statues in Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. What do they think the sculptors were trying to say about death? Invite the children to share their ideas about death; some of these alternative frameworks might give a useful guidance in approaching this unit, which must be sensitively presented.	*Note:* there are seven possible lessons in this unit, but regardless of how many lessons you teach, you should start with this first, general lesson. Monument to the Dead, Pere Lachaise Cemetery http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pere-Lachaise_Aux_Mortes.jpg Mourners: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3063/2556747844_9b5cb5623a.jpg?v=0 Top 5 books about death for children: http://childrensbooksguide.com/death
Activity 1: Ask children to suggest a range of feelings and emotions. Do all people share the same feelings all the time?	
Activity 2: Introduce the subject of death and invite children to share how the word itself makes them feel. Ask if anyone has heard the expression "a good death". What might that mean? (E.g. when a person has been very sick and in pain and they die pain-free and at peace, or when a person has died after a long and fulfilled life, or when a person dies surrounded by their loved ones.)	
Activity 3: Invite them to share how we express sadness. Explain that in different belief systems and cultures there are different ways to do this. Explain that the period of sadness after death is called mourning, but that people can mourn other things as well, like the loss of a favourite toy, or having to move. Look at the picture of the Mourners statue, what does it convey? Knowing how to express sadness when someone dies can give us confidence and allay the fear of doing something 'wrong' or upsetting people who are already upset.	

Activity 4: Invite all the children to share the beliefs of their family regarding what happens at death, ensuring them that there is no one right answer to this.	*Journey's End*, Anita Ganeri, http://www.amazon.co.uk/Journeys-End-Death-Mourning-Times/dp/023752841X It might be useful to make word banks mounted on card to put on tables so that the children become used to seeing the new words as well as hearing them.
Activity 5: Explain that there is a range of beliefs about life after death, including the idea that this is the only life we have, and that no aspect of us survives death. There is also a variety of beliefs about the nature of any possible afterlife (e.g. it is a better place known as heaven or paradise) or that there might be another or a succession of lives on earth through reincarnation.	
Plenary: Children can jot down a few phrases and then organise some into a haiku or cinquain (see background information) that reflects what they feel or what they have learned. It might be appropriate for children to work in pairs.	

Buddhism: cycle of life and death	*Pupils will*	understand that Buddhists believe that birth and death are part of a cycle, and that the way you behave in life affects your future life; they think about how their actions have consequences that can affect the future.
Aim: to introduce pupils to the Buddhist beliefs concerning the cycle of life and death.	*SEN*	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	**Suggested resources**
Starter: Remind children of the meaning of reincarnation and explain that Buddhists believe they will continue to be reborn in another life until they reach enlightenment and enter nirvana. On the IWB show them a picture of the reclining Buddha. Explain that this sculpture and many like it show the Buddhist belief that at the moment he approached death the Buddha slipped peacefully into nirvana.	Note: you may have to review a few basics about the Buddha and Buddhism if this is the first time children in the class have been exposed to this religion. The story of the Buddha's passing is told in *Journey's End* (see above) The story of the experiences that shaped his teaching are in the book, 'Buddhist Stories,' by Anita Ganeri, Available on Amazon Reclining Buddha: http://farm1.static.flickr.com/10/17385417_888a7181f7.jpg There are some activities for exploring the Buddhist value of 'do no harm' on: http://www.cist.org.uk/pv/am/al1601.htm
Activity 1: Read the poem by Christina Rosetti, 'Hurt no living thing' (see background information). Explain that this poem summarises the teaching of the Buddha and discuss how this can be reflected in our lives (t,p,s is useful here).	
Activity 2: Explain that Buddhists believe if they are kind they will be happy in any future lives and if they are greedy and selfish they will be unhappy.	
Activity 3: Many Buddhists believe that when someone is dying it is important to read sacred texts to them. One of these is the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', which explains what the person might expect to see after death and before rebirth. Ask pupils if there are any books, stories or films that they like to read/watch when they are feeling particularly poorly. Why do these things make them feel better?	
Activity 4: Talk about some of the Buddhist funeral customs (see background information), explaining that they vary with cultural tradition but the body is usually cremated and often carried to the funeral pyre on a beautifully decorated platform.	
Plenary: Remind class that death is regarded as natural in Buddhism, but sadness is also natural. If the children are familiar with the story of 'The four sights' this reflects the natural context of death. The children can write a poem, or as a class—or in groups—they can list very specific ways to be kind in the coming week.	

Hinduism and death	***Pupils will***	understand that Hindus believe in reincarnation, and that a liberation from this endless cycle of deaths and rebirths can be obtained through spiritual practice; they will think about the causes and effects of their own actions.
Aim: to introduce the concepts of reincarnation and moksha.	***SEN***	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	**Suggested resources**
Starter: Show a picture or video of candles floating on the river Ganges, explaining that, every day during the *aarti* ceremony, Hindus commit these offerings to the river Ganges in memory of the departed. What does it feel like seeing this image? Explain that, like Buddhists, Hindus believe in reincarnation; also that the details of their new life (reincarnation as an animal or a high or low status human) will depend on their behaviour in the present life.	The story of how the River Ganges fell from heaven to earth is in the book, *Journey's End*  www.pharotours.com Explanations of key Hindu concepts suitable for ks2 can be found here: http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/religion/hinduism.htm
Activity 1: If they have done unit *Ks2.8: Initiations*, remind or ask class to describe a 'rite of passage.' Explain that Hindus believe that there are 16 special 'rites of passage' or *samskaras* that a person undergoes during their life, beginning with conception and ending with the death rituals.	
Activity 2: Explain the meaning of the words *moksha* (the liberation that occurs when the soul is reunited with the Ultimate, Brahman) and *karma* (the belief that all actions have an effect).	
Activity 3: Describe some Hindu death rituals (see background information) or show videos from YouTube or TrueTube. For example, the body is washed and covered with a white or orange cloth and placed on a funeral pyre of logs and sandalwood. Ghee might be poured on the burning pyre: the moment when the skull cracks is believed to be when the atman (soul) is released for rebirth. Ideally ashes are scattered on the River Ganges and Hindus living abroad make a special journey to India to do this for their relatives if they can.	
Plenary: Children could think about cause and effect, making short lists in groups and sharing these ideas. They could do this by reading out a 'cause', provoking children in another group to answer with the likely effect.	

Humanists and death	*Pupils will*	understand that most (but not all) atheists believe that humans have one life only, and that there is no evidence of life after death; consider what they feel is important to achieve in this life.
Aim: to explore what many non-religious people feel about death.	*SEN*	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	Suggested resources
Starter: Discuss the fact that we are lucky to live in a country where people are allowed to practice freedom of belief, and that people who do not believe in a god are known as atheists (*a-theos*, without god). Atheists who have an ethical philosophy based on the need to do good for all humans are known as humanists. Explain that most atheists do not believe in an immortal soul or an afterlife, but that there are some atheists who believe that life continues on after death in some form. On the IWB show the picture of the atheist tombstone, which suggests that, whatever this particular atheist believed or didn't believe they had a sense of humour.	Note: some atheists believe that some form of consciousness survives bodily death. Atheist tombstone, Thurmont, Maryland: http://farm1.static.flickr.com/180/415565083_0fee72006e.jpg Sugar paper for memorials; crayons or coloured pencils
Activity 1: Explain that humanists believe that, as we only have one life, it is important to live the best life possible and to help our fellow humans. If appropriate, invite children to share their feelings about these beliefs.	
Activity 2: Describe a humanist funeral or memorial ceremony, which celebrates the life of the person who has died. Like many religious funerals, tribute is paid to the person, to the life they lived and the connections they made, and compassion and sympathy is expressed to the people they have left behind.	
Activity 3: Share the saying of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, "Live not one's life as though one had a thousand years, but live each day as the last." Discuss the meaning, value and implications of this saying.	
Activity 4: Give pupils a piece of sugar paper and ask them to create a 'tribute' for someone who died (can be a relative, friend, pet or famous person). This could be a haiku or cinquain that encapsulates the most loved qualities of the person or animal being memorialised. Share these mementos.	
Plenary: The children can share ideas of important things they wish to accomplish during their lives, e.g. places they want to visit; people they would like to meet; work or creative projects they'd like to accomplish; adventures they would like to experience. They can write a poem about one of these.	

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Islam and death</td><td>Pupils will</td><td>learn that Muslims believe that being good in this life will be rewarded by a wonderful afterlife; consider their own idea about what might be paradise.</td></tr>
<tr><td>SEN</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Gifted</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Aim: to explore the Islamic concept of an afterlife in paradise.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Possible activities</td><td>Suggested resources</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Starter: On the IWB, show a picture of a Muslim prayer rug with a ‘Garden of Paradise’ motif. Explain to children that the word for ‘heaven’ in the Qur’an is al-Jannah, ‘the Garden’, and that the typical Islamic garden is divided into four quadrants by canals that are meant to represent the rivers in the garden of Eden. Tell pupils that the garden of paradise is a common motif for prayer rugs, tiles and decorative panels in mosques. Hand out individual (or large, if they are to work in groups) sheets of paper and tell class to draw/create an image of something that could be considered paradise, either after death or here on earth.</td><td rowspan="6">Journey’s End includes a brief account of Mohammed’s death

The typical Islamic garden is a representation of heaven on earth. It developed on the Persian plain, which was an arid desert. The environment was harsh, and a paradise garden was its opposite. The Islamic notion of paradise included water, shade, flowers and fruit trees such as dates and pomegranates. It was an enclosed garden, shutting out the harshness of the surrounding landscape.

Paper and pens or coloured paper for drawing/collages.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activity 1: Explain that there is no concept of reincarnation in Islam, Christianity or Judaism. Why do they think different religions have such different ideas about what happens at death?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activity 2: Explain that, although they don’t have a belief in reincarnation, many Muslims, Jews and Christians have a belief similar to karma. That is they believe that one’s actions have consequences and that the nature of a person’s afterlife is determined by their behaviour during life. In the case of Islam, many Muslims believe that every individual has an angel at each shoulder recording all our actions. One angel records good deeds, the other bad deeds. The balance between good and bad deeds determines whether a person ends up in paradise.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activity 3: Ideally the last words a Muslim hears/says on earth should be, ‘There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.’ Why would a Muslim want this to be the last thing they heard?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activity 4: While children are working on their paradise project explain some of the Muslim customs around death and dying (see background information).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Plenary: Children can write a poem using concepts from the lesson or can work in groups to list how they would like to be remembered and think specifically how they can work towards this.</td></tr>
</table>

Christianity: the resurrection	*Pupils will*	understand that Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and that this has implications as regards what believers think will happen to them after death.
Aim: to explore the Christian belief regarding life after death.	*SEN*	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	Suggested resources
Starter: On the IWB show children the "Ascent into the Empyrean" by Hieronymous Bosch. Ask them what they think the artist is trying to say about what happens after death. Ask if anyone has heard the expression "light at the end of the tunnel".	The story of Easter from a bible or children's story book describes the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.  Ascent into the Empyrean, Hieronymous Bosch http://99wallpapers.net/image/the-empyrean-spirits/the-ascent-into-the-empyrean
Activity 1: Remind children that Christians, like Muslims and Jews, do not believe in reincarnation, but that different types of Christians have different beliefs regarding whether you should be buried or cremated.	
Activity 2: If you have already studied Easter, remind pupils that Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that this is known as the resurrection. Explain that Christians believe that the resurrection of Jesus shows that there will also be a resurrection for his followers.	
Activity 3: Look at the role of a substitute in a soccer match. Explain that this can be used as a metaphor for Jesus' role in the life of a Christian. Explain that Christians believe that you have to be perfect to get into heaven, but no one except God is perfect. However they believe that during his life Christ was perfect on behalf of everyone and that he 'earned' eternal life for his followers through his sacrifice on the cross.	
Activity 4: Explain that a Christian funeral, which can be burial or cremation, is a time of sadness (for the loss of the person), joy (memories of that person) and hope (that they will see that person again in heaven). The bible verses John 11:5-6 are often read, there can be tributes and songs of praise to God (hymns) are sung. There might be an address that explains the basis for a Christian's hope. There is also usually a celebration of the dead person's life.	
Plenary: Invite children to ask questions and/or write a poem.	

Judaism: sitting shiva	*Pupils will*	learn that in Judaism the focus is on living a moral life, rather than preparing for an afterlife; participate in a discussion of ways/rituals for remembrance, either of individuals or events.
Aim: to explore Jewish responses to death	*SEN*	
	Gifted	

Possible activities	Suggested resources
Starter: On the IWB, play a video of a cantor chanting the kaddish prayer. Explain that the kaddish prayer is a prayer of mourning that is said every day. Show class some of the paintings in Max Miller's "Mourner's Kaddish" (see link right). Tell them that, although Max Miller wasn't particularly religious, when his father died he found that he was moved to visit many different synagogues to say kaddish. And that he made paintings about these experiences.	'The rabbi and his sons' is a short story in *Journey's End* that tells how Jews try to accept death as God's will. Max Miller's "Mourner's Kaddish" paintings http://www.maxmillerstudio.com/mourner/index.cfm "Jewish ritual, reality and response at the end of life", by Rabbi M A Popopvsky. A wonderfully detailed account of caring for dying Jewish patients and Jewish rituals surrounding death and mourning; pages 29-42 deal with traditional mourning practices, including a guide for non-Jews about how to pay a *shiva* call. (See extract on sitting shiva in the background information.)
Activity 1: Explain some of the beliefs that most Jews hold regarding death: ▪ The focus is on living a good life now rather than thinking about the afterlife. ▪ Most believe that everyone has only one life. ▪ If a Jew knows they are about to die they ask God to forgive them. They might say a prayer called the *shema* to show their devotion. ▪ Some Jews believe there will be a Day of Judgement but that the most important thing is to obey God's commandments during their lives. ▪ Like Muslims, Jews are buried as soon as possible after death. Orthodox Jews prefer burial as they believe it is wrong to destroy what God has made, however Reform or Liberal Jews can be cremated. ▪ They give money to charity rather than giving flowers. ▪ It is traditional to name babies after someone who has died.	
Activity 2: As a class, role-play sitting shiva. To prepare, you may show class a video of people sitting shiva (search on YouTube or TrueTube for examples). Split class into mourners and visitors. Discuss proper attire for both mourners and visitors, proper behaviour, why it is more appropriate to bring food than flowers (so that the mourners can concentrate on their grief). Have some mirrors available so that you can cover them up.	

Activity 3: Display or read out the following quote from the Talmud: "Do not try to comfort your fellow while the body of the deceased lies before him." Discuss this quote. Explain that Jews call mourners "lamenters", and that they believe that the raw intensity of feeling that follows a person's death is normal. That these feelings can be very complex (e.g. anger either at God or the dead person for leaving), but that they need to be expressed. For this reason outsiders may provide comfort through their presence, but that they should not actively console a grieving person or talk about this grief until after the funeral. (As a way of exploring this, ask the children how they feel when someone sees that they are sad and tries to talk them out of their sadness by insisting they "cheer up".)	
Plenary: Discuss this as a class in an open discussion. Focus on the fact that although belonging to a certain community might give you rules and rituals surrounding death, no-one can really tell you what you should or should not feel. And that it is important to understand that if, say, you feel anger at a person for dying—e.g. a parent or a sibling—that this is natural and doesn't mean that you didn't love that person.	

Key words	Mourning, resurrection, reincarnation, afterlife, samsara, nirvana, burial, cremation, moksha, karma, heaven, paradise, shiva, kaddish	
Points to note		
Expected outcomes		

Pupils are working at **emerging** levels if they:

- understand that some people believe in life after death.
- are able to describe the mourning rituals of one religion.
- know that many people believe that you have to be good in order to get into heaven.

Pupils are working at **expected** levels if they:

- understand that there are different beliefs about what happens at death, and are able to describe several.
- are able to describe mourning rituals from several traditions.
- understand that many people believe that our actions during life can affect what happens to us after death.

Pupils are **exceeding expectations** if they are able to do all of the above. In addition they:

- will be able to relate the various beliefs about what happens after death to specific religions or worldviews.
- are able to relate various mourning rituals to religious beliefs.
- are able to compare and contrast the idea of 'heaven' or 'paradise' with the idea of moksha, i.e. liberation from the cycle of life and death.

Background information

Monument to the Dead
Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris
wikipedia

Angel
Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris
flickr

Mourners
Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

Snowman *Chubby, cheerful* *Waiting, grinning, winking* *Icy weather keeps him smiling* *Frosty* *Friendship* *Understanding* *Talking, caring, sharing* *Taking and giving all at once* *Best pals* *Penny* *Round, Smooth* *Tossing, Flipping, Shining* *Make A Special Wish* *Lucky*	The term **cinquain** (pronounced SING-cane, the plural is 'cinquains') as applied by modern poets most correctly refers to a form invented by the American poet Adelaide Crapsey. The first examples of these were published in 1915 in The Complete Poems, roughly a year after her death. Her cinquain form was inspired by Japanese haiku and Tanka (a form of Waka). Crapsey's cinquains utilized an increasing syllable count in the first four lines, namely two in the first, four in the second, six in the third, and eight in the fourth, before returning to two syllables on the last line. In addition, though little emphasized by critics, each line in the majority of Crapsey cinquains has a fixed number of stressed syllables, as well, following the pattern one, two, three, four, one. The most common metrical foot in her twenty-eight published examples is the iamb, though this is not exclusive. Also, in contrast to the Eastern forms upon which she based them, Crapsey always titled her cinquains, effectively utilizing the title as a sixth line ***How to write cinquain poems:*** Line one: Decide on one word title (noun). Line two: Choose two words that describe your title (adjective). Line three: Choose three words that tell you something that the title can do (verb). Line four: Choose a four word phrase that describes a feeling about your title. Line five: Think of one word that refers back to your title (synonym).
Hurt no living thing: Ladybird, nor butterfly, Nor moth with dusty wing, Nor cricket chirping cheerily, Nor grasshopper so light of leap Nor dancing gnat, nor beetle fat, Nor harmless worms that creep. Christina Rosetti www.cist.org.uk	*All things are subject to decay, strive on with diligence*. (Last words of the Buddha) The idea that all things are transient is central to Buddhist teaching. Loss and impermanence are things to be accepted rather than causes of grief, and the passing of the Buddha himself—observed by Mahayana Buddhists on **Parinirvana Day**—is thus an occasion for celebration, as it marks the Buddha's release from the cycle of death and rebirth, which is the ultimate aim of Buddhism. After his enlightenment, the Buddha spent forty years teaching. He died in the village of Kusinara in India when he was eighty years old, having passed peacefully into nirvana. Buddhists mark the day by meditating or by visiting the temple or monastery. It is an opportunity to reflect on one's own future death, and to remember those who have recently passed away. Parinirvana means 'completed nirvana', and the Buddha's last days and final message to his followers are described in the Pali text called *Maha-parinibbana Sutta*, the "'Great Parinirvana Sutra', extracts of which are often read on this day.

Cambodian Buddhist funeral
flickr

The Buddha's cremation
at Kusinara
Mural painting, Thailand

www.buddhistelibrary.org

Buddhists believe that they live a succession of lives; *samsara* is the word used to describe the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth in various states (e.g. human, divine, animal, etc.) and in many different planes (e.g. happy, unhappy). Life in *samsara* continues until the believer attains an enlightened state of permanent, lasting happiness called *nirvana*: the ultimate goal of all Buddhist practice. Death is seen as a prelude to existence in another state. According to Buddha's teaching, no state lasts forever. The plane of rebirth is determined by a person's *kamma*, which is the sum total of wholesome and unwholesome actions performed in previous existences. In order to reach enlightenment the Buddha's teachings, called the Noble Eightfold Path, should be followed. Until this state is reached we continue circling on in *samsara*.

Buddhists place great importance on the state of mind at the moment of death. When death is imminent a monk is called to chant from religious texts, or relatives may introduce some religious objects to generate wholesome thoughts into the person's mind, because the last thought before death will condition the first thought of the next life.

One, two or three days after death, the body is either buried or cremated. At the funeral a monk leads the congregation in the traditional Buddhist manner, offering respect to the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (his teaching), and the *Sangha* (the community of enlightened beings). Following this, the congregation accepts the *Five Precepts*, which are guidelines for—and commitment to—the leading of a moral life. If a cremation takes place, it is traditional for a nephew of the deceased to press the button that draws the curtain on the coffin and consigns it to the furnace. Sometimes the ashes are kept in an urn, which may be stored in a monument built specifically for this purpose; alternatively they may be scattered.

Immediately after the death, friends and relatives observe a period of mourning. This is done symbolically by observing a certain amount of austerity and frugality in the house of the dead person. Mourners may, for example, wear plain white clothes, abstain from wearing jewellery, eat simple food and not indulge in entertainment.

Relatives and friends direct their efforts above all to assisting the deceased in his or her journey though *samsara*. By performing good actions such as unselfish generosity, they generate 'merit', which can be transferred to benefit the deceased. This is the primary way of showing one's gratitude and paying respect to the dead. This act may be repeated three months later and then annually thereafter. In addition to benefiting the deceased it also brings comfort to the bereaved.

Before the end of the first week after death, a member of the monastic community may be invited to the house to talk to the surviving members of the family. They will usually remind the bereaved that everything is impermanent, that nobody can live forever and death is inevitable. The Buddha, however, cautioned his followers that expressions of grief may be damaging to one's mental well-being, causing pain and suffering. He said that grief does not benefit the departed one, nor does this benefit the griever. (From *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)

Burning ghats,
Varanasi, India

webshots.com

Funeral procession
Kathmandu, Nepal

www.csuchico.edu

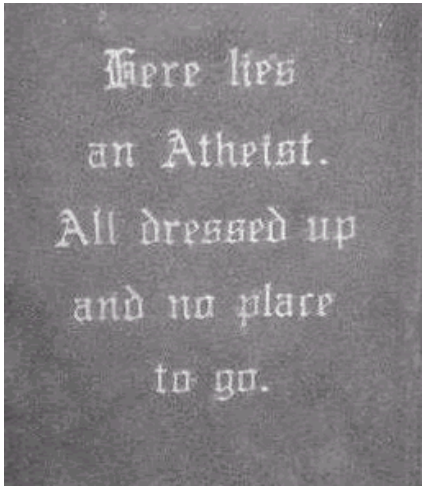
Hindus believe in the law of karma which states that each individual passes through a series of lives until, depending on the actions of previous existences, the state of *moksha*, or liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth, is attained. Consequently, death is not understood to be the end of a process, but is merely a stage in the long chain of transition. It is this continuity, extending beyond the limits of any single lifetime, which is enhanced and focused during the elaborate mortuary rituals performed by Hindus. The funeral ceremonies involve not only the immediate family members of the deceased, but also those of the extended kin network.

When death is imminent, the person is lifted from the bed to the floor so that the soul's free passage into the next life is not obstructed. Water from the holy River Ganges is given to the dying person and a *tulsi* (basil) leaf is placed in the deceased person's mouth. The *tulsi* leaf has a dual significance. Firstly, it is associated with Lord Vishnu, one of the three gods who are collectively known as the Hindu Trinity of gods; Vishnu is also known as the preserver of the universe. Secondly, the *tulsi* leaf is believed to have many medical properties.

After death, the body is washed and dressed, preferably in new clothes. Married women are clothed in a pink or red sari and adorned with jewellery. *Kumkum* red powder is placed in the parting of the hair and a red spot or *tilak* is applied on the forehead.

In India, the hot climate necessitates that the funeral is held as soon after death as possible, however in Britain the need to fulfil various legal and bureaucratic formalities may lead to a delay of a few days. Except for young children under one year of age who may be buried, the customary mode of disposal of a dead body amongst Hindus is by cremation. In the villages in India, the body is placed on a bier made of bamboo poles and carried on the shoulders of close male relatives to the burning grounds. In most cases, all the relatives in the village attend the cremation.

There are now electric crematoria in many cities in India, including one near the bank of the River Ganges in Varanasi. At cremation grounds, or *ghats*, the body is placed on a pyre of wood with the head pointing north in the direction of Mount Kailasha in the Himalayas. In the case of affluent families the wood of the pyre may be an expensive variety such as sandalwood. 'Ghee', or clarified butter, is poured on the pyre to help it burn, and the pyre is then set alight by a son, brother or brother's son (in this order of priority). Other mourners will then throw fruit, flowers, incense and fragrant spices into the fire. Mourners traditionally attend the entire cremation, i.e. until the body has been totally consumed by the fire. In the final stages of this long process, the chief mourner (i.e. the male relative who first lit the pyre) breaks the skull with a long pole in order to allow the soul to escape, a rite known as *kapol kriya*. On the fourth day (in certain parts of India this may take place on the third day) the ashes are collection by the chief mourner and the place of cremation cleared. The ashes are then traditionally immersed in a river, preferably the Ganges. Any items of jewellery that have not melted in the fire are collected and distributed among the mourners, along with a simple meal, usually a food called *kitcheree*, a mixture of boiled rice and lentils. (Extracted from *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)



Gravestone in Thurmont, Maryland
ionian-enchantment.blogspot.com

"I fall asleep in the full and certain hope That my slumber shall not be broken;
And that, though I be all-forgetting,
Yet shall I not be allforgotten,
But continue that life in the thoughts and deeds
Of those I have loved."
Samuel Butler 1835-1902

Humanists believe that we only have one life and that we should make the best of it. We should try to live happy and fulfilled lives and help others to do so and the best way to achieve this is by living responsibly, thinking rationally about right and wrong, considering the consequences of our actions and trying to do the right thing. Humanists are concerned to make the world a better place in which to live, not only for people alive today, but also for future generations—especially as the lives of their descendants represent the only sort of immortality in which humanists believe.

Humanists ask themselves the same questions as everyone else: Why am I here? What's the purpose of life? How did life begin? What will happen to me when I die? They look for evidence before they take on a belief, and so are more likely to believe the results of scientific research or what their own experiences tell them—or remain open-minded about questions—rather than to believe what someone else says. Humanists tend to think about these big questions for themselves. Some questions may not have answers, or we might not like the most probable answers.

Humanists experience the same feeling of loss and sadness at the death of a loved one as anyone else does. But they accept death as the natural and inevitable end to life. They do not usually believe in any kind of life after death, but believe that we live on in other people's memories of us, in the work we have done while we are alive, and in our children.

Humanist funeral ceremonies

There are no specific or obligatory rituals to be followed either by the bereaved or by those who wish to express their condolences. An expression of sympathy, an acknowledgement of the bereaved person's feeling of grief and the offer of a listening ear are more likely to be appreciated than any suggestion that the deceased has gone 'to a better place' (which may contradict what the family believe).

Humanists may choose to be cremated or buried and the ceremony can take place anywhere, though it is most commonly held at a crematorium where, if possible, any religious symbols will be removed or covered up.

At a humanist funeral there will be no suggestion that the deceased has gone on to another life: the ceremony is intended to celebrate the life that was lived. The humanist funeral officiate will have spent time with the bereaved relatives and together they will have planned a ceremony that properly honours the person's life and, hopefully, brings some comfort to everyone who attends as they are reminded of how their lives have been enriched through knowing the deceased. At the funeral the officiate will talk about the person's life and what they achieved and it is usual for family members or friends to read personal tributes. The ceremony may also involve suitable readings, poetry or music, and there may be a brief period of silence to allow people attending the ceremony time for their own private reflection or—if they have religious beliefs—for prayer. (Extracted from *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)

Muslim funeral procession
Kenya

www.chicagopublicradio.org

Muslim cemetery, Beijing
cache.daylife.com

The ***Islamic*** *concept of death* is quite simple, the idea being that "from God (Allah) we have emerged and to God we return." Consequently, the official mourning period tends to be relatively short, usually not more than three days. Widows mourn for a year in the Middle East and North Africa. The next of kin mourn for forty days, however this does not include the deceased's spouse or children.

When death is imminent, the person is asked to declare their faith by repeating the simple formula: "God is One and Muhammad is His Prophet". The Imam (the prayer leader at the mosque) is informed as soon as possible after death and prayers from the Qur'an are recited over the body.

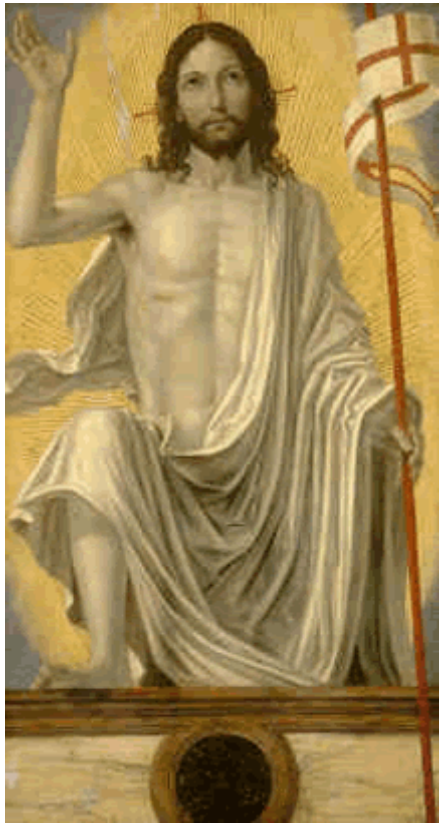
The body is then taken to the Funeral Director's premises where it is washed by family members of the same gender as the deceased. This ritual is usually performed in a room that has been purified and from which all statues and religious symbols have been removed; special arrangements can be made with the Funeral Director to ensure that these beliefs, fundamental to the Islamic faith, are respected. After the body has been washed, it is swathed in a simple white cotton sheet or shroud; all Muslims are dressed alike to symbolize their equality before God. The body is then place in an unlined coffin.

According to Islamic religious traditions, the prescribed mode of disposal of the body is burial. The burial of the body should take place before noon. If a person dies in the afternoon or during the night, they are buried the next morning before noon. If they die midday or thereabouts, then they are most likely to be buried the next morning, as burying after sunset is not customary. However, in Britain delays are inevitable, as there are various legal formalities that have to be completed before a certificate for disposal is given by the Registrar of Births and Deaths. Nevertheless, custom prescribes that the burial should take place with the minimum delay.

The usual practice is for the deceased to be taken to the mosque, where special prayers are recited, before proceeding to the graveyard. A brief prayer session is also held at the cemetery. The body is then buried in the grave with the head and right-hand side facing Makkah (i.e. south east in the UK).

On the first three days after the burial the official mourning takes place, where the Qur'an is recited throughout the day by a professional chanter or with the aid of audiotapes. On the 40th day, a remembrance ceremony is held in the mosque (for men) and at home (for women), where a meal is shared in the evening. Women come to visit the family of the deceased and to share in the remembrance day. The next of kin, especially the first next of kin, wear black for the first forty days. The wife and adult daughters of the deceased wear black for a year in the Middle East, except Saudi Arabia where they wear white for the first three to five days only.

In addition to the specific rituals described above, the dead are commemorated in various ways. On Thursday evenings, prayers are offered to the dead after the *magrib namaz*, the prayers recited at sunset. Similarly, after Eid at the mosque, the family visits the cemetery and offers prayers for the dead. It is customary for Muslims to visit families that have been bereaved to offer condolences in the course of the year. (Extracted from *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)



The Risen Christ
Ambrogio de Stefano Borgognone, 1510

www.bible-art.info

Christian beliefs and practices

Christians believe in one God who has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is described as the Holy Trinity. Central to Christian belief is Jesus of Nazareth in whom God assumed human form. The sacred text for Christians is the New Testament, which contains a code for living based on the life and teaching of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus—when he returned to life after being crucified—is integral to the belief in Jesus' claim and offer of a life after death in heaven. Depending on the aspect of the central mysteries stressed by a particular Christian tradition, death can produce feelings of fear, resignation or hope.

After death the body of the dead person may be moved to the undertaker's Chapel of Rest. The word 'chapel' does not necessarily indicate a place of worship, though in the case of believers the Funeral Director often arranges candles round the coffin and displays a cross in the room.

Some Roman Catholics or High Church Anglicans transfer the corpse to their church on the evening before the funeral; following the ritual reception of the body into the church, it remains there overnight. In some parts of the country, however, the coffin is brought to the house the evening before the funeral and transported from there to the church. The next morning a funeral service or requiem mass is celebrated during which the priest or minister wear black vestments.

The final ritual in Christian burial is the graveside committal where the minister leads the mourners in prayer as the body is lowered into the grave.

Instead of burial, some Christians may choose cremation. The ashes of the deceased may be scattered in a Garden of Remembrance or elsewhere. Alternatively, they may be placed in an urn and interred in a cemetery. Some families keep the ashes at home. If the ashes are to be scattered in the Garden of Remembrance, the family may choose the garden and the precise place of dispersal, and if they wish, they may return a few days later to witness the scattering of the ashes.

(Extracted from *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)

Sitting Shiva
David Schwab

www.chgs.umn.edu

Jewish graves
www.chicagopublicradio.org

Jewish funeral customs and beliefs about death

The Orthodox Jewish tradition prescribes that funerals should take place within twenty-four hours, unless death occurs after sunset on Friday—in which case the burial is postponed until Sunday as work is forbidden on the Sabbath. No professional undertakers are involved since all arrangements are made through the Synagogue. Progressive liberal Jews permit cremation. However according to the orthodox tradition, cremation is forbidden, as human beings are created in the image of God and it would therefore be wrong to deliberately destroy a body.

The body is dressed in a white shroud (*kittel*), which is then placed in a plain wooden coffin. Men are buried with a prayer shawl *(tallith*) with its tassels cut off. While the body is in the house, Jews believe that it should not be left unattended. Candles are placed at the head and the foot of the coffin and sons or other near relatives of the deceased maintain a constant vigil. If no relatives are present, professional mourners are called in.

The rabbi is sent for as soon as death occurs. He or she returns to the house of mourning an hour or so before the funeral is due to start to offer special prayers for the deceased. Close relatives of the dead person usually gather at the house of mourning, dressed in old clothes from which a piece is ritually cut as a mark of grief. Traditionally this torn garment is worn throughout the seven days of intensive mourning (*shiva*). After prayers offered by the rabbi at the house, the coffin is carried out and mourners usually follow on foot to the cemetery. If the cemetery is not within walking distance, transport is permitted, but many Orthodox Jews insist on covering at least part of the way on foot.

At the cemetery the dead body is taken to a special room. Mourners usually wait outside until the coffin is placed in the centre of the room. Then the men stand on the left and the women stand on the right of the coffin. There are no flowers or music at the funeral ceremony, ensuring that there is no distinction made between rich and poor. Prayers and psalms are recited and the rabbi makes a special mention of the virtues of the person who has died.

After the burial the special prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*, is recited for the first time by the male relatives. A special meal is provided of eggs, salt-herrings and bagels. Peas or lentils are also suitable foods to serve on this occasion as, according to Jewish tradition, roundness signifies life. In orthodox families, from sunrise to sunset during the seven days of intensive mourning, close relatives of the deceased must wear their torn garments and special slippers that are not made of leather. Prayers are said throughout the day. Neighbours and friends visit to offer condolences and help. The ritual prescribed for women ends with this seven-day period. Men however, are forbidden to cut their hair or shave for thirty days. The sons or other male mourners go to the Synagogue every day to say the *Kaddish* for eleven months. The gravestone is then erected, symbolising the end of the official period of mourning. Every year on the anniversary of the death, the family say the *Kaddish* and burn a candle for twenty-four hours. The grave is visited at least once a year, especially before the Jewish New Year, to ensure that cherished memories do not fade. (Extracted from *Funeral rites across different cultures*, EGfL)

Maybe the most well-known Jewish mourning practice is *shiva*—a seven-day period of focused mourning, prayer and consolation. The term derives from the Hebrew word for seven because it traditionally extends through the first seven days following burial. It also sounds like a form of the Hebrew verb "to sit" which calls to mind one of *shiva*'s most salient customs: mourners sit on low stools or overturned crates, symbolizing their sorrow and discomfort. In English, people often refer to mourners as "sitting *shiva*."

Shiva is traditionally observed in the home of the deceased or of the primary mourner, usually the spouse or an adult child of the deceased. However, in today's society, with families often spread apart, *shiva* may be observed simultaneously by different mourners in separate locations, or by the same mourners in more than one place over the course of the seven days.

Shiva begins as soon as the mourners return home from the burial, when they turn from honouring the deceased to expressing their own grief. Upon arriving home, traditional mourners may remove their leather shoes, which symbolize luxury, and refrain from wearing them throughout the seven days. They also light a large memorial candle—*ner daluk*—which burns throughout *shiva*, offering a concrete symbol of hope in a setting filled with emotional darkness. Customarily, the doors of a *shiva* house are not locked in order to encourage visitors. Mourners are not generally left alone during *shiva*, though all requests by the family for privacy and respite are to be respected. There is no right or wrong way for mourners to behave during *shiva*. Some may prefer to sit in silence with their pain; others may prefer to talk about their loss. It is common during *shiva* for mourners to cry, reminisce, leaf through photo albums and swap stories about the deceased. Often a mourner is able to express grief directly at times, but needs silence at others…

Shiva is not observed over the Sabbath—Friday sundown through Saturday sundown. Mourners are encouraged to leave their home and enter the synagogue to celebrate the Sabbath even in the midst of their grief. Some other Jewish holidays also interrupt *shiva*, delay its start or cause it to end early, depending on when the holiday falls in relation to the death. Though *shiva* technically extends for seven days, the day of the funeral is counted as one full day and *shiva* ends just after morning prayers on the last day. This means that, in most cases, mourners spend only about four full days actually "sitting *shiva*." In modern practice, some Jews shorten this period even further, most commonly tothree days.

The community is obligated to offer comfort and support. Jewish law forbids mourners from eating any food they have prepared for themselves on the day of the burial. This forces friends and others to come to the home in person, sustaining the mourners physically with gifts of food and emotionally with their presence. The religious obligation to visit a *shiva* house falls on the entire community; there is no expectation that a visitor had known the deceased well, or even at all. Mourners are known to experience profound comfort from condolences and support by community members who were virtual strangers to them. …

The first meal in a *shiva* house is called a *se'udat havra'ah*— meal of condolence. It usually begins with a blessing over the bread, a simple act of offering gratitude for what one has at a time when mourners are normally focused on what they have lost. The menu traditionally includes round foods such as lentils and eggs, symbolizing the cycle of life. Often, guests serve the mourners before partaking themselves. Jewish law prohibits mourners from attending work or school during *shiva*. It is a time to begin processing one's grief and acknowledging the loss—an immediate return to standard routines might falsely appear to diminish the death's impact on the mourner. Jewish law does, however, permit certain leniencies when the financial burden of lost work would cause the mourners significant hardship.

The mourner physically represents his or her incompleteness during this time by not focusing on outward appearance. To this end, many people observe the custom of covering all the mirrors in a *shiva* house as a rejection of vanity during this period. Traditional mourners may also refrain from most acts of personal grooming, such as shaving or applying makeup. Jewish law forbids most pleasurable and other non-essential activities during *shiva,* such as sex, games, shopping and even Torah study. … (Extracted from Jewish Ritual, Reality and Response at the End of Life, pp37-39)