RELIGION AND THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR
(RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND NATIONAL TRADITIONS:
FUNERAL RITES AND CUSTOMS IN THE USA)
(2 CE HOURS)

Learning objectives

- Be able to conduct each funeral service with dignity and respect, adapting funeral arrangements to serve the needs of each family as appropriate and according to their means, customs, and religious, cultural, and national traditions.
- Be able to recognize, understand and adapt to the needs of ethnic communities, as well as mainstream or numerically dominant groups.
- In dealing with the bereaved, be able to:
  - Understand and respect the values of the people you serve.
  - Provide interpreters, if necessary.
  - Reduce incidents of perceived discrimination, lack of empathy, or hostility due to ignorance of specific customs and traditions.
- Be accountable and able to serve the multicultural consumer base.

Demographic trends in the United States

Demographic trends in North America point to increasing diversity of religion, nation of origin, culture, and subculture. In the United States, the racial and ethnic composition of the country is changing – no longer a white majority and black minority, the early part of this century is seeing the development of three major subcultures: African American, Hispanic, and Asian American. Within each of these groups are subgroups defined by different languages, cultures, and religions.

Variation within groups

Funeral rites vary not only by religion and culture, but also by country of origin, family customs, financial resources and/or the personal preferences of the individual and families involved in the ritual. This course introduces customs and cultures characteristic of some of the world’s major religions and nationalities. Differences of opinion exist not only within specific groups of faith but also between the different branches of a religion. The information presented can only begin to introduce the many varieties that exist in each category.

While each ritual is unique, most funerals include the following components:

- A death announcement.
- Some preparation of the deceased.
- Disposition of the body.
- A service or ceremony.
- Memorialization.

Because so many variations exist, it is best to contact a local or regional representative of the religion or culture at an appropriate place of worship. Resources are suggested throughout the chapter.

African-American funerals

Definitive statements about African-American death and grieving are not easy to make, due to the great diversity within and among African American communities in the United States. In 1963, a book, The American Way of Death [Mitford; 1963], hypothesized that traditional black funeral customs were disappearing, becoming increasingly similar to those of the white majority. Yet, four decades later, African-American funerals continue to be an eclectic mixture of diverse religious and cultural elements.

While some African-American funerals are no different than Euro-American funerals, African-American funeral rites often combine a number of contemporary and traditional customs, with rituals, in some cases, that emphasize the individual’s ancestral roots in West Africa or the Caribbean. Customs of African origin may include a wake lasting a number of days, and ritualistic drumming, singing, and dancing. Other customs with an African source are throwing dirt into the grave and decorating graves with broken pottery, a West African observance seen in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Georgia. Americans of Caribbean descent may “hide” an object in the casket with the body. In cases of cremation, the individual may ask that the ashes be scattered in the ancestral homeland, or another cherished location.

African-American subcultures are also distinguished by geography or region (Northern or Southern; urban or rural), socioeconomic status, educational background, and religion (Southern Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostal, Protestants, etc.). The Nation of Islam is a distinct subculture that shares few rituals with mainstream African-American Christian culture. Muslim funerals require burial within 24 hours of the death, and consider embalming and cremation taboo. Funeral services are directed by men only, and are typically conducted at a mosque. The Imam, or religious leader in the Muslim ceremony, leads a recitation from the Quran, and viewing of remains is prohibited. The deceased is positioned in the casket to face East, toward Mecca, as are the grave and the chairs at the funeral site with services.

Even the “standard” Christian African-American funeral varies depending on the individual’s religious denomination. Perhaps the one constant in an African-American funeral is the great effort made to attend, considered a necessity for dear friends and relatives, and even a strict obligation for acquaintances of the deceased, regardless of the proximity of relationship with the deceased. Funerals in the United States may take place a week or more after the time of death to provide the relatives and friends of the deceased time to travel, if necessary, to attend the funeral.

Traditional African-American funerals are more common in the rural South, among the more evangelical religious groups (Church of God, Missionary Baptist, Pentecostal). Modern funerals are more prevalent in the urban North, and among members of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant congregations.

Common customs include:

- The evening before the funeral, the return of the corpse to the home.
- On the day of funeral, body and funeral party are driven to church.
- Exits and entrances of the church are lined by women, or “flower girls,” who usually dress in white.
- The corpse is brought into the church, through the passageway lined by flower girls, with the church bell tolling.
- The choir sings and the minister recites some words.
- A song is sung by the choir and audience.
- Scripture is read and/or a prayer is delivered by an assisting minister or prominent church member, including:
  - Reading of the obituary.
  - Acknowledgement of flowers and messages.
  - Testimonies by friends and neighbors delivered.
  - A eulogy is read by the pastor.
- The audience takes final view of the remains.
- Interment.
- Male volunteers typically fill the grave after final rites.
- The reception line may be arranged by age, from the oldest to the
The jazz funeral is another unique African-American custom that became a distinct cultural feature of New Orleans as far back as the early 1800s. The funeral itself is commonly held in a funeral home, rather than the family church. The body is displayed and is accompanied in the casket with favorite items belonging to the deceased. The ceremony is traditionally conducted by men.

In a traditional jazz funeral, the band meets at the church or funeral parlor where the dismissal services are being conducted. During the procession from the funeral location to the final resting place following the services, it is customary to play a dirge or “Negro spiritual” such as “Nearer My God to Thee,” very slowly and mournfully. The band may walk only a short distance, perhaps a couple of blocks, since burial sites are not always within walking distance of the church or funeral parlor. If the cemetery is close, the band will accompany the procession to it.

When the interment ceremony is completed, the band leads the procession from the graveside without playing. Once the band is a respectful distance from the burial site, the lead trumpeter plays a note, and the band strikes up a rousing, “When the Saints Go Marching In,” or a ragtime song such as “Didn’t He Ramble” on the return from the cemetery. The practice of having music during funeral processions was basic to the African-American subcultural identity. Musical traditions – expressions of grief in jazz, blues, spirituals, and gospel music – were woven into the grieving ceremony, as important a part of death as of life. The traditional jazz funeral expresses the West African philosophy that there is something not only to mourn, but also to celebrate, even in death.

Baha’i funerals

Baha’i is a religion of 6 million members worldwide, and more than 110,000 adherents in the United States. It is a belief with roots in the Islamic faith, but exists today as an independent religion. Baha’i believe in the essential unity of mankind, the equality of men and women, religious tolerance, the harmony of science and religion, and the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth. Baha’i followers believe that all people are members of one religion, with one God, who goes by different names, has taken many forms, and has sent messengers (Christ, Muhammad, Buddha, Moses, and Krishna), to different parts of the world. Baha’i believe that god is essentially unknowable, and that the soul is eternal, and lives on after the death of the body.

Baha’i have no specific funeral rites, but Baha’i are encouraged to leave wills specifying their preferred funeral arrangements, and many do. Followers of the faith may pray and/or meditate daily, and gather together every 19 days for spiritual and social fellowship and administrative functions. Each year, from March 2nd to the 20th, members of the Baha’i faith fast from sunrise to sunset. Children under 15, the elderly, and pregnant and nursing women do not fast.

If Baha’i followers choose to donate their body parts for research and organ donation purposes, the remains of the body should be buried. The Baha’i have no set guidelines regarding funeral customs and rituals except the following:

- Embalming and cremation are discouraged.
- The deceased should not be shown in an open casket.

The Baha’i require burial within a one-hour radius of the location of death. In practical terms, interment takes place very near the place the death occurred. There are no special requirements for tending to the body, except that it is to be washed in the traditional manner of the area, and wrapped in a cotton or silk shroud before burial. The body may be buried wearing a special Baha’i burial ring.

There are no clergy or religious authority figures in the Baha’i religion. The service is conducted by family and other Baha’i members. For assistance, the Baha’i Spiritual Assembly, an administrative body, can be contacted when a Baha’i member dies. Assembly members will work with the deceased’s family to arrange an appropriate Baha’i funeral. The funeral service usually takes place at a Baha’i chapel or at the graveside. The “Prayer for the Dead” is commonly recited at the funeral. Those who attend should dress as their culture dictates, or wear dark colors and no makeup. It is appropriate to send flowers or cards.

Buddhist funerals

Buddhism is a religion prevalent throughout much of Asia that numbers about 350 million members worldwide, with over 1 million adherents in the United States. Predominantly Buddhist countries (with more than 50 percent Buddhist population) are primarily in South and Southeast Asia: Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar (formerly, Burma) Sri Lanka, Tibet, Laos, and Vietnam. Buddhists are also reasonably prevalent in mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. In the United States, Buddhists numbered 0.8 percent in the year 2000. A rapidly expanding population, the number of Buddhists in the United States is growing nearly three times as fast as Christianity, equaling about 2.4 million 2004 and estimated to reach 3.2 million by 2025.
Buddhist traditions vary considerably by country; meaning Japanese Buddhist funeral practices may be very different from Thai Buddhist funeral practices, which differ from Vietnamese funeral practices, etc.

In addition, there are two major branches of Buddhism, Theravada and Mahayana, which vary in their interpretation and practice. Theravada Buddhism is more prevalent in Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Mahayana Buddhism is more prevalent in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Another tradition, Vajrayana, is more commonly found in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and parts of India.

**Mindfulness**

Buddhism accepts death as a natural and inevitable phenomenon; a point of transition from one life to the next, in an endless cycle of reincarnation. Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, lived in India in the sixth century BCE. His teachings, the basic tenets of Buddhism, emphasize the impermanence, illusory nature, and suffering of life, and introduce The Eightfold Path – right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration – a way to transcend worldly things, cease the cycle of rebirths, and attain enlightenment.

Mindfulness (sati), a state of uncritical reflection or nonjudgmental observation, is a central concept in Buddhist ideology, playing an essential role in Buddhist life and a critical role in death, as well. A clear, calm, compassionate state of mind is central to most Buddhist practice, and highly desirable when carrying out the responsibilities of a funeral. The frame of mind of the mourners is important, because actions and thoughts translate into karma, or merit, for the deceased individual.

A significant focus of Buddhist funerals is assisting the soul of the deceased to make its ascent from the physical body, by acquiring merit through the right state of mind. An agitated or unclear mind produces karma that leads to the deceased’s rebirth and the continuation of earthly suffering. Skillful words and actions emerge naturally from the right state of mind, assisting in the accumulation or merit, the pathway to enlightenment. Relatives may rely on monks, soothsayers, or ritual to help overcome negative factors related to death. Everything related to the funeral ceremony must be carried out properly, to avoid the creation of negative influences.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes an elaborate funeral rite, stressing the necessity of calming and focusing the mind before death. It includes instructions to both the dying person, the corpse, and the mourners, to initiate the deceased and guide him/her to a new form through the transition from death to rebirth. The mourning ceremony continues for 49 days, until rebirth is assured.

**After death**

Buddhists generally cremate the bodies of their dead, but burial is also practiced. Embalming is not common. If the deceased expressed a desire to donate organs, appropriate action should take place immediately after death, to ensure this wish is fulfilled. The body of the deceased is treated with great veneration and attention. There are no limitations on how long the body should lay in state before the funeral.

Lavish spending on the funeral is discouraged in favor of a simple, dignified ceremony. Instead, money should be donated to worthy causes or charities favored by the departed, a process that transfers merit to the deceased. The funeral is usually planned by family members, the surviving spouse and/or oldest children, brothers, and sisters. It is common for relatives to travel considerable distances to attend.

**Preparing the body**

Family members may choose to clean and dress the deceased’s body as an act of veneration. It should be dressed simply, in plain clothing, with no jewelry, symbolizing the illusory quality of worldly things and the inability to take anything to the next life. The deceased should be placed gently in a casket. Averting one’s eyes from the body or turning away, with one’s back to the deceased, is interpreted in some Buddhist cultures as a sign of disrespect.

Monks assist the body in making the transition to a new life by attending the funeral and reciting specific sutras, ritual prayers or doctrines. After death and before cremation, while the deceased is prepared for the funeral fire, the monks chant to encourage the deceased’s good energies to be released from the body. Family and friends provide the monks food and candles, creating goodwill that also assists the lingering spirit of the deceased to make the necessary transition. If monks are not present to conduct the service, friends and relatives of the deceased or members of a Buddhist organization may speak or perform the Buddhist rites. Music with chant appropriate to the occasion that contemplates the impermanence of life or the transfer of merit may play.

**National traditions in Buddhist funerals**

In practice, funeral and death anniversaries in Buddhist countries often reflect local customs, such as animistic beliefs or elements of ancestor worship that have little to do, theoretically, with Buddhist philosophy. In each location, funerals are a unique synthesis of local ideology, interpretation, and Buddhist practice. However, there are some traditional customs that remain constant across Buddhist funeral practice.

Traditional Buddhist rituals include chanting, incense burning and a memorial service. Because use of incense is common, be aware that adjacent rooms may have an odor non-Buddhist grievers find unusual or even unpleasant. Those who attend the funeral services first pay their condolences to the deceased and the family prior to the service, at the funeral home. Black or dark colors are not required, but guests should avoid the color red. If the funeral service takes place in the temple, guests are required to remove their footwear.

A family member initiates the funeral service by offering a eulogy, and perhaps, a short life history of the deceased. Chanting follows. Then, a family member will light sticks of incense and make a ritualistic offering. The family, usually in white, the traditional color at the funeral, sits at the front of the room and accepts condolences from those in attendance. When approaching the casket, guests may make a simple bow toward the casket. After the funeral service, interment takes place at a cemetery.

The family pays tribute to the deceased at a first-year anniversary and the third-year anniversary, which ends the official grieving period. The first memorial gathering takes place within seven days of the funeral, when friends and family gather at the temple or a family member’s home to commemorate the deceased. It is traditional to bring gifts of food to the mourners; in some cases, vegetarian food may be preferred. Guests may make donations to charity in the name of the deceased.

**Southeast Asian Buddhist funerals**

Services may be held in a funeral home hall or other peaceful location. Flowers from friends and relatives are often displayed. An altar is usually set up in front of the casket, with a photograph or portrait of the deceased on a stand or table near the casket. An image
of the Buddha is typically displayed somewhere near the altar. As is customary at a temple, incense is burned and offerings such as flowers, candles, and fruit are placed on the altar.

Traditional elements of a Buddhist funeral are the wearing of white, particularly by a spouse or child of the deceased. In some Buddhist ceremonies, the family dresses in white, the traditional color of death in some cultures, and guests may wear black, white, or plain clothing. When paying last respects, guests may stand or bow in front of the altar, clasp hands, observe a moment of silence, or burn incense, and offer condolences to the family. Depending on the culture, it may be appropriate to remove one’s head covering when the Dhamma is recited, or during delivery of a sermon. Guests may join in chanting sutras if they are able to. If not, they should be silent.

The mourning period lasts 49 days, of which the first seven are considered most significant. Lay people and monks chant specific sutras each of the weeks. The first service should be held within two days of the death, at the home of the bereaved. The second service is held two to five days after the death, and is conducted by monks at the funeral home. The third and final service, conducted seven days after the burial or cremation, is focused on encouraging the soul to the next reincarnation.

At the time of cremation or burial, relatives and friends may follow the casket. Chanting continues throughout this time. It is customary for close family members to view the cremation and preserve remains in an urn or other container. If the body is buried, close family members remain at the cemetery until the casket is covered with earth.

**Chinese Buddhist funerals**
The first seven days of the 49-day mourning period are the most important. Family members and monks say prayers every seven days, for the full 49 days, if possible. After 100 days, a final prayer ceremony is conducted, but this custom is optional, and of less significance than the initial ceremonies. Historically, Buddhists have cremated their deceased; however, burial is becoming more and more common among Chinese Buddhists.

The number of ceremonies is dependent on the financial situation of the family. Daughters typically bear the financial responsibility of the funeral. If she is of modest means, the period of mourning may be shortened to a period of three to seven days. The head of the family should attend at least the first and second prayer ceremonies, and be present for the burial or cremation. Most Chinese Buddhists follow the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, believing that there is an intermediate period (called Antarabhabha in Sanskrit, or Bardo in Tibetan) between death and rebirth. During this critical time, family members can exert an influence on the form the beloved will take in rebirth. All funeral participants ensure that specific prayer and remembrance procedures are appropriately performed by family members, friends, and monks, to assist the departed in making a favorable rebirth.

**Vietnamese Buddhist funerals**
In Vietnam, the dead are draped in inexpensive white gauze, with turbans wrapped around the head, a straw crown, and a sash on top of that. The body is enclosed in the coffin along with reeds, paper, and other objects meant to keep the body in place during decomposition. Embalming is not a common practice.

Family members wear white clothes, armbands and headbands, in the Asian tradition. The service may include friends and members of the community saluting the closed casket, recalling incidents in the deceased’s life, sharing reminiscences, and making brief statements. Some mention may be made regarding the deceased’s good frame of mind before and at death. The family gathers before the altar dedicated to the deceased, to make offerings of food for the deceased’s soul; usually, three bowls of rice, three cups of tea, and a variety of other Vietnamese dishes. This ceremony is repeated three times a day during the entire mourning period.

Mourners use bamboo walking sticks, to express their grief and need for support, in walking to the graveside. After the procession, the oldest son, monk, or funeral attendants throw a handful of dirt into the grave, and pay their respects to the other family members. Relatives leave the grave, but wait nearby, going home once the grave is completely covered.

Laypeople chant throughout the period at the funeral home, at each of the ceremonies leading up to the final service, supporting the deceased through the transition of death from one form of life to another. Monks commonly provide additional assistance in funeral and anniversary observances, but are not essential, as this duty can be carried out by friends and relatives. A public funeral ceremony is typically held 49 days after the death.

In cases of cremation, the closed casket is taken to the crematorium with family and friends in procession. Family members lead the way, entering the crematorium with the casket. Later, family members will observe 49th and 100th day anniversaries, with family members returning from out of town to the community, where they gather at the temple. Candles and incense are continuously lit for 100 days at the altar, dedicated to the deceased.

Ceremonies are held for the deceased after 100 days; on the anniversary of the death; Tet, the lunar New Year, and the 1st and 15th of each lunar month. Families hold dinners on the 49th and 100 days after death, and on the first anniversary. Additionally, they may also have dinner every following year on the anniversary of the death.

In cases of burial, there is an additional ceremony three years later, when the body is exhumed and the bones are cleaned, reordered, and reburied in a small coffin made of clay. This ceremony is attended by only the closest friends and relatives. The dead are also remembered on Buddhist All Souls’ day, in August, when it is customary to perform special services at the temple.

**Christian funerals**
Most countries have a single numerically dominant religion. The vast majority of North Americans – nearly 262 million members in the U.S. population-define themselves as “Christians.” Christians can be sub-categorized as Catholics, Protestants, or a third identity, called Orthodox or Eastern Christian. Of the 76.5 percent of Americans in 2001 who identified themselves as Christian, the two largest groups were Protestant (52 percent) and Roman Catholic (25.4 percent).

Christianity is not only divided into these branches, but also into religious bodies or denominations, and, within those categories, into specific congregations or church attended. Different denominations within Christianity reflect divisions based on ideology. All denominations shared a common history until an ideological division, or even a geographical separation, created a schism between two interpretations of belief. All church denominations (the Catholic Church, or United Methodist Church, for example) were once unified. Eventually, different interpretations of doctrine demanded different spiritual or behavioral requirements of a follower or followers.
Common Christian funeral customs
In Christian practice, the deceased is typically taken to a funeral home and prepared for family viewing. At the funeral home, guests approach the casket, and pray silently for a few moments. When finished paying respect to the deceased, guests greet members of the deceased’s family and offer condolences.

The burial traditionally takes place at a cemetery or mausoleum. Family and friends gather together, and a clergymember recites the appropriate prayers. While it was once common to stay until the casket was lowered into the ground, today, the casket is usually lowered after everyone has left the cemetery. If the deceased has been cremated, the remains are placed in an urn, and may be kept by the family or scattered at a designated destination.

A gathering or wake usually takes place immediately after the interment or is announced at a later date. This gathering is an opportunity for the family to offer thanks to those who have helped during their time of sadness and to also memorialize and celebrate the life of the deceased. Food and drinks are commonly served at these gatherings.

Traditionally, one was expected to wear black when visiting the funeral home or attending the funeral. Today, dark colors and conservative attire are generally considered to be appropriate. To offer gestures of sympathy, it is proper to send the bereaved family a card or letter of condolence, flowers to the family’s home or to the funeral home, or make a charitable donation on behalf of the deceased.

Because funeral services may vary depending upon the denomination, church, and final wishes of the deceased or the deceased’s family, it is best to ask about specific arrangements. A funeral mass or service may take place in a church or funeral home chapel. Specific details regarding the funeral service are generally posted in the local newspaper.

Protestant funerals
Martin Luther and John Calvin founded the Protestant Reformation, in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, in the early 1500s to the mid 1600s. Since the Protestant movement’s formation, the religion has divided into over 1,000 denominations, each based on a different interpretation of Jesus’ teaching. Contemporary Protestant traditions include those of Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Pentecostal Christians, and many other distinct beliefs and practices.

The multitude of denominations within Protestantism all revolve around the Christian theme of life after death, with each interpretation stressing different dimensions of the religion. In Lutheran funeral practices, for example, there is usually a last viewing before the beginning of the funeral service takes place, after which the funeral coffin is closed, and there is usually a burial service for the dead. The service may take place in a church, but can also be held in a private home, funeral home or crematory. Mourners may also be invited to pray at the burial site, and those nearer to the grave may throw handfuls of earth onto the coffin as it descends into the earth.

Presbyterianism funerals take place two to four days after the death, with most services held in the church sanctuary, and no form of interment is specifically encouraged or discouraged. Worshippers are urged to provide the “ministry of presence” to those who have experienced a loss, by calling, writing, or visiting the bereaved. In Protestant practice, a brief prayer is said for the deceased at the church on the Sunday following the death. The funeral may take many different forms and may include speeches and readings by relatives and close friends.

Protestant funeral services most commonly take place at a funeral home, usually within three days of the death. A minister will usually conduct the service, although, increasingly, there is greater participation from family and friends in the actual service. Visitors are not expected to participate, although some services include a time for spontaneous testimonials about the life of the deceased. Protestant ceremonies usually include scripture lessons that relate to death and the Christian concept of resurrection. The service may also include prayers, a sermon, and a group reading or singing of hymns.

Sending flowers, cards and charitable donations in the name of the deceased are appropriate displays of sympathy to the family. In some cases, the family may request that those attending the service provide a donation to a charity in the name of the deceased. In general, Protestant funerals are preceded by a visitation period with the casket open or closed, depending on the family’s wishes. The casket is typically closed during the actual funeral service.

Protestant funerals are varied in their customs, and individual churches or families may diverge considerably from the norm. The service is typically tailored to the wishes of the deceased and his/her family. Notification of clergy members should be carried out as soon as practical. There are no restrictions placed on removal of the body. Embalming is commonly allowed, and there are few restrictions in dressing the deceased. His or her own clothing, or clothing purchased from a funeral home, may be used. Similarly, no particular restrictions or requirements are placed on the type of casket used. Both the clothing and casket are left to the discretion of the family.

Protestant funeral services generally begin with calling hours or visitation prior to the funeral, which can be the evening before, or the morning of, the service. Guests are able, during this time, to pay their respects to the deceased and give condolences to the family. While black clothing is no longer necessary for Protestant funerals, guests should dress in a modest or subdued manner. It is common to send flowers, cards, or charitable donations to the funeral home or the church where the funeral takes place.

At the funeral itself communion may be offered to the family the morning of the service. Families make the ceremony meaningful by selecting music, hymns, and scripture readings of significance to the deceased. Following the ceremony, a brief prayer service is held at the cemetery before interment. 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 discussing important points of the deceased’s life.
The order of the service and processions are left to the family and/or clergy's discretion, but generally approximate the following orders:

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<tr>
<th>Funeral</th>
<th>Funeral cortege order</th>
<th>Committal service</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scripture reading</td>
<td>Escort and/or lead car</td>
<td>Procession to the grave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>Seating of the family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical selection</td>
<td>Honorary casketbearers</td>
<td>Placement of casketbearers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eulogy(s)</td>
<td>Active casketbearers</td>
<td>Use of sand or flower petals by the clergy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Casket coach</td>
<td>Benediction</td>
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<td>Musical selection</td>
<td>Hearse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benediction</td>
<td>Family of deceased</td>
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<td>Recessional</td>
<td>Friends</td>
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The family often hosts a gathering following the funeral, to share memories of the deceased and help the family deal with their grief. Food may be sent, or delivered in person, to the family's home.

The Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church is also referred to as the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Church, the Christian Church of the East, the Orthodox Catholic Church, and the Graeco-Russian Church, and may also be called Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, or Romanian Orthodox. While these names highlight national or cultural distinctions, all are names for the same church, practicing the same faith and rituals.

The Orthodox Church allows autopsies to determine the cause of death, or for purposes of medical science, and there is no prohibition or objection to organ donation. However, the Orthodox Church typically requires burial of the dead, viewing cremation as an act of desecration. Church burial is denied for cremated remains, some suicides, and stillborn or unbaptized children, although a Trisagion Prayer may be read at the graveside (see below).

According to the Holy Canons of the church, a Christian body must be returned to the earth. Cremation is specifically forbidden, as the body should be placed in a casket and set in a grave. Some lay organizations hold specific funeral rites during the evening wake, before the priest arrives, to conduct Trisagion prayers, or at the graveside after the committal. While there are variations from one parish to another, the following liturgical rites for the burial and the remembrance of the dead are fairly standard in most Orthodox communities:

- Office of the Burial of the Dead. This rite is usually performed in the church temple, with the coffin at the middle of the temple, but can also be performed at either a funeral home chapel or a cemetery chapel. The priest should be contacted as soon as the death occurs to be sure that the funeral details can be arranged in accordance with the traditions of the church.
- The services (Panichida, Lite, Parastas, or Trisagion) for the departed occur:
  - At the funeral home on the evening before the burial.
  - On days of special commemoration, including the ninth day, 40th day, yearly anniversaries, and memorial Saturdays.
  - The Lito (or Trisagion) for the departed can be celebrated at the conclusion of almost any service. The Panichida, however, should not be sung at the conclusion of a Resurrectional Divine Liturgy on Sunday, nor are funerals held on Sundays. (Memorial services are typically held on Saturday evening, immediately before the vigil service.)
- The Trisagion Service is a very brief memorial service that includes closing hymns also found in the Rite of Burial, or funeral service. It is customary, the evening before the funeral, as well as on anniversaries of a person's death and some other occasions, for the priest to read Trisagion Prayers, which are structured in the following way:
  1. Opening doxology.
  2. The Hymn: “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us,” and other short prayers that conclude with the Lord’s Prayer.
  3. A Litany for the departed, with responsive reciting of “Lord, have mercy” three times after each petition.
  4. The final blessing.

The funeral service includes a cross, candles, and various hymns and prayers that are repeated at the conclusion of the Rite of Burial.

Funeral

The following practices take place at the church:

- The coffin holding the body of the dead person, is carried, feet first, into the church, and set in the center of the nave, facing the altar, for the burial service.
- The coffin is opened and an icon of Christ or the patron Saint is placed in the deceased’s hands.
- A wreath (with the Trisagion printed on it) is placed on the forehead of the departed.
- The hand-cross is placed in the coffin near the head of the departed.

After the priest blesses and anoints the body, he folds up the paper with the following prayer: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. This paper band signifies a crown of glory or victory for completing life’s course." The priest says the prayer at the end of the funeral service, at which time he proclaims that the sins of the departed are forgiven. While these two customs are not universal among all Orthodox Christians, they are observed in many churches. The Prayer of Absolution is read in all cases, either from the paper placed in the coffin or from the service book.

- The worshippers are distributed candles, which are lighted by the priest, and are held almost until the end of the service.
- After dismissal and the “memory eternal,” friends come to pay their last respects to the deceased, and may kiss the hand-cross on the side of the coffin or the icon placed in the deceased’s hands. Close relatives are given a few minutes alone with the departed. Then, the coffin is closed and carried from the church to a hearse. The choir sings the Trisagion, and the bells are rung.
- The funeral cortege proceeds to the cemetery, where a short graveside service of entombment is sung by the priest.
- The blessing of the cross: it is customary to mark the place of burial with a grave mound and a cross, which may be depicted on the gravestone or stand above it. The cross should be placed at the feet of the deceased, so as not to be facing it. When the monument is placed on the grave, the parish priest joins relatives of the deceased at the cemetery for The Rite of Blessing of the Cross.
Memorial services
A memorial gathering (makaria) after the committal at the cemetery is common. While it holds no religious significance, it provides an opportunity for guests to extend expressions of sympathy to the bereaved, and for the family to express thanks to those who attended the service or assisted in some way.

Memorial services (minimosyna) are customarily held in conjunction with the Divine Liturgy on the 40th day after death, and on the first and third anniversaries of the death. Traditionally, when the memorial services are celebrated, a dish of boiled, soft-shell wheat or barley is prepared by the relatives or friends of the deceased, and sweetened with sugar, honey, raisins or dried fruit. Called kolyva, the sweetened boiled wheat symbolizes the resurrection of the dead and sweetness of the afterlife. This kolofo is offered to all participants in the remembrance service. Those who offer memorial services usually purchase and distribute candles to the clergy, singers, and all others in attendance, as lit candles symbolize hope in the Resurrection.

Roman Catholic funerals
There is no restriction on removal or preparation of remains, unless the deceased was a priest or a nun. Religious articles are removed during embalming. In 1963, the Vatican lifted the ban on cremation for Catholics, allowing cremation under certain circumstances, and if the remains are treated with the same respect given the human body from which they come. Some practices, such as dividing the cremated remains among family and friends or keeping them in the home, for example, are forbidden, as they are seen as diminishing respect and dignity for the dead.

Unless the deceased is a priest who is dressed in the robes of the station, or a nun who will wear her official robe, there are no special requirements for dressing the deceased. Rosary beads are often placed in the hands of the deceased, and a crucifix may be placed on the outside foot panel of the casket, or inside the head panel. The Sacred Heart is placed inside the head panel.

While a Roman Catholic funeral follows relatively formal guidelines, Catholic funerals also vary according to individual, family, and church. Personal heritage and cultural tradition play a large part of the Catholic ceremony, influencing the tone and structure of a Catholic funeral and stressing the deceased’s heritage, be it Irish, Russian, or Italian, etc.

Wake
Usually, the second day after the deceased passes away, friends and family hold a visitation (also called a wake, or “calling hours”), typically held at a funeral home. The wake is usually scheduled the evening before the funeral, and includes a brief prayer service, or rosary recitation, usually conducted by a priest or lay minister at the funeral home. Friends of the family may send flowers or gifts, although it is not uncommon for the family to request a donation to charity. Catholics may also purchase Mass cards, which are typically displayed in the funeral home.

While a priest usually officiates at the wake, anyone may recite the prayers. The casket is usually open during the service. Flowers are displayed at the wake, and music may be played. One candle (called a vigil light) is placed at the head and one at the foot of the casket. A prie dieu, or prayer bench (for kneeling), is placed in front of the casket and a crucifix is put behind the casket. There may also be holy water and incense at the service, and a tray for Mass cards in the vestibule. Immediately following the wake or on the third day, a Catholic funeral is held.

Funeral and Mass
The following day, family members and close friends gather at the funeral home to proceed to the church. The Roman Catholic funeral ceremony typically begins at the funeral home, proceeds to the church for a Mass, then to the graveside, where there is additional liturgy. While usually open at the wake, the casket is closed during the funeral service.

The funeral service is held at a church. Catholic guests may bow at the knee when they enter the church, a gesture neither required nor expected of non-Catholics. A funeral service, in which prayers for the deceased and a eulogy are said, may stand alone, or be part of a larger ceremony known as a Mass (although a eulogy is not allowed during a funeral Mass). 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, and sing or speak with the service if they choose, but should not take communion.

The funeral Mass often involves a procession from the funeral home to the church. A pall or flag may cover the casket. The church procession begins in the Narthex (the vestibule leading to the nave of the church). The procession order for each part of the service follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funeral home to church</th>
<th>Funeral cortège</th>
<th>Committal service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crucifer</td>
<td>Escort and/or lead car</td>
<td>Led by the priest, acolytes, and casket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>Priest and acolytes may ride in lead car</td>
<td>Seating of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral director</td>
<td>Honorary casket-bearers</td>
<td>Placement of casket-bearers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casket and casket-bearers</td>
<td>Active casketbearers</td>
<td>Use of sand or flower petals by the clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Casket coach/hearse</td>
<td>Benediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family of deceased</td>
<td>Family of deceased</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only those closest to the family should go to the cemetery*

The family typically sits on the right side of the altar, with the casketbearers sitting on the left side. Mass is followed by the final Commendation (Absolution), the use of holy water and incense, and ends with the recessional and blessing of the casket. Following the Mass, committal prayers are said at the cemetery, prior to interment. Under certain circumstances, when the body is unavailable (because of cremation, or burial elsewhere), or if those participating are not Catholic, the funeral liturgy, outside of Mass, may be more suitable. In this case, the Rite of Committal at the cemetery takes place at a later time.

The Rite of Committal is the final funeral rite, which may be led by a priest, deacon, or lay person. It usually takes place close to the place of burial (grave, tomb or crematorium). This rite is relatively brief, but, if it is the only funeral rite, it is typically expanded with music, readings, a homily, and petitions, and also includes the Rite of Final Commendation. A funeral reception, where food and drinks are served, may also be held after the services, according to the family’s wishes.

On the seventh and the 13th day and at the end of the year, a festive dinner or breakfast is organized by the deceased’s family. Mourning is observed for one year by close relatives of the deceased, and during this time they do not attend public or social functions.
Additionally, a Mass may be held on the annual anniversary of the death.

Islamic funerals

Islam is the religion preached by the Prophet Muhammad, who lived in Mecca about 1400 years ago. “Islam” means peace or complete submission. Those who practice the religion abide by the following guiding principles:

- Belief in the one God, Allah.
- Belief in the Prophet Muhammad and the holy Quran.
- Belief in a day of judgment and a life after death.
- Commitment to fast for a specific period.
- To go, at least once, on a pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj).
- To give generously to the poor (Zakat).
- To fight on behalf of Allah (Jihad).
- Prayer five times each day.

Islamic states follow the law of the Quran, which prohibits slavery and emphasizes education and charitable pursuits. Prostitution, drinking alcoholic beverages, gambling, robbery, and adultery are prohibited in Islam. Spiritual cleanliness is an important tenet of the faith. The holy book, the Quran, prohibits eating pork or pork products, meat of dead animals, blood and intoxicants, and requires a period of fasting from dawn to dusk daily for one month a year. There is a strong emphasis on family ties. Islam promises a happy life in the afterworld, if the individual follows the tenets of the Quran in this world.

People who practice the Islamic religion are called Muslims. Adherents number as many as 1.3 billion worldwide, and live in the Middle East, where it is a dominant religion, but also in parts of Asia, Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Europe, the United States, and Canada. The top Muslim populations outside these areas are the countries of Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, and China.

As many as 6 million Muslims have been estimated to live in the United States, where the number of adherents is increasing due to high birth rates among Muslims, conversion to Islam, and immigration (with immigrants representing as many as 60 percent, and African American and Hispanic converts totaling as much as 40 percent). While individuals are diverse in their specific observances, most Muslims build their faith around “The Five Pillars of Islam: Faith, Prayer, Fasting, Charity and Hajj” (Pilgrimage to Mecca).

The two main branches of Islam are the Sunni and the Shi’a. Worldwide, there are about 125 million Shi’ite Muslims, who live primarily in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Indian subcontinent, and 940 million Sunni Muslims, in virtually every other part of the world. There are significant cultural and doctrinal differences between Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims; when they coexist in the same area, they do not make up one religious body, but usually form their own, separate mosques. Sufism is sometimes classified as a separate branch of Islam or a pan-Muslim movement. The Nation of Islam is another subgroup that contributes to the numerical and ideological prominence of Muslims in the U.S, but may have very different funeral customs than Shiite or Sunni Muslims.

After death

As soon as the person is known to be dead, family members should do the following:

- Turn the body to face in the direction of Mecca.
- Have someone sit with the body and read the Quran.
- Those closest to the deceased should close the deceased’s eyes and mouth, straighten the legs, and place both hands at the sides of the body.
- Begin to say prayers for the deceased’s forgiveness.
- Announce the death to increase the number of people praying for the deceased.
- Cover the face and entire body with a sheet or cloth.

A mourning period of three days is usual, during which time before burial the face of the deceased may be uncovered. Excessive displays of grief or wailing may be discouraged in some cultures. During this mourning period, the deceased is never left alone. If the death occurs at home, the body should be taken immediately to a location where it will be bathed.

It is customary to bury the deceased as soon as possible after death, and after the Janazah Salah (funeral prayers) have been performed. Autopsies are generally not permitted unless required by law. Custom requires the body to be buried within 24 hours of the individual’s death. Typically, the burial takes place between sunrise and sunset on the day of, or day following, the death. Cremation is prohibited.

Ritual bathing

After death, the body should be bathed and scented with flowers and oils, in a ceremony known as “gusul.” It is obligatory for Muslims to wash the body. Male ritual bathers may only bathe deceased males; and females bathe deceased females. It is a sin to wash a body not of your gender. Variations in this ritual differ, but the body is always washed an odd number of times and water must touch all parts of the body.

If the deceased was male, the hair is washed and combed. If a female, the hair is loosened, washed, redone, and placed behind her back in three braids. Washing should begin on the right side of the body, with three kinds of water used: water with leaves of a plum tree, camphorized water, and “pure water.” If only one kind of water is available, caretakers should wash the body three times in the available water. After the body is washed and dried of water and perfume, the body is wrapped in one or more white cotton sheets (kafan).

The kafan should be clean, and large enough to cover the entire body. Ideally, if it does not financially burden the family of the deceased, a man should be wrapped by the material three times, and a woman, five times, although both can be wrapped only once if the shroud is not large. Men may not be buried in luxurious or expensive materials, such as silk, for example, but it is permissible for a woman.

Like bathing the deceased, shrouding the body is a collective obligation. A shroud is usually purchased with money left behind by the deceased. If the deceased left no money, the person accepting his expenses should purchase the shroud. If the deceased leaves no money and there is no caretaker, individual Muslims or the public treasury of the Muslims will pay for the shroud, for both men and women.

While Muslims in largely Islamic lands may be familiar with washing and dressing the body, family members living in the United States may be hesitant to do so, if not trained in the practice. Regional Islamic centers may teach the custom, serving the Muslim community in smaller cities and towns where Muslims are not personally familiar with the tradition. Mosques or Islamic centers may also import special water and the white cotton that wraps the body. If the Muslim client cannot identify anyone to assist in this obligation, the local masjid know where to find someone who can perform this service.
**Funeral**

The funeral ceremony is held in a funeral home or mosque. The body is carried in a coffin to the mosque and positioned with the face toward the direction of Mecca. The body is kept at the mosque for some time while the priest and others recite prayers (namaz). There is no open casket. The funeral should be very simple; extravagance in funeral arrangements or materials is discouraged, considered vanity and a waste of assets that is contrary to Islamic belief. Some cultures discourage the purchasing or placing of flowers on the grave, considering it a waste of money that might be given as charity to the poor on behalf of the deceased. Expressions of grief, in general, should be transformed into the practice of pious deeds.

The funeral service is conducted by the family priest (qazi). In some cultures, women do not attend funerals. If women are allowed, they typically must wear headscarves and sit in areas separated from men. If the funeral service takes place in a mosque, shoes are removed. The funeral service is usually simple and brief, less than an hour with interment following, involving ritualistic chanting and readings from the Quran. Those in attendance will pay their respects by lining up and walking past the body before the deceased is taken to the final resting place. Close friends and the sons-in-law may see the face of the deceased before burial, but spouses, daughters and sons should not.

Typically, four people place the four corners of a bier, or stand holding the corpse, on their shoulders. No one should walk in front of the bier, but while the holders are changing shoulders, one may pass behind the bier. The carriers repeat “Allah Akbar,” “God is Great,” and pray for blessing during the time they carry the body. Mourners should walk beside the bier, and those who are riding or driving should follow it. During this process, only the carriers should speak. Otherwise, silence is recommended.

At burial, family members and friends gather with religious leaders to pray and ask God for forgiveness. Expression of emotion is appropriate, with crying and praying encouraged, helping mourners release their sorrow. There is a sense that the bereaved must resolve their sadness before they can return to the events of daily life.

When the body is lowered into the grave for burial, the face should be resting in the direction of Mecca. While lowering the body, these words are recited: “In the name of Allah and with Allah, and according to the sunnah of the messenger of Allah upon whom be the blessings and peace of Allah.” Those attending the burial throw three handfuls of soil over the grave, while reciting from the Quran: On the first handful, “Of this (the earth), we created you;” on the second, “And to it shall we cause you to return,” and on the third, “And of it we shall cause you to be resurrected a second time.”

After this, two stones are placed over the grave at either end and two trees may be planted over the grave. Nothing, including the Quran, should be left in the grave. The dead person is always buried without a coffin, with the head facing towards Mecca. The graves of Muslims are not otherwise marked.

**Mourning period and memorialization**

Following the funeral ceremony, friends and relatives typically go to the house of the deceased. Three days of commemoration are observed there, with recitations from the Quran throughout. A meal is often prepared and guests may stay the day and night, with close relatives staying the entire week. A meal is later served at the mosque for all those who attended the funeral service. Mourning for family members usually lasts for three days, and 10 days for a widow mourning her husband. It is customary to bring food such as baked goods, fruit or vegetable platters. Those offering their condolences should not bring or order flowers for the family. A food donation or a money donation is more acceptable.

During the mourning period, emotion is openly expressed. The Muslim faith encourages family members to face and accept their bereavement. There may be a great deal of crying and discussion of how mourners will adapt to the new situation. Close family and friends are encouraged to be social and mourn as a family, to reassure and comfort the relatives. It is appropriate for family members and friends to listen to the grieving and offer comforting words.

**Offering to the dead**

On the third day after burial, a ceremony lasting several hours is held in the mosque, in which friends and relatives gather to pray. A religious leader will read from the Quran and pray with relatives and friends. It is believed that the prayers that are said for the deceased, at the time of death and the days that follow, will make the deceased’s life better in the afterworld.

On this, the third day, snacks and fruits are served to all who participated in the funeral procession, and all the guests proceed to the grave and pour oil over the grave. On the tenth day, offerings are made again. Another feast is held on the 40th day and at the end of the fourth, sixth and the ninth month. Close relatives in mourning may wear black clothing for 40 days. At the end of this period, relatives gather in the cemetery or the house of the deceased to pray from the Quran and ask for God’s blessing. At this point, everyone except very close relatives and widows wears clothing in colors other than black; widows may wear black for up to one year.

Throughout the year, the deceased is remembered, with requests for blessings, prayers said, and donations to the poor made in the name of the deceased. This ritual is repeated at the end of the year when there is a ceremony to pray for, and to remember the deceased. It is believed that these rites elevate the status of the dead person in the eyes of Allah. At each occasion, food is served to people on behalf of the deceased.

**Judaism**

Studies estimate the number of observant American Jews at a figure of around 3 million, with as many as 1 million or 2 million more secular or non-religious Jews, who may observe some or none of the traditional funeral customs. Many different interpretations or ways of observing Judaism exist; orthodox, conservative, and reform Jews make up the vast majority of Jews; other less common philosophies, or Jewish schools of thought, are represented by traditional, reconstructionist, and Chasidic Jews.

In all cases, a Jewish funeral should be simple and dignified. Practices in this area are guided by two primary considerations: respect for the dead, and concern for the mourner. Mourning rituals are intended to initiate a process of healing through the expression of grief and the healing power of time. An outline of observances for the mourning period and funeral follow. This is a relatively brief introduction to many concepts. If you have any questions about the process or steps, consult a rabbi for further information, interpretation and guidance, as different families and individuals may deviate somewhat from these steps.

Even after death, the body is considered sacred, and must be treated with respect and consideration. Embalming, cremation, the use of cosmetics on the deceased, and organ donation are generally considered desecration of the body by formal Jewish law, but interpretations of law vary, and individuals may choose organ donation or cremation, and make the decision known to family
and friends. In most cases, customs, the local rabbi’s interpretation of tradition, and an understanding of the deceased’s wishes guide the mourner’s decisions. Some Jews, for example, consider organ donation an example as Kavod Hamet (respect for the deceased) or a mitzvah (good deed).

The practice of autopsies is also, typically, contrary to Jewish law, as an autopsy may be viewed as a desecration of the body. When an autopsy is required by law, it should be supervised by a Rabbi familiar with the procedure. Embalming is only permitted when required by law.

**Anuit**

Anuit is the period between death and the burial. Jewish law dictates that the time of burial not be delayed any longer than absolutely necessary, and preferably occur within 24 hours of death. A burial may be delayed for legal or logistic reasons; to transport the deceased, for example, or if relatives and friends need to travel some distance to attend the funeral. Neither arrangements for the burial nor the burial itself should occur on the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat), which begins Friday evening at sundown and ends Saturday evening at sundown, or other days considered holy.

Families generally consult the rabbi as soon as they know of the death. If the family belongs to a synagogue, their rabbi will typically conduct the services. If the family is not affiliated with a specific synagogue, they can request a rabbi at any synagogue to conduct the service. In certain cases – accidental deaths, suicides, or death of a child less than 30 days of age – refer to the rabbi for directions.

The deceased are not left alone during the period before burial, as it is considered disrespectful to the body, so arrangements are made for individuals, called shomrim (guardian or watcher) to attend the body. Shomrim are usually members of the family or close friends of the deceased who maintain a constant watch over the body, usually one individual during the day and another at night, and may read passages from the Book of Psalms.

After death has occurred, the eyes and mouth of the deceased should be closed and a sheet should be placed over the deceased’s face. Jewish law requires that the deceased be bathed according to specific ritual, a highly valued mitzvah (good deed) carried out by specially trained individuals called a Hevra Kadisha (holy society). Hevra kadisha traditionally supervise all Jewish funerals. Its members are often volunteers, who assist the family of the deceased in practicing Jewish customs and traditions. Holy society members make many of the funeral and burial arrangements, coordinating car service, sending sympathy acknowledgment cards, and seeing that obituaries get published, for example.

Between the time of death and the funeral, an immediate family member of the deceased, called an onen, is designated. During anut, the onen is excused from other religious obligations, so that he or she may arrange the funeral and burial matters for the deceased. The onen does not conduct his or her usual business or professional duties, indulge in “luxurious” pleasures, drink wine, or eat meat (except on Shabbat or an approved festival) while assigned to this role. Visiting the onen during the time between death and burial is discouraged, as nothing should distract the onen from his/her primary obligation, to attend to the needs of the deceased. This caveat does not apply when organized groups, such as Hevra Kadisha, or commercial firms take care of burial needs. In those cases, the participation required of family members is minimal.

**Tarahah and Takhrikhim (cleansing and shrouds)**

The ritual washing of the body, Taharah, is accompanied by prayers and psalms, and is typically supervised by members of the Hevra Kadisha. Then, the body is dressed in a simple handmade white shroud (takhrikhim). Jews are typically buried in plain white linen or cotton, to emphasize the equality of all people before God. The same principle is reflected in the plain, wooden coffin (aron) required for burial. Wooden coffins are also used in Jewish funerals to avoid interference with the natural process of “returning to the earth.” Only an all-wood casket that contains no metal can be used.

Jews do not display the body or have a wake, as viewing the body either publicly or privately is contrary to Jewish tradition. The coffin should never be open to the public at the funeral. If the coffin is to be opened, it should take place prior to the funeral service, and only be opened to the intimate family. While objects of value or favorite items are generally not buried with the dead, a Jewish male is customarily buried wearing his kipah, or yammakah (ritual head covering) and his own talit (prayer shawl). The fringes of the talit are cut, however, to make it ritually unfit, before it is buried with the body.

**Mourners**

While everyone who was acquainted with the deceased feels grief and mourns the death, specific responsibilities or roles are assigned to seven individuals, in particular: the husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, brother or sister (including half-brother and half-sister), immediate family members who are expected to fulfill formal obligations and observation of the mourning period. While in-laws and grandchildren also grieve the death and are permitted to observe the mourning rites, they are not obligated to do so. Males under the age of 13 and one day, and females under the age of 12 and one day, are not expected to observe the laws of mourning as adults.

**K’riah (ritual tearing)**

Mourners traditionally participate in the rite of K’riah, which takes place just before the funeral service. The mourner recites a benediction and participates in a ritual in which a tear is made in a visible portion of clothing or a black ribbon attached to the clothing. Worn as an external symbol of inner grief; the tear is on the left side, close to the heart, for a parent, and on the right side, for anyone else. The torn garment or ribbon is worn throughout the mourning period, but should not be visible during the Sabbath. K’riah is observed whenever one learns of a parent’s death, regardless of the length of time that has elapsed since the day of death.

**Funeral**

Funeral services take place the day after death, unless it is the Sabbath. The occasion is solemn. It is not appropriate to send flowers to the bereaved, but food is permitted if it is kosher. Friends and associates of the deceased who wish to express condolences in a tangible way are encouraged to contribute to a charity (tzedakah) important to the deceased, or plant a tree dedicated to their memory. This is a way to emphasize concern for the living, and extend the influence of the deceased after he or she is no longer living.

Neither flowers nor music are permitted at the funeral service, although a cantor may chant memorial prayers. Attendees are expected to wear respectful attire in subdued colors. Head coverings may be required: for orthodox and conservative services, men, and in some congregations, women, are required to cover the head (typically kipah or yamakah for men and scarves for women). At Reformed services, the choice is typically optional. Most synagogues will provide the head coverings at the entrance to the chapel, if they are required. Women attending orthodox and conservative
services are expected to cover their shoulders, arms, and legs to the knee. Mourners should not enter the service during the recessional, processional, or eulogy.

Funeral services are held in synagogues, at funeral homes, and grave-sites. Conducted by rabbis, they are typically brief, simple ceremonies, lasting between 15 minutes and one hour, and include a traditional memorial prayer and a eulogy honoring the dead. Services start with the Kaddish, which is usually said by the son. If there are no sons, family members designate someone else to say Kaddish, which honors the deceased. Said in commemoration, and generally considered a prayer for the dead, the Kaddish is an affirmation of life and hope for the future.

At a funeral, the casket is covered with a special cloth, called a pall. At the grave-sites, the immediate mourners, who were close to the deceased, to serve as pallbearers. They carry the pall and coffin from the chapel to the graveside in a slow procession, pausing a traditional seven times on the way to the grave. Attending the funeral service, and walking behind the coffin after the funeral or at the cemetery are signs of respect. Only close friends and family members proceed to the cemetery for burial.

K’vurah (burial)
It is tradition for the burial to take place as soon as possible, even on the same day of the death, but no more than two nights after the death. Only close friends and family attend interment. After prayers are said, each person places a shovelful of dirt on the casket, and the immediate family recites the Kaddish. After burial and the Kaddish, immediate family members leave, passing between two rows of people (the rest of the funeral procession), to receive expressions of consolation. It is traditional to wash one’s hands when leaving the cemetery, before entering the house of mourning. Once the burial has taken place, shiva (the mourning period) begins. Non-Jews may or may not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Consult a rabbi or a committee on Jewish laws and standards regarding applicable rules.

Seudat Havra’a (condolence meal)
It is customary for family, friends, and neighbors to arrange a condolence meal to be served to mourners at the house of mourning when they return from the cemetery. Traditionally, round foods (like eggs or lentils), which symbolize the cycle of life, are eaten at the meal, but meat and wine are not served.

Shivah (initial period of mourning)
Shivah, the seven-day period of mourning observed by the immediate family (the mourners, as specified above), begins the day of burial. Typically referred to as “sitting shivah,” the period is a contemplative time in which the mourner can begin to adjust to life without the deceased. Mourners usually stay together, away from work or school, at the home of the deceased or one of the mourners, essentially removing themselves from daily routine, studies, and business or professional responsibilities. If severe financial loss would result from not working, the rabbi should be consulted.

It is customary for mourners to divest themselves of vanity items or practices, covering mirrors or turning them toward the wall in the house of mourning, and “luxurious” comforts, symbolized by soft pillows or the wearing of leather footwear. For that reason, cushions are removed from couches, mourners sit on low stools or benches, and the mourners do not wear leather shoes or slippers. Traditional practices include:

- Lighting a seven-day candle upon returning home from the cemetery.
- Refraining from sexual intercourse.
- Refraining from bathing, (except for hygienic purposes).
- Refraining from changing outer garments (clothes that touch the body can be changed for hygienic purposes).
- No anointing the body, use of cosmetics, or haircutting.
- Males refrain from shaving.

Exceptions are made for pregnant women and any others for whom any of these steps might cause harm or physical difficulties. Certain holidays and Shabbat are excluded from these practices. While Shabbat is included in counting the seven days of shiva, no outward signs of mourning should be visible on the Sabbath; mourners may wear leather shoes, sit on regular chairs and wear clothing without the torn garment or ribbon. Those in mourning still attend synagogue services on Sabbath and holidays, where it is customary to recite prayers and lamentations.

Condolence calls (nichum avaylim), visits to comfort the mourning family members, are appropriate during the seven days of shivah, except on Shabbat. Also during this time, it is customary to recite the phrase “may he/she rest in peace,” and “of blessed memory” (in Hebrew or English) after mention of the deceased’s name. The initial period of shivah ends on the morning of the seventh day. To mark its end, mourners typically take a short walk outside of the home together, to symbolize a return to their normal life and routine.

Shloshim
During the thirty days following burial (shloshim), after the observance of shivah, mourners return to daily work and activities, but refrain from shows, entertainment, and purely social activities. Mourners do not partake in the celebration of weddings, bar/bat-mitzvahs, or any other events where music is played. Mourners do not cut their hair, shave, or wear new clothes; the k’riah is usually worn throughout shloshim; and mourners participate in synagogue services daily and recite Kaddish, but do not perform religious rituals at home. Shloshim ends on the morning of the thirtieth day after the funeral.

Sons and daughters of the deceased maintain these restrictions beyond the 30-day period, reciting Kaddish for eleven months, minus one day, counting from the day of death. Other mourners may choose to say Kaddish for the deceased during this period as well.

Visiting the grave
Customs vary as to when one may visit the graveside. Some go on the day they finish sitting shivah; others go at the end of the shloshim; others do not go for eleven months. Generally, it is considered inappropriate for any guests to visit the grave of the deceased until 30 days after the funeral. Visitors to the grave place a pebble or small stone on the grave, instead of flowers, as an expression of respect to the deceased.

It is customary to place a tombstone on a grave and dedicate it in a brief ceremony or unveiling that takes place within a year of the death, at any time after the end of shloshim. A rabbi or cantor may conduct a brief service at the graveside, and family members may recite prayers and psalms.

Yahrzeit (anniversary of death)
Yahrzeit is observed each year on the anniversary of the day the person passed away, according to the Jewish calendar. One who is not certain of the day when a relative died should select an appropriate date on which to observe yahrzeit each year. A candle should burn in the home during the 24-hour period of yahrzeit, sunset to sunset, starting on the evening preceding the day. It is appropriate to fulfill some mitzvah and to donate tzedakah on the anniversary in honor of the dead on this day. Family and friends
gather on the yahrzeit for the purpose of recalling the deceased. Many people visit the cemetery on the occasion of Yahrzeit, when Jewish custom again indicates that stones, picked up at the graveside, be placed as a memorial sign on the tombstone.

Mourner’s Kaddish is recited at all services on the yahrzeit. Many people visit the cemetery on the occasion of Yahrzeit, placing a stone as a memorial sign of the visit on the tombstone, and washing their hands after the visit as a symbol of purification.

**Yizkor (memorial prayers)**

Yizkor in Hebrew means, “remember.” Yizkor is a prayer said in memory of the person on certain holidays throughout the year. The Yizor is recited on Yom Kippur; Sh’mini Atzeret, the eight days of Pesach, and the second day of Shavuot. Some Jews follow the custom of lighting a yahrzeit candle on each of these occasions, others only on Yom Kippur. During the first year of bereavement, one may attend Yizkor services (although this is not an obligation), but should not say the prayer, as mourners are still saying Kaddish for the deceased each day for the first 11 months after death. A memorial candle is lit before the Yizkor day and on Yom Kippur, in memory of the deceased.

**Masonic funerals**

Freemasonry is not a religion, but a fraternity that recommends men involve themselves with a religious faith of their preference, and stressing the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. The participation of the Masonic Institution in a funeral service is an expression of its fraternal affection for the deceased and for his family, rather than an exclusively religious ceremony.

Masonry includes many auxiliary groups or organizations. The basic unit is the lodge (or “Blue Lodge”) to which every Mason belongs. The lodge is the unit that typically conducts a Masonic funeral, but on occasion, another organizational body may hold a funeral service. The Order of the Eastern Star, for example, which includes women and men, will sometimes officiate at the funeral of a female member.

Members are not obligated to have a Masonic funeral; it is never required by the Masonic order. Any member in good standing at the time of his/her death may have a Masonic funeral if the deceased or his family requests it. With a few exceptions (such as the Knights Templar), a Masonic lodge is composed of individuals of different religions. Masons are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other faiths, so Masonic services are sensitive to these religious beliefs and practices. Similarly, the Masonic order has no desire to displace or hinder a religious leader or service, and will assist clergy in any way possible.

Masonic involvement may range from members conducting all or part of the service to simply attending, and who will do as much or as little as the family requests of them. While there is no single Masonic funeral service, there are some common elements that may be unknown to the general public. The presiding officer may wear a hat while conducting the funeral service, and Lodge members may place sprigs of evergreen on the casket, to symbolize immortality. A small white leather apron, called a “lambskin,” may be placed in or on the casket. It is the badge of a Mason, and his to wear, in death. Some Masonic services are comparatively long, and wording of Masonic funeral services may sound old-fashioned.

**Mexican-American funerals**

Mexican-American funeral rituals include elements of Anglo, Aztec, Mayan and Spanish cultures, combining aspects of their unique communities with cultural and national traditions. Some common elements in Mexican-American funerals are the great significance of the ritual, the many people who attend, open expression of emotions, and a philosophy that embraces death as a natural part of life. Children, for example, are not shielded from death, as is more common in mainstream U.S. culture.

Elaborate funerals and long mourning periods are not uncommon in Mexican-American funerals. In some cases, family, friends – even the entire community – may participate financially, giving the loved one what is considered a “proper funeral.” Everyone attempts to attend the funeral, to pay respects. Ceremonies may be very expensive and elaborate, with caskets that have religious sets on the head panel or special hardware, and may include scenes such as Our Lady of Guadalupe or the Last Supper.

Flowers and floral tributes often have religious connotations, such as a rosary of rosebuds and blooms arranged in the form of a cross. In preColumbian times, small flowers similar to marigolds were associated with death, with Aztecs using them to decorate elaborate designs on graves. One should not give someone of Mexican descent marigolds because of this association. These flowers may still be used to adorn graves, or used to draw figures and write names. These flowers may also be used to make a pathway from the home to the cemetery, or be scattered around the house of families who have suffered a death in the past year.

Most Mexican-American funerals have either a Roman Catholic or Christian component. A Roman Catholic funeral usually consists of a wake, a funeral service and/or Mass, as well as a final ceremony at the graveside. The wake is typically held at the family’s house or the funeral home. During visitation, some members will pray the rosary and may want to kneel. To accommodate these prayers, a funeral director can hold visitation in a parlor that has chapel seating. For nine days following death, family members may bring candles to their church and light them at the altar. During the Mass, the priest will read scriptures, lead prayers, and may offer Holy Communion.

Increasingly, the Mexican treatment of death is becoming more like the traditional orthodox service performed in Catholic churches worldwide. Elements of death and bereavement also follow the pattern of an orthodox Catholic service, with funeral arrangements made quickly to ensure a prompt burial, which is preferred. The Catholic Church does not encourage cremation. Christian or Protestant funeral services, like the orthodox service, typically focus on the deceased’s entry into heaven, with services usually consisting of a visitation or wake, the funeral service or Mass, and a graveside service.

The following characteristics are more common in the arrangement of a Mexican-American funeral:

- The entire family may plan the funeral.
- Mexican-Americans expect almost immediate access to the body. If arrangements are made in the morning, they want the body to be prepared and laying in state by that evening.
- Visitation can last longer than two days, with families arriving for the wake early and staying until closing time or beyond.
- Children play an active role and are encouraged to participate in all services – visitation, funeral and committal.
- Funerals are often considered social events, almost like family reunions with a lot of food and conversation.
- Mexican-Americans generally feel an obligation to pay their respects to the deceased and to their families, so accommodations will need to be large enough to hold large numbers.
- Relatives will throw a handful of dirt on the coffin before the grave is filled.
- Strong emotions are usually a part of the service, as well as the...
time following the service.

In most instances, they will insist on seeing the deceased no matter what the cause of death or how traumatic it was.

In an urban setting, the body is more likely to be on view at a mortuary, while in rural areas, friends and relatives comes to the home of the deceased where the body lies in state. The casket will be set atop a table or stand, while underneath, herbs and candles will burn, with a scent similar to incense. When the body is viewed inside the family home, drinks are served and people socialize, discussing the deceased with family and friends. Little attention is given to the actual body, although it is present. The casket is accompanied to the graveside at the cemetery, where guests may stay for longer periods, walk around the cemetery, and visit other family members’ or friends’ graves.

Many Hispanic are Roman Catholics who have representations of the saints and the Virgin in their homes, to whom they light candles and pray. Catholic beliefs are sometimes mingled with indigenous traditions that may emphasize holy place, miracles, penitence, and sacrifice.

The Day of the Dead, which begins on or around October 31, is an important ritual associated with death that also varies according to culture and geographical location. It is a joyous celebration that invites the dead to enjoy the things they left behind. Popular symbols of the celebration are skulls and skeletons. People may dress as skeletons or draw skeletons to represent those who have died. There is great festivity, as families joyfully celebrate the dead family and ancestors.

While The Day of the Dead is a community event, it is essentially a family affair in which the living reunite with others, both living and dead, in a celebration paying respect and showing love for the deceased in a ritual that is meant to reassure the living that they will always be remembered when they die.

One of the main features of The Day of the Dead is an altar in the homes of loved ones who have lost family members. The altar is three tiers high, and covered in tissue paper of the following colors: purple (symbolizing pain), white (for hope) and pink (for celebration). Candles in the same colors cover the altar, meant to illuminate the way for the dead when they return for the celebration. Four candles are placed on the top tier to signify the four cardinal points. Three candy skulls, representing the Holy Trinity, are placed on the second level. On the third tier is a large skull representing the Giver of Life. Copal incense is burned at the altar to keep bad spirits away.

Pan de muerto or “Day of the Dead bread” is offered, with candles and fruit, at the altar. A towel, soap, and a small bowl are placed on the altar for the spirit to wash after the long trip. There is also a pitcher of water meant to quench their thirst and a bottle of liquor to symbolize festive times. Flowers are used to decorate the altar, with the flower’s petals used to form a pathway for the dead to find the family banquet.

Bread is also one of the items taken to the cemetery, with each village making a characteristic pan de los muertos, which is left on the grave of the loved ones, in anticipation that spirits will come out and eat the food. The family takes home what is left behind or eats it at the cemetery, but practices vary by village. In some cases, a big picnic, decorated with candles and flowers is featured, with the intent that both living and dead members of the family will eat together.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (sometimes referred to as the “LDS Church” or as “The Mormon Church”)
The Mormon Church, which at one time was mainly found in the western United States, has in recent years experienced significant growth. It is now common to find members in every state in significant numbers. Members often refer to one another as Brother (last name) and Sister (last name.) They are very family oriented, and large families are not uncommon. They also have a very orderly theological hierarchy, and are traditionally very respectful of it. They consider Jesus Christ to be the savior of all mankind and that through his atoning resurrection, all mankind may be saved. Mormons believe that death is a necessary part of the eternal plan to return to their heavenly father from which they came. Death is a spiritual reunion with family members which have gone on before in a state of paradise where the immortal spirit abides until the Resurrection, at which time the immortal spirit will be united with an immortal, perfected body, for eternity.

Mormons use the traditional Holy Bible but in addition, they have other scripture including “The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” from which the nickname “Mormons” comes. Services are usually held at a Mormon chapel (also called a ward building), and are frequently upbeat. They frequently have a “traditional funeral” with visitation and burial, but cremation rates have increased.

The church organization is set up with a lay clergy leadership, meaning they have an unpaid clergy who frequently hold down full-time jobs in the community, as well as serve in leadership positions in the church. All males beginning at the age of 12 are ordained to different levels of the priesthood. At about the age of 18, young men are ordained to the priesthood calling of elder. An elder can carry out most priesthood responsibilities within the church. The church is divided into “wards” or smaller “branches” determined by geographical boundaries. Each ward is lead by a bishop or branch president who is assisted by two counselors. Frequently, the family of the deceased can provide the funeral director with the name and contact information of their bishop or branch president if this information is unknown by the funeral director. It is most helpful if the funeral director contacts the bishop or branch president as soon as possible to coordinate items such as service times, who will conduct the service, the dressing of the deceased, and any other items that may need to be addressed.

If the deceased had participated in holy temple rites, (referred to by the church as “the Endowment”), the bishop will send a dressing committee to dress the deceased: elders (males) for men, and the Relief Society (females) for women, in special temple clothing, prior to casketing the body. If the individual has not been through the Mormon temple, regular clothing will be used, and the funeral home may be asked to dress the deceased. If the deceased is dressed in temple clothing, a family member or another member of the church will place a cap on the men or a veil over the face of the ladies just prior to closing the casket.

A typical service follows the format of:
- Prelude music.
- Opening hymn.
- Invocation.
- A brief eulogy.
- Hymn.
- Speaker(s).
- Benediction.
- Postlude music.
At the graveside, there is a brief priesthood “Dedication of the Grave” prayer.

A gathering of friends and family is frequently held at the ward/chapel building afterwards.

Endnotes
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16 The Book of Life, published by the Rabbinical Assembly.
17 Congregation Shaarey Zedek has prepared this booklet as a guide Congregation Shaarey Zedek for their suggestions and comments. The publication of this Guide was made possible by a grant from the Chevra Kadisha of the Congregation
18 Barbara Younoszai, Mexican American Perspectives Related to Death, Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death, and Grief.
19 http://www.ncfda.org/ss-folder/forms/Mexican percent20Forms/Mexican-American Funerals.pdf
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(RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND NATIONAL TRADITIONS:
FUNERAL RITES AND CUSTOMS IN THE USA)

Final Examination Questions

Select true for false for each question and complete your test online

1. Baha’i is a belief with roots in the Jewish faith, but exists today as an independent religion.
   True   False

2. There are no clergy or religious authority figures in the Baha’i religion.
   True   False

3. Mindfulness (sati), a state of uncritical reflection or nonjudgmental observation, plays a critical role in Buddhist funeral practices.
   True   False

4. The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes an elaborate funeral rite, including instructions to the corpse, guiding him/her to a new form, through the transition from death to rebirth.
   True   False

5. It is not required for Muslims to wash the body.
   True   False

6. Mexican-Americans very rarely insist on seeing the deceased.
   True   False

7. Condolence calls, (nichum avaylim) visits to comfort the mourning family members, are not appropriate the seven days of shivah, except on Shabbat.
   True   False

8. Members of a Masonic order are required to have a Masonic funeral.
   True   False

9. In Jewish funerals, it is generally considered inappropriate for any guests to visit the grave of the deceased until 30 days after the funeral.
   True   False

10. Traditional African-American funerals are less common in the rural South.
    True   False