

Royal Greenwich  
**Agreed Syllabus for Religious  
Education 2019-24**

End of Life's Journey



## The End of Life’s Journey

<b>What this unit contains</b>	<p>During this unit pupils investigate beliefs about life and life after death. The unit encourages them to reflect on and express their hopes for their future. Pupils will have the opportunity to share feelings of loss caused by separation, and consider how faith and belief can provide some answers to life’s most challenging and ultimate questions, and also challenges attitudes, values and commitments in life. They will consider how important it is to celebrate the lives of those they have lost and how remembering can help the healing process. They will examine their attitudes, values and commitments in the light of this learning.</p>					
<b>Where the unit fits and how it builds upon previous learning</b>	<p>This unit should be taught in Year 6. It focuses on elements from the local Agreed Syllabus on ultimate questions. Some lessons have suggested cross-curricular links with ICT, art and design, and design and technology.</p> <p><b>CAUTION:</b> Some lessons could be upsetting to a pupil who has recently suffered bereavement or has a friend or family member with a terminal illness. Care needs to be taken to check whether any pupils are in this situation and to deal with this sensitively in communication with parents/ carers.</p> <p>Humanist notes and a book for pupils can be found on <a href="http://www.humanism.org.uk/shop/92">http://www.humanism.org.uk/shop/92</a> for those schools who would like pupils to find out how the end of life is marked in Humanism.</p>					
<b>Extension activities and further thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore personal feelings about grief through Michael Rosen’s Sad Book by Michael Rosen (Author), Quentin Blake (Illustrator), Walker Books</li> <li>• Find out about the work of a local hospice in caring for the families of those who are life limited, e.g. St Christopher’s Hospice. 51-59 Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham, London SE26 6DZ Tel:020 8768 4500, Demelza House, 5 Wensley Close, Eltham SE9 5AB Tel:020 8859 9800 or Greenwich &amp; Bexley Hospice, 85 Bostall Hill, Abbey Wood, SE2 0GB Tel: 020 8312 3244.</li> <li>• Visit a war memorial or graveyard</li> </ul>					
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Christian Christianity loss sadness remembering religious Islam Muslim Hinduism cremation	Buddhism Buddhist community reincarnation Sikhism Sikh Heaven Karma bereavement Humanism	grief healing God hope memorial burial coffin commemorate Humanist Jewish person	epitaph eulogy grave gravestone priest spirit soul Judaism bereaved	service grieving death memorial bereaved Baha’i Hindu Sikhism	<p><b>SMSC/Citizenship</b></p> <p>personal hopes for the future                  beliefs about death                  ultimate questions about meaning and purpose in religion                  remembering the lives of others</p>

**Session 1 Key Question: How is life like a journey?**

Learning outcomes	AT 1	AT 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <p>realise there are significant milestones on the journey of a life;</p> <p>consider what they would like to happen for themselves and the world in the future;</p> <p>appreciate the importance of hope to human beings.</p>		<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>As a whole class activity, make a map representing a journey of life identifying significant milestones along the way for an imaginary person. This could be drawn as a road with smooth and rocky sections, crossroads etc.</p> <p>Encourage pupils to discuss key moments in their lives so far, e.g. taking their first steps, starting school, learning to read, moving from KS1 to KS2, etc.</p> <p>Teachers could share with pupils some significant milestones in their lives, e.g. leaving school or first job, then a personal reflection on what they still hope to achieve, see or do. Invite pupils to share their hopes - it may be interesting to make a list of these and to discuss how some may not be achieved as life can sometimes be difficult. Talk about how during tough times people hope for better times in the future. Decide how one might show easy and hard times in life, on the diagram.</p> <p>Pupils draw personal timelines, based on the idea of the one that has been modelled. The timelines should branch off showing their probable and ideal future.</p> <p><b>Plenary:</b> During this session the pupils can share their timelines with other members of the class. Encourage pupils to discuss what helps people to look forward to better times during times of difficulty.</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p>Template of timeline for modelling to the pupils</p> <p>RE Today: Exploring the Journey of Life and Death</p> <p><b>Sensitivity note for teachers:</b></p> <p>This activity may lead to discussion about the end of the journey of a person's life and may also lead to pupils sharing experiences of the ends of lives of members of their families. These need to be dealt with very sensitively and a class code of conduct where disclosures are treated with respect would benefit the atmosphere for starting this unit.</p>

**Session 2 Key Question: How do we feel when people leave us?**

Learning outcomes	AT 1	AT 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <p>consider human responses to loss and bereavement;</p> <p>reflect on their own response to human experience of life and death.</p>		<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>Start the lesson by reminding pupils how they shared and discussed their timelines. Select incidents in some of them and discuss why they are similar in some places and different in others e.g. starting school, illness, friends moving, so that pupils consider the different experiences every one of them has had and also that everyone has had some difficult times to cope with.</p> <p>Read the storybook ‘<i>Children Also Grieve</i>’ with the pupils.</p> <p>Talk about how the characters cope with their loss and grief and how they begin to feel less sad. How might the story help people to think about their own experiences?</p> <p>In groups think about questions you might like to ask the dog characters. Then pupils could, using puppets or toys, ‘hot seat’ the characters asking their questions.</p> <p><b>Plenary:</b></p> <p>Discuss how people feel when people close to them die. How might the book help the audience for whom it is intended?</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p><i>Children Also Grieve – Talking about death and healing</i>’ by Linda Goldman (Jessica Kingsley)</p> <p>Dog puppets or toys can be the dogs in the story</p> <p>These sessions may all involve pupils sharing experiences of the deaths of members of their families, friends or pets. These need to be dealt with very sensitively and it may help to recall the class code of conduct.</p>

**Session 3 Key Questions: What do Christians believe happens after we die? How does the Christian community respond to bereavement?**

Learning outcomes	AT 1	AT 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <p>learn about ways in which human experiences associated with death, loss and bereavement are understood in Christianity;</p> <p>understand the term bereavement;</p> <p>be aware that people cope with bereavement in different ways;</p> <p>understand how the Christian community supports the person who is bereaved.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p><b>Recap work from last lesson.</b></p> <p>Explain to pupils that the vast majority of Christians believe in some kind of Heaven, in which believers enjoy the presence of God and other believers and freedom from suffering. Christian views differ as to whether those of other faiths or none at all will be in Heaven, and there are many views about what Heaven might be like.</p> <p>To understand one Christian view of what happens when someone dies with the class watch the short film extract on <i>Waterbugs and Dragonflies</i> or read the book to the pupils and discuss the symbolism with them.</p> <p>Refer to the words of The Bible taken from I Corinthians 2:9:</p> <p>“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”</p> <p>Compare this to the dragonfly which is unable to return to tell the other waterbugs what he has discovered about life after the pond.</p> <p>Introduce the term “bereavement” and talk about how different people cope with loss in different ways.</p> <p>Talk about how being part of the Christian community can help Christians who are bereaved in a variety of ways. You could ask a member of the local Christian community to come in to talk about the support given to community members and how this helps them.</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p>Good News Bibles</p> <p>‘Pathways of Belief’ DVD: Christianity – Easter section <i>Waterbugs and Dragonflies</i></p> <p>or the book on which this is based: <i>Waterbugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children</i> by Doris Stickney. Or the same story section from BBC Active DVD ‘Rites of Passage’</p> <p><a href="http://www.belovedhearts.com/stories/Doris-WaterbugsandDragonflies-632617144169637500.aspx">www.belovedhearts.com/stories/Doris-WaterbugsandDragonflies-632617144169637500.aspx</a></p>

**Sessions 4 and 5 Key Questions: What do other faiths and beliefs believe happens after we die? How do they respond to**

Learning outcomes	AT 1	AT 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <p>understand the term bereavement;</p> <p>learn about the ways in which human experiences associated with death, loss, hope, and meaning in life are understood in Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Humanism and Sikhism;</p> <p>be aware that people cope with bereavement in different ways;</p> <p>understand how each community supports the person who is bereaved.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p><b>Recap what has been covered in the unit so far.</b> Explain that different religions have different answers to the question ‘What happens when someone dies?’</p> <p>Remember the term ‘bereavement’ and talk about how people cope with loss in different ways. <i>(You may be able to refer to topical local, national or international events or scenarios in familiar television programmes to distance from pupils’ experiences.)</i></p> <p>Explain that people all have different beliefs about what happens after a member of their faith or belief dies. Religious communities and individuals help people who are bereaved in different ways. In these 2 sessions the pupils are going to find out some of these. Divide the class into 5 groups, each group will be finding out about one religion and becoming the class experts on what that religion believes about death and what it does to mark the death of someone and to support their family. The group can use fact sheets, books, ICT and audio- visual resources etc. At the end of this double session, each group will feedback to the class on its findings.</p> <p><b>Feedback session:</b> Pupil groups report back their findings. Draw out from them how being part of a ‘faith community’ might help people who are bereaved in a range of ways. Talk about the support given by friends to all those who have suffered a loss, whether they belong to a community or not.</p> <p><b>Plenary:</b> Using a circle and a straight line explore the two ideas of reincarnation / rebirth and one earthly life. Sensitively compare and contrast different beliefs about life after death. Play some peaceful music and ask pupils to think about the different helpful activities. If possible, record a personal response.</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p>Hodder/Wayland series – <i>Life’s End</i></p> <p>Espresso Faiths - Buddhism (Worksheet on Pets) Research Sheet</p> <p><i>ISKON Desire Tree: A Handful of Mustard Seeds (story of Kisa Gotami, see links)</i></p> <p>Buddhanet Interactive Tour of the Wheel of Life (see links)_</p> <p>Fact sheets for pupils on beliefs about death and bereavement in each faith.</p> <p>Music</p>

**Session 6 Key Question: How do we remember people who have died?**

Learning outcomes	AT 1	AT 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <p>know some ways in which human experiences associated with death, loss, hope, and meaning in life are expressed;</p> <p>reflect on their responses to human experience of death;</p> <p>understand how important it is to celebrate a life and how remembering them can help their friends to become less sad.</p>		<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p><b>Recap the work done in previous lessons and in particular feelings about parting and loss.</b> Watch online or read the book <i>The Fall of Freddie the Leaf</i> with pupils. Give pupils a leaf shaped piece of paper and encourage them to write their feelings about the story on the leaf. These could be displayed in the classroom.</p> <p>Read <i>Badger's Parting Gifts</i>. Then give out text extract.</p> <p>Highlight all the words that describe feelings. Discuss the parting gifts.</p> <p>Can pupils suggest any 'gifts' that people have given them? Write a short account as one of the animals, of an experience with Badger that they might recall to tell the others, and that includes positive feelings that will help them to remember him with less sadness. Play peaceful music while pupils share their writing with each other.</p> <p>Talk about how important it is to celebrate the lives of people who have died and how remembering can help people to heal.</p> <p>✓ <b>Plenary:</b> During the session, either have a candle lighting ceremony in which each child lights a candle to remember somebody special.</p> <p>✓ or</p> <p>Encourage pupils to consider various parting gifts that have been left to them by those who have died.</p> <p>✓</p>	<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p><i>Badger's Parting Gifts</i> by Susan Varley (ISBN 0-00-664317-5)</p> <p><i>The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages</i> by Leo F. Buscaglia Publisher: Slack; (Aug 2002) ISBN-10: 0-80507-195-4</p> <p><b>Notes for Teachers:</b></p> <p>During this session pupils may share personal experiences of loss. These need to be dealt with very sensitively within the class code of conduct.</p>

## Death and Bereavement in Christianity

For Christians, **Good Friday** is when they remember the death of Jesus on the Cross (his **Crucifixion**), and **Easter** Day is when they remember Jesus rising, (his **Resurrection**). Christians believe that when Jesus had risen, it was a promise for a life after death, known as **eternal life** for those who believe in him. (*John 3: 16*)

Christians believe that although death is very sad, living a Christian life means that when they die, Christians will continue the next stage of their journey, sharing the promise of an eternal life with God in Heaven and with those Christians who have passed on before.

In many Christian traditions the priest or minister prays with a person who is dying and anoints them with Holy Oil to help them on their journey to eternal life.

Some Christians wear black after someone dies as an outward sign to sympathise and empathise with the sadness of the occasion. The period of wearing black may differ between culture to culture and denomination to denomination within the Christian faith.

Christians remember the life of the person who they have lost. Although Christians believe that their loved one has gone onto a better and everlasting life, they will still miss them and usually feel very sad.

Christians comfort each other at this time through strong community fellowship; visiting each other and talking with each other about their sense of loss. This experience can differ from church to church. A special service is held for the burial or cremation usually within two weeks of the death. In addition a memorial service may be held as an opportunity for many people to remember and thank God for a person's life. This may be held on the same day or several months later.

Before the service a Christian minister usually visits the bereaved family and helps them talk about their loved one and to choose readings and prayers for the service.

The funeral service is usually held within a church, chapel or crematorium. The Christian family are invited to celebrate the life of the person who has died and say 'Goodbye'. People often show their respect by sending flowers to place on the

coffin and grave, or they may donate money to a charity in the person's memory. The leader of the Christian family, priest, minister or bishop, leads the funeral service. Through prayer, reading, songs and a shared eulogy, Christians are supported to say goodbye to someone who has been part of their family. Christians can only be buried in consecrated ground. Christians may also be cremated and their ashes are either buried or scattered somewhere special to the person who has died and the family.

While earth is sprinkled over the grave, by a faith leader and sometimes by family members, or ashes are scattered, the faith leader will say "Earth to Earth. Ashes to Ashes. Dust to Dust." This reminds Christians that a person's body returns to dust, but the spirit or soul lives on with God.

The time spent at a graveside can differ between culture to culture and denomination to denomination; most Pentecostal church members do not leave immediately, continuing to sing and comfort each other until the coffin is completely buried.

After a funeral service it is customary for the bereaved family and friends to continue to share time, food and drink and to comfort each other. Again the length of this time together can vary between denominations from a few hours on the day of the funeral to nine nights.



*Information Sheet 1 continued*

Families may mark the site of the grave with a gravestone highlighting the life of the person who has died. As part of this an appropriate quote from the Bible with an epitaph about the person may be placed on the gravestone. Some people remember a person in another way such as by placing a plaque on a memorable site or by planting a tree to commemorate the person's life.

The Christian minister will call or visit and offer to keep in contact and provide support for the family after the funeral.

People who are grieving often need to talk about their loved one and the personal loss they feel. Sometimes they need to be told they are allowed to be sad. They may feel lonely, guilty, fearful and even angry. The Christian Church offers friendship, practical support and prayers

All Christians will share beliefs and rituals, but within the Christian faith there is also room for people to express their grief in different ways and to deal with their bereavement personally, knowing that they have the support of their community.

**Helpful Bible Quotations**

*"Jesus said: 'For God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.'"*

John 3:16 (Good News Bible)

*"Jesus said: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'"*

John 14:16 (New International Version)

*"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*

1 Corinthians 13:12 (New International Version)

The 'Committal' from 'Common Worship.' (The Church of England Prayer Book)

*"We have entrusted our brother/sister....to God's mercy, and we now commit his/her body to be cremated/to the ground:*

*Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust: in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our frail bodies that they may be conformed to his glorious body, who died, was buried, and rose again for us. To him be glory for ever. Amen."*

Sessions 4 & 5 Information Sheet

## Death and Bereavement in the Baha'i faith

### Christian Glossary

**Bereavement** – The period that follows when someone has lost someone/something, usually when someone/something has died.

**Bishop** – A name for the leader of the Christian community.

**Burial** – When a person who has died is buried in the earth.

**Chapel** – A Christian place of worship.

**Christian** – A follower of Christianity.

**Church** – A Christian place of worship.

**Coffin** – The container in which the body of the person who has died is placed for burial or cremation.

**Commemorate** – Remembering something.

**Committal** – The prayer that is said at a funeral when Christians pray over committing the body of the person who has died to be cremated/to the ground in the sure and certain hope that the person will be raised to eternal life.

**Consecrated** – Blessed by a priest, bishop or other faith leader.

**Cremation** – When the body of a person who has died is cremated (burned.)

**Crematorium** – The place where a cremation takes place.

**Crucifixion** – When someone is put to death by being placed on a cross and left to die.

**Easter Day** – The greatest festival of Christianity, when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

**Epitaph** – A sentiment or statement about the person who has died which is placed on their gravestone.

**Eternal life** – Everlasting life which Christians have been promised by God that they will have after death.

**Eulogy** – A review of the life of the person who has died. This is shared at the funeral service and may be given either by the Priest or a family member/one of the friends of the person who has died.

**Good Friday** – The Friday before Easter Day when Christians commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus.

**Grave** – The place where a person who has died is buried.

**Gravestone** – A stone that is laid to mark the place where a person who has died is buried. Details about the person's life are written on the gravestone.

**Grief** – A feeling of something missing and emptiness that a person can experience when someone/something close to them has died.

**Grieving** – Enduring the pain that someone can feel when someone/ something close to them has died.

**Holy Oil** – Oil that has been blessed by a priest or bishop and may be used by them in the sacrament of anointing a person who is dying.

**Loss** – A feeling of something missing and the emptiness that a person can experience when someone / something close to them has died.

**Memorial Service** – A religious service that may be held some time after a person has died for their family and friends to celebrate the life of their loved one and in which to remember them.

**Minister** – A name for the leader of the local Christian community.

**Priest** – A name for the leader of the local Christian community.

**Resurrection** – The rising of Jesus from the dead, which forms the basis of Christianity.

**Spirit** – The inner nature of a being, the soul.

**Soul** – The inner nature of a being, the spirit

Bahá'ís believe that human beings have an everlasting soul, which gives them a

natural ability to think deeply, spiritually and morally. They believe that this life is just a tiny part of a never ending journey, that God is beyond human understanding and out of our reach, but that the spiritual journey of the soul is a movement towards the presence of God.

Baha'is believe that this exciting journey begins the instant the mother becomes pregnant and will go on through the baby's life and on into the worlds beyond.

When a baby is inside its mother's womb it cannot understand this physical world, and also we cannot yet understand how our journey will unfold when our physical body dies and our soul is free to continue into other dimensions.

Bahá'ís have very special and powerful prayers to be read when someone is sick or dying and there is also a prayer that can be said if an individual feels sick themselves, to prepare themselves better for death. Bahá'ís believe that it is important to remember those that they love when they say prayers, as the prayer can help them in their spiritual journey after death.

### **The Bahá'í Healing Prayer**

*Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succour in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.*

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

### **Life and Death**

Baha'is believe that the life of an individual begins at conception, when the soul associates itself with the embryo. When death occurs, they believe the body returns to the world of dust, while the soul continues on, to progress in the spiritual worlds of God. They also believe that the soul progresses in the next world through the good deeds performed here on earth and the prayers of family and friends.

Bahá'ís believe that they should be buried. They are buried no more than one hour's journey from the place of their death. The body is washed and then wrapped in cotton or silk and treated with dignity and respect, since it was once the home of the soul. A coffin of fine wood is used and a ring with a special verse is placed on the finger. The verse says, *"I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate."*

The only requirement for the funeral is that a special prayer is read before the body is laid to rest. Bahá'ís are free to include whatever readings or songs they choose, in order to celebrate the life of the person who has died. Often prayers are said for the progress of the soul and also to ask God to help those that are grieving.

Bahá'ís often visit the graves of loved ones and say prayers for the progress of their souls in the next world.

### **The Prayer for the Dead**

*(The Prayer for the Dead is the only Bahá'í prayer that has to be recited in a congregation; it is recited by one believer while all present stand in silence. Bahá'u'lláh clarified that this prayer is required only when the deceased is over the age of fifteen, that its recital must be before the body is put in the grave, and that there is no requirement to face the Qiblah during its recitation. "Alláh-u-Abhá" is said once; then the first of the six verses is recited nineteen times. Then "Alláh-u-Abhá" is said again, followed by the second verse, which is recited nineteen times, and so on.)*

O my God! This is Thy servant and the son of Thy servant who hath believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set his face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee. Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.

Deal with him, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and concealest their faults, as beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounty and the ocean of Thy grace. Grant him admission within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

Let him, then, repeat six times the greeting “Alláh-u-Abhá,” and then repeat nineteen times each of the following verses:

We all, verily, worship God.

We all, verily, bow down before God.

We all, verily, are devoted unto God.

We all, verily, give praise unto God.

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.

We all, verily, are patient in God.

*(If the dead person is a woman, let him say: This is Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden, etc...)*



## Bahá'í Glossary

**'ABDU'L-BAHÁ** - Servant of Bahá: the title given to Abbas Effendi (23 May 1844 - 28 November 1921), eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh. Abdu'l-Bahá travelled to Europe and North America when he was released from prison and came to London, including Woolwich, in 1911 and again in 1913 and gave many talks about the need for unity and peace in the world.

**ALLÁH-U-ABHÁ** - "God is Most Glorious": A very special expression for Bahá'ís.

**BÁB, THE** - The "Gate": title given to Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad (20 October 1819 - 9 July 1850). The Founder of the Bábi Faith, telling of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

**BAHÁ** - Bahá means "Glory."

**BAHÁ'Í** - Literally "one of Glory" or "follower of Bahá'u'lláh."

**BAHÁ'U'LLÁH** - "The Glory of God": title of Mirza Husayn-'Ali Nuri (12 November 1817 - 29 May 1892), Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

In spite of a life of imprisonment and persecution, Bahá'u'lláh wrote thousands of letters and other documents, about 15,000 originals still exist. Bahá'u'lláh is referred to by a variety of titles, including the Blessed Beauty, the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Divine Physician and the Prince of Peace.

**MANIFESTATION OF GOD** - A Bahá'í term for the founders of the major world religions, who are seen as a voice of God. Bahá'í scripture identifies ten

historic individuals as Manifestations: Abraham; Moses; Jesus Christ; Muhammad; Krishna; Zoroaster; Buddha; the Báb; and Bahá'u'lláh.

**MOUNT CARMEL** - A mountain in Haifa, Israel where the Shrine of the Báb and the Bahá'í World Centre are located.

**QIBLIH** - "That which one faces; prayer-direction; point of adoration": The Qiblih for Bahá'ís is the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahji, Israel.

**SHOGHI EFFENDI** - The title of Shoghi Rabbání, the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi was a student at Oxford University. He is buried in the New Southgate Cemetery in North London.

**TWIN HOLY SHRINES** - The Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

## Death and Bereavement in Buddhism

### Death and Bereavement in Buddhism

#### What traditional Buddhists believe

The Buddha taught the Three Signs of Being: that all is constantly changing, including ourselves and the world around us. Because we resist it, as a consequence we suffer unnecessarily. According to the Four Noble Truths, we constantly want to surround ourselves with what we like (things, people and situations), and get rid of what we dislike. This wanting makes us unhappy. This can only stop when we let go of wanting, and we do this by following the teaching of the Buddha – the Noble Eightfold Path.

Awakening to the way things really are and living out of and in accordance with that insight may take many lives. Awakening is also called Enlightenment, and leads to Nirvana, when all sense of separation between you and me, and the world, and the Buddha, comes to an end, and we feel truly at home. Getting off the cycle of birth, death and rebirth takes time and effort, and follows the law of karma: below you can learn about karma.

At the end of our life, we are like a wave falling back into the ocean; and our energy and direction, along with those of all the other waves and currents, will cause another one to come up and take shape.

When we die, our body returns to the earth, but the qualities and attributes of the character we have made for ourselves live on. As a result, we may be reborn as another being, and possibly of a rather different kind (Rebirth, Re-becoming).

#### Karma and Rebirth

As we are all connected together, like members of one big family, we should always be kind to one another.

Buddhists believe that everything we think, say and do has consequences in this life

and our future lives, for ourselves and others.

This is the idea of Karma, which originally meant ‘action’.

For example, when we are angry towards others, we might want to hurt them and make them afraid of us; and we may end up with only a few friends but lots of enemies. Being angry makes us miserable and lonely in this life. Moreover, when an angry type of person dies, they are likely to find themselves reborn among other angry beings, and their thoughts, words and actions have contributed to that.

On the other hand, if we are kind, generous and work for the happiness of others, we will reap the benefits of good Karma, and we may be reborn in one of the happier states. Lots of people talk about Karma but not always the way Buddhists talk about it. Nevertheless, our thoughts, words and actions contribute to determining what will happen after the death of the body.

#### Samsara

The endless cycle of birth and death is called Samsara (which means going around in circles). All beings are trapped in Samsara, until they find the way out of it. When a being is released from Samsara they have ‘attained’ Nirvana.

#### Things Buddhists do for dying people

Buddhists think that it is important for people to die in a peaceful place and state of mind, cared for by those they know and trust. The state of heart and mind of the dying person can have a significant effect on what happens after they die.

Sometimes the dying person will be visited by their Buddhist teachers or good

## Buddhist Glossary

friends, who chant special verses or sutras (chapters of sacred texts). They might also re-affirm some of the vows they made as a Buddhist. Dying people are encouraged to let go of their attachment to this life and be open and present to what is happening. Different Buddhist schools have different ways and rituals for dealing with death and dying.

### After Death

Immediately after death, it is common for Buddhist scriptures to be chanted around the body and for people who were close to the dead person to say farewell and make wishes for them to have a happy rebirth. It is common not to touch the head as it is believed by many that whilst the body looks dead the person is still there and leaves by the head. Ceremonies are performed, and any benefits are dedicated to the dying person to help their journey on to another life.

In Buddhism the body is usually cremated, following the example of the Buddha. The burning up of the body is thought to be important as it shows nothing stays the same and things constantly change. It helps the family and friends realise that their dear one has left this life and cannot return.

In South East Asian and other countries the person who dies is thought to be reborn immediately. In Tibetan and some Mahayana Buddhist schools there is said to be a period of seven weeks between one life and the next. Shin Buddhists hope to be reborn in the Pure Land by invoking Amitabha Buddha, in a happy place full of opportunities for further training where they can achieve Nirvana (final release from the Wheel of Samsara). Some Buddhists do not hold strong views about such beliefs, among these are secular Buddhists.

Sometimes a picture of the dead person is placed on the family altar for weeks or longer.

Memorial services might be held a month after of someone's death, and/or on the annual anniversary, to remind us of the departed, and to express our gratitude to our long line of ancestors, because we owe them our life and culture.

### Some resources:

#### **The Story of Kisa Gotami and the Mustard seed :** **Animation from ISKON Desire Tree:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj7kNfzXvJE>

#### **Clear Vision text:**

<https://www.clear-vision.org/Files/Kisa%20Gotami.rtf>

#### **The Mountains of Tibet by Mordicai Gerstein**

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Mountains-Tibet-Mordicai-Gerstein/dp/1782850473/ref=sr\\_l\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1522188547&sr=1-l&keywords=the+mountains+of+tibet](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Mountains-Tibet-Mordicai-Gerstein/dp/1782850473/ref=sr_l_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1522188547&sr=1-l&keywords=the+mountains+of+tibet)

A Tibetan woodcutter dreams of exploring the world, but is too busy with his life to ever leave his valley. After he dies, he is taken on a journey through the cosmos and all the places on Earth as he makes choices that lead him to a new life. First published in 1993.

#### **Buddhanet Jataka Tales**

[http://www.buddhanet.net/bt\\_l\\_conts.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/bt_l_conts.htm)

[http://www.buddhanet.net/bt\\_conts.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/bt_conts.htm)

e-book: <https://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/budtale1.htm>

**Asura and asura realm** – 'jealous deity' – one of the six realms

**Being** – Every kind of living thing, apart from plants.

**Bhavachakra** - Wheel of Life

## Death and Bereavement in Hinduism

**Deva** – ‘God’ – one of the six realms. A bit like Heaven, but doesn’t last.

**Karma** – Actions with a strong intention that influence not only the current life, but also future rebirths.

**Naraka** – ‘Hell’ – one of the six realms. Like hell, but doesn’t last.

**Preta** – ‘Spirit’ or ‘Hungry Ghost’ – one of the six realms.

**Punabhavana** - rebecoming. Buddhist belief that there is no permanent self or soul which travels from one existence to another\*(or is reincarnated). All life changes from moment to moment and that rebirth is a major form of that change

**Pure Land** – ‘Buddha Realm’. A kind of temporary heaven presided over by a Buddha, where people can go further on the Buddhist path.

**Rebirth** – The process by which beings are endlessly born into one of the six realms. The traditional Sanskrit words for this are *Bhavana* which means ‘becoming’ or *Jati* which is ‘birth’.

**Samsara** – The endless cycle or wheel of birth and death, driven by the actions of beings (karma).

**Six Realms** – The six realms cover all the possible kinds of beings that exist in the universe. None of these realms are permanent.

[http://buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b\\_gloss2.htm](http://buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b_gloss2.htm)

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/glossary.html>





## Hindu Funeral

Hinduism teaches that God is within each being and object in the universe and also transcends every being and object. It teaches that the essence of each soul is divine, and that the purpose of life is to become aware of that divine essence.

When someone dies, the individual soul has no beginning and no end. It may pass to another through reincarnation, depending on someone's karma. Karma is the consequences of one's actions over lifetimes – not just the most recent one. If the soul has realised the true nature of reality, it may become one with the Brahman, the "One."

Most Hindus choose to die at home, surrounded by family and loved ones who will keep vigil till the cremation which is usually 24 hours after death (in India)

### Organ Donation

Organ donation is acceptable for Hindus, as there are no Hindu laws prohibiting organ or tissue donation.

### Antyesti - Funeral Traditions in Hinduism

Although death is a sad occasion, Hindus believe in reincarnation and see death as a transition bringing the soul closer to nirvana (heaven), so funerals tend to have an atmosphere of hope and joy as well as sadness for the loss of a relative or friend. Funerals are usually conducted by a priest and by the eldest son of the person who has died. Hindus are always cremated, believing that this releases the soul from its earthly existence. Traditionally, all Hindus - except babies, children, and saints - are cremated.

In a traditional Hindu funeral, there are certain things that happen, including:

- A lamp (Diya) is placed by the head of the body
- Prayers and hymns being sung
- Pindas (rice balls) placed in the coffin

- Water (Gangajal) sprinkled on the body
- A 'mala' - a necklace of wooden beads - is put around the dead person's neck. Garlands of flowers may also be added.

Hindus always have an open casket, and a priest or "karta" will preside over the proceedings. Hymns and mantras are recited, offerings are made to ancestors and gods.

### The Venue for the Funeral Ceremony

Outside India, funerals normally take place in a crematorium. Hindus believe that when a body is burned, the fire frees the soul so that it can be reincarnated and the flames represent Brahma, the Hindu god of creation.

A Hindu funeral service that precedes the cremation is unlikely to be contained within a crematorium chapel due to the time constraints and the importance of a procession to pass places of significance to the deceased. Hence, here in UK people hold the service in a temple or family home, and then go on for a committal at the crematorium.

### Traditional Funeral Practices

Family members will pray around the body as soon as possible after death. People will try to avoid touching the corpse as it is considered polluting. The corpse is usually bathed and dressed in white, traditional Indian clothes. If a wife dies before her husband she is dressed in red bridal clothes. If a woman is a widow she will be dressed in white or pale colours.

The funeral procession may pass places of significance to the deceased, such as a building or street. Prayers are said here and at the entrance to the crematorium.

The body is decorated with sandalwood, flowers and garlands. Scriptures are read from the Vedas or Bhagavad Gita. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or male, will light some kindling and circle the body, praying for the wellbeing of the departing soul.

Traditional Hindu families may choose to witness the start of the cremation process, and observe the committal of the coffin into the cremation furnace, reflecting the customs and practices in the Indian Subcontinent.

### **Post Funeral Reception**

Upon returning home, all family members will bathe and change into fresh clothes. Then the family will gather for a meal. A priest may visit the family at home and purify the house

### **The Cremated Remains**

Afterwards, the ashes of the dead person are sprinkled over flowing water. Many people take the ashes to India to put on the waters of the Ganges; others may take them to the sea near to where they live.

### **After the Funeral Service**

After the cremation, the family may have a meal and offer prayers in their home. Mourners wash and change completely before entering the house after the funeral. A priest will visit and purify the house with spices and incense. This is the beginning of the 13-day mourning period when friends will visit and offer their condolences. Often, a garland of dried or fake flowers is placed around a photograph of the deceased to show respect for their memory. On the thirteenth day the samskara ends with Kriya. During this ceremony, rice balls (pindar) and milk are offered to the dead person to show gratitude for his or her life.

### **Memorial Services**

A memorial service is held 31 days after death, during which a number of rituals are performed.

'Shradh' is practiced one year after the death of the person. This can either be an annual event or a large one-off event. This is the Hindu practice of giving food to the

poor in memory of the deceased. A priest will say prayers for the deceased and during this time (usually lasting one month) the family will not buy any new clothes or attend any parties. Sons are responsible for carrying out Shradh.

## Hinduism Glossary

**Auspicious** – Lucky

**Chief mourner** – Either the eldest or the youngest son or the nearest male relative

**Cremation** – Burning

**Homa** – Fire used in worship

**Kumbhas** – Brass water pots

**Mangalsutra** – Wedding pendant

**Pinda** – Rice-ball

**Reincarnation** – Rebirth into a new body for another life

**Shradh** – Hindu ritual of treating people to feasts in the name of the deceased

**Sindoor** – Marriage mark



## Death and Bereavement in the Humanist Belief system

### Death

Humanists believe that this is the one life we have. They believe that there are no gods, no heaven or hell, and that we no longer exist as people once we have died.

They believe that their bodies, or the atoms that make up their bodies, will continue to exist as part of the natural world. However, the person themselves will live on only in other people's memories, or in the work they have done while alive and left behind them, or in their children.

Many humanists, like many people, would prefer not to die. However, they believe that wanting something to be true is not the same as it being true. They believe that death is a natural part of life, and because we can't avoid that, it makes sense to try not to be afraid of it, but instead to come to terms with it. Then we can focus on finding meaning and purpose in the here and now. For humanists, life is all the more precious because it comes to an end. Humanists have no expectation of reward or punishment after death. The main thing is to try to lead good and happy lives now, while we are alive, and to help other people do the same. We don't get another chance.

Humanists think that really important questions for all of us are 'How can I live a fulfilled and worthwhile life? How can I help others to do this? Asking the question "What would I like to be remembered for when I am dead?" helps people to think about the answers to these questions.

### When a person is dying

Because humanists do not believe in gods or an afterlife, they believe that the important things to do when somebody is dying are the 'humane' things: supporting and comforting them as far as possible, alleviating their suffering, listening to and

respecting their wishes as far as possible, helping their close relatives and friends who may also be suffering.

### When someone dies

When someone they know dies, most people feel grief, sadness, shock, pain and possibly other emotions such as anger, guilt, or remorse. If they were close to the dead person, these emotions can be even more overwhelming.

Humanists believe that this is true for religious and non-religious people alike. The natural human response is to comfort, or seek comfort from, those around us, and humanists will do this in whatever way comes most naturally to them. This could include staying close, or 'being there' for someone; showing respect for the dead person; practical help; or simple expressions of sympathy.

### A Humanist funeral or memorial ceremony

Humanism has no rules about what should be done with the body of the person who has died, other than legal requirements. The body may be cremated, or buried, or even, if the person has left instructions, donated to medical science. There may be a funeral, or there may be a memorial ceremony separate from this.

A humanist funeral is a positive celebration of a person's life, specially created for that person and their family, with music, readings and time to reflect.

It will

- focus sincerely and affectionately on the person who has died
- allow friends, relatives and acquaintances to express their feelings and to share their memories
- celebrate the life of the person who has died by paying tribute to them, to the life they lived, the connections they made and left behind.

It will usually include:

- Music that is in some way connected to the dead person: for example songs they liked, or that reminds their friends of them
- Family or friends' memories or stories about the dead person.
- A eulogy: a talk focussing on the achievements of the dead person, and the meaning of their life.
- A brief period for quiet reflection. There will often be religious people amongst the mourners, and this can be a chance for them to offer their own private prayers if they wish.
- It may also include readings of poetry and prose, a non-religious reflection on death, or symbolic actions like candle lighting, or formal words of goodbye.

It may be conducted by a trained humanist celebrant, or by family or friends themselves.

Humanists believe that a funeral like this helps the bereaved in their grief, and helps us all to come to terms with the cycle of life and death

## Death and Bereavement in Judaism

After a person has died, the same respect is shown for them as when they were alive. The body is not left alone at any time. A 'watch' is kept from the time of death until the funeral. Funerals in the Jewish tradition are held within a day or two of death except for **Shabbat**. The dead are always buried in the ground. Observant Jews do not use cremation.

At the House of Mourning, all shiny surfaces such as mirrors and TVs are covered. This is so that the mourners are not tempted to look at themselves, but think of their departed one.

To show that we are all equal in death, Jewish people are buried in a plain cloth Shroud. Men are buried in their **Tallit** (Prayer Shawl) over the Shroud. Coffins are plain, with no decoration or adornments, and made of wood. It is not usual to have flowers at a Jewish funeral.

The Mourners (**Aveylim**) at a funeral would be parents, brothers, sisters, children and husband or wife of the deceased.

One custom before the funeral is to 'Make **Kriah**'. A piece of clothing of each Mourner is cut by a friend, relative or by the Rabbi, and then torn further by the Mourner.

The funeral service is aimed at honouring the deceased, and not at comforting the mourners. The service mostly consists of chanting of Psalms.

After the coffin is lowered in to the ground, first the Mourners, and then all those present who wish to, are invited to put earth into the grave. It helps all concerned to accept the death of the relative or friend. There are two parts of the final goodbye; respect for the deceased, and comfort for the mourners.

Before re-entering the Prayer Hall it is customary for all those who have been on the 'grounds' of the cemetery to wash their hands. Water is a symbol of life and this shows that death is not the end, and that life, for the living, must go on.

If there are ten men present (a **Minyan** or quorum), the service in the Cemetery will conclude with the Mourners reciting the Mourners' Prayer, or **Kaddish**. This prayer declares the greatness of God, and the acceptance of his will.

On taking their leave of the mourners, visitors wish each Mourner a 'Long Life'. This is one of the ways Jewish people tell each other to 'move on', and not let grief take over their lives. Concern is for the living, while showing respect for the dead.

It is considered to be an exceptional 'good deed' (Mitzvah) to accompany the dead to their final resting place. This is because no reward from the recipient can possibly be expected or given.

On return from the Cemetery, the Mourners eat a special 'meal', consisting of a hard-boiled egg, a baigel, and a piece of salt herring. This is called the 'Meal of Consolation'. The significance of these foods is as follows:

- the egg has no beginning or end, as mankind has no beginning or end;
- the baigel, as bread is the staff of life, the sentiment that life must go on;
- the salt herring reminds us of tears.

*Session 4 and 5 Information Sheet 3 continued*

After the funeral, a week of mourning is observed. This period is called **Shiva** meaning seven (days). During this time, a memorial candle is kept alight, the Mourners do not work, or beautify themselves, they do not cook or clean, they sit on low chairs, and wear slippers, not leather shoes. Friends and relatives come to the house to speak to them, comfort them, and bring them food.

Prayers are held at the Shiva House for the week of mourning, except for Shabbat, when they are said in the Synagogue. The Kaddish prayer is said by the Mourners at each of these services, as long as there is the required Minyan. For thirty days after the funeral, Mourners do not go to parties, listen to music, watch TV, cut their hair, or shave their beards. They continue to say Kaddish in the Synagogue, at all services. If they are mourning the loss of a parent, these prayers will continue for one year.

On the anniversary of the death of a relative according to the Jewish calendar, the Mourner lights a candle in their home, which burns for 24 hours. The Mourner also says the Kaddish prayer in the Synagogue.

It is customary to dedicate a memorial stone at the grave at the end of a year.

### **References**

**The Jewish Book of Why? by Albert Kolach**

**<http://www.mazornet.com/mazornet/deathandmourning/>**

Jewish Perspective of Death and Mourning.



## Jewish Glossary

**Aveylim** – Mourner

**Bet aveyl** – House of mourning

**Kaddish** – Mourners prayer or memorial prayer

**Kriah** – Cutting of mourners clothes

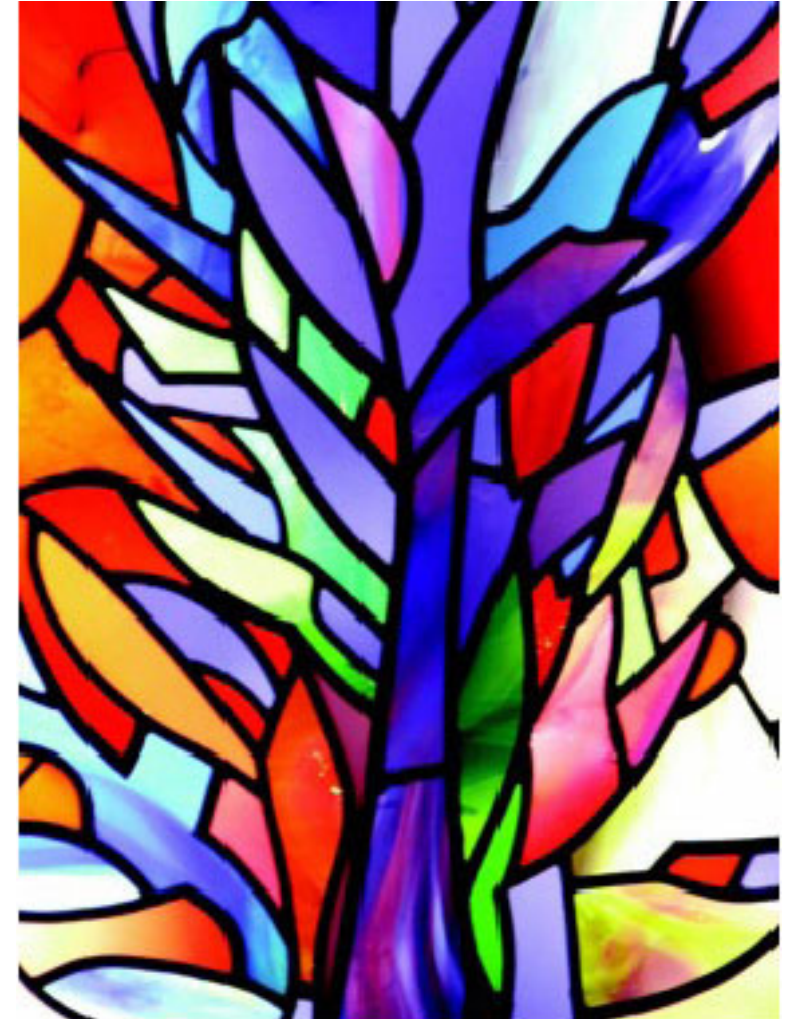
**Minyan** – Quorum of ten men (over 13 yrs. and one day)

**Mitzvah** – Good deed

**Shiva** – Seven days of intense mourning

**Shloshim** – Thirty days of mourning

**Tallit** – Prayer shawl





## Death and Bereavement in the Muslim Faith

For Muslims, the purpose of life and death and of the afterlife in Islam is explained in the Qur'an. For a Muslim, death is the return of the soul to their Creator, Allah, and so the inevitability of death and the hereafter is never far from the Muslim's mind.

### When a Muslim is dying

Family members of the dying person and their good Muslim friends should be informed and should support him or her in reminding them of Allah. They encourage the dying person very gently to be sorry for all that he or she has done wrong, remind him or her about all the good things that he or she has done, about Allah's mercy, and of Allah's forgiveness. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Let no Muslim die except expecting and hoping the best from Allah."

### What should be done when someone dies?

Muslims are recommended to do the following when someone dies:

- advise the dying person to say: "La ilaha illa-Allah";
- to lay the dying person so that the Qibla is on his right side;
- when the person has died, close their eyes and cover them;
- prepare the body for burial without delay, as soon as death is confirmed by a doctor;
- settle any debts of the dead person.

### Informing Family and Friends

Muslims tell the family, friends, and other good people when someone dies so that they can attend the funeral. It is a Muslim's duty to offer condolences, comfort, and sympathy to the family and the relatives of the deceased.

### Grieving

Muslims are agreed that crying and grieving for the dead is good, but it is not acceptable to be angry with Allah for the person's death. It is allowed and acceptable for a Muslim to be sad and grieve for as long as they want to and as long as they need. However people are encouraged to restrict loud and outward mourning.

### Preparation of the Deceased

Wherever someone dies, it is very important that the body is taken to the mosque as soon as possible, with all the necessary papers. Muslims have been taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. Cremation is forbidden. Rather, the body is cleaned "washed or bathed", scented, and covered with a clean cloth for burial. There are certain steps in the preparation of a Muslim's body for burial, these are:-

- Ghusul - This involves a ritual washing like wudu and then there is a complete washing of the whole body. Male bodies are washed by a man and female bodies are washed by a woman, these will normally be close relations.
- Kafan - This is the shroud that is used to wrap the body of the person who has died. The kafan must be wrapped around the body at least three times overlapped. These could be the Muslim's Hajj robes.

Session 4 and 5 Information Sheet 4 continued

### The Funeral

Praying for the person who has died and having funeral prayers in the mosque, Salat-ul-Janazah, are essential in Islam. The Muslim starts his or her life with a call to prayer and life is concluded with a prayer, so all of life is seen as an act of worship. The congregation pray to ask Allah to forgive the dead person's sins, have mercy on him or her and to grant them a place in Jannah.

### Burial

The body should be buried by Muslims as soon as possible in a Muslim cemetery and the body should be turned towards the Qibla. Generally graves should be simple. People may visit them afterwards to pray for the person who has died and to remember that there is an end to earthly life but also to reflect on the life after death.

### Bereavement

The initial bereavement period lasts for three days, during which prayers in the home are recited almost continuously. Shoes are taken off before entering the house of the bereaved, and it is customary to cover one's head when talking about the person who has died. People often sit on the carpet to pass on their condolences. Traditionally, black clothes or veils are not worn during bereavement - most people wear plain simple clothes with no make-up or jewellery.

“**Allah** has created life and death as a test to see who is the better in conduct.”

From The Qur'an, Sura 67:2



## Muslim Glossary

**Allah** – God, in Arabic.

**Ghusul** – Washing of the dead body.

**Hajj** – Pilgrimage to Makkah. Hajj Robes are the robes worn by men during the Hajj. Women do not wear Hajj robes.

**Jannah** – This is paradise, a place that Muslims believe has been prepared as a reward for those who have lived a good life. ‘A good life’ means one that Allah considers good.

**Kafan** – Shroud used for wrapping the dead body.

**“La ilaha illa-Allah”** – “There is no god but Allah.”

**Qibla** – Towards Makkah.

**Qur’an** – The final revealed message from God.

**Salah-ul-Janazah** – The funeral prayers.

**Wudu** – Ritual washing before prayer.



## Death and Bereavement in the Sikh Faith

### Sacred Text

This text tells Sikhs to behave well in this life, so that when they die they will be able to stay with God and escape reincarnation.

*‘Strive to seek that for which you have come into the world, find through the grace of the Guru, God will dwell in your heart. You will abide in His presence, in comfort and in peace and not return ever to be born and to die once more.’*

Guru Arjan

### The Long Sleep

Many Sikhs believe in reincarnation. They believe that death is the start of a long sleep for the soul, before it sets out on a new life. Sikhs believe that death is part of the cycle of life and is what happens before you set out on a new life.

Each life teaches new lessons and brings a soul closer to God. Good deeds will bring you nearer to God and bad deeds will push you away from him and that you will just stay in the cycle of life and death and not towards freedom.

Sikhs believe that souls are rewarded for good deeds and that when all lessons are learned God will free them from the need to experience another life. Then they will be able to join God and be liberated (mukti) from the cycle of birth and death.

The Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, says that mukti can only be achieved by living a God-conscious life, where everything you do is guided by the word of God. Sikhs believe that the only things that you carry with you when you die are good deeds. (See Guru Nahak’s story of the Rich Man and the Needle.)

### What happens when a Sikh dies?

When a Sikh dies the evening prayer is said and everyone remembers God by saying ‘Waheguru!’ meaning ‘Wonderful Lord’.

Everyone is treated equally in Sikhism because Sikhs believe that everyone is of equal importance and was created by one and the same God, so no matter how wealthy or powerful a Sikh may be in this life, his or her funeral will be the same as

the poorest Sikh’s. Sikhs believe in cremation, not burial, as the body that is left is just a shell for which the soul has no more use. The cremation should take place as soon as possible, and in India it usually happens on the same day as the death, or the next day.

Before the cremation, the body is washed, traditionally yoghurt and water are used. It is then dressed in new clothes, including the Five Ks – the symbols of the Sikh faith: shorts, uncut hair, sword, bracelet and a comb. The body is then placed on a bier or in a coffin and covered with a plain cloth. It is brought home on the way to the funeral so that friends and relations can pay their respects to the dead person one last time.

When a death occurs, the family and friends make arrangements to read the Guru Granth Sahib. This can either be read whenever the bereaved wish or continuously (Akhand Path). The continuous reading takes approximately 48 hours to complete. Sometimes the Guru Granth Sahib is read over a week or more.

*Session 4 and 5 Information Sheet 5 continued*

### **The Funeral**

On the way to the place where the cremation takes place, the body is taken to the Gurdwara for prayers. It is not usually taken inside the building, the prayers are said outside the building. Then a procession takes the body to the funeral ground where it will be cremated.

Once they arrive, the friends and relations say a general prayer over the coffin. This is the concluding prayer (Keertan Sohila), and this is the same prayer which is said every night when the Guru Granth Sahib is placed in its resting place in the Gurdwara. At the cremation site the funeral pyre is lit. This is usually done by the eldest son. If the cremation takes place in a crematorium, the nearest relative will indicate when the cremation should begin. After the cremation, everyone returns to the Gurdwara for the Bhog service, in which Shabads (hymns) from the Guru Granth Sahib are recited and sung.

Everyone shares Karah parshad, a sweet which symbolizes equality of all humans, and they have a meal in the community kitchen, or langar. Both of these rituals symbolize equality to Sikhs. They also remind everyone that life must go on for those left behind. Sikhs often give money to charity at this time.

### **Helping the Family**

After the cremation, friends visit the bereaved family for the next two weeks, to pay their respects and provide support. This may be longer if it is a young person who has died or it is an unexpected death. They talk together about the dead person, share happy memories about their lives with that person and help around the home. Sikhs believe that by sharing their grief with each other, the amount of grief will be halved. This will help bring the community together and may heal any family conflicts that existed before the person died.

Sikhs believe that although everyone will miss the deceased, death should not be sad. The dead person has learned the lessons he or she was meant to learn in life and will move on nearer to God.

### **The Final Farewell**

In Sikhism it is forbidden to erect a tomb of memorial to a dead person because Sikhs do not believe that the body is of any use after the soul has left it. In India, therefore, after a cremation many families arrange for the dead person's ashes to be taken to Kiratpur near Anandpur Sahib. There they are sprinkled onto the waters of a river. Sikhs living outside India that cannot arrange to travel there for this purpose will still arrange for the ashes to be scattered onto flowing water in the local river or sea.

## Sikh Glossary

**Akhand Path** – The 48 hour continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib

**Bhog** – Food offering

**Guru Granth Sahib** – Last and everlasting Guru, Sikh holy book

**Karah parshad** – A sweet pudding which symbolizes equality of all humans

**Keertan Sohila** – Concluding prayer of the day for Sikhs

**Langar** – Food prepared and shared in the community kitchen

**Mukti** – Liberation

**Shabads** – Hymns

**Waheguru** – Wonderful Lord



## Session 4 and 5 Research Sheet

Make some notes for your feedback under the name of faith or belief.

1. Which faith or belief are you studying?	
2. Where do people of this community believe they go after death?	
3. What can you find out about that place?	
4. In this belief what does it teach about how this life influences what happens to believers after death?	
5. What rituals or traditions are used by members of this faith or belief when someone has died?	
6. Are there any special ways that this faith or belief community has helped people to remember someone who has die?	

## Session 6 Resource Sheet

### **From “Badger’s Parting Gifts”**

“Although Badger was no longer with his friends, he had given each of them a special memory of him.

He wanted them to help each other using these gifts.

Even though Mole and his friends felt lost, alone and unhappy, in time their sadness melted like the winter snow.

They remembered the joyful moments they had shared with Badger and all that he had taught them, and they felt thankful that they had known him. As he had left them he had felt free and happy, not afraid.”

*By Susan Varley*

