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Shaping the Future of Shipping

Faith and Burial for Seafarers

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The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) is the global trade association representing national shipowners' associations from Asia, the Americas and Europe and more than 80% of the world merchant fleet.

Established in 1921, ICS is concerned with all aspects of maritime affairs particularly maritime safety, environmental protection, maritime law, employment affairs and trade.

ICS enjoys consultative status with the UN International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Organization (ILO).

1 Introduction

Over the last few years and particularly since the start of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic there has been an increase in cases of shipping companies finding it difficult to repatriate the bodies or ashes of deceased seafarers quickly enough, in accordance with the wishes of their next of kin.

Any actions taken in the event of a death should respect the religious beliefs and customs of seafarers and their families.

This Guide aims to:

- Provide advice to companies on the issues concerned, and on the requirements and customs of various faiths, to be factored into any decisions taken;
- Recommend practical steps which can be taken in the unfortunate instance of a death on board a ship; and
- Help anyone involved in decisions affecting the repatriation of a deceased seafarer including ships' Masters, agents, funeral directors in ports, welfare agencies, government officials, shipowners, unions and seafarers' families.

ILO Maritime Labour Convention 2006

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Maritime Labour Convention 2006 is a single, coherent instrument, embodying up-to-date standards of existing international maritime labour conventions and recommendations, and fundamentals from other international labour conventions. The instrument was “designed to secure the widest possible acceptability among governments, shipowners and seafarers committed to the principles of decent work... for effective implementation and enforcement”.

MLC Article IV states that “Every seafarer has a right to health protection, medical care, welfare measures and other forms of social protection.” This includes measures in relation to the death of a seafarer during their contractual period.

Regulation 4.1 – Medical Care on Board Ship and Ashore

Purpose: To protect the health of seafarers and ensure their prompt access to medical care on board ship and ashore.

Guideline B4.1.4 – Medical assistance to other ships and international cooperation

Parties to the MLC 2006 should give due consideration to participating in international cooperation in assisting with medical care. This includes arranging for the repatriation of the bodies or ashes of deceased seafarers, in accordance with the wishes of their next of kin and as soon as practicable. The Convention also makes clear that any actions taken should respect the religious beliefs and customs of seafarers.

This Guide aims to help shipping companies with this by summarising the key requirements and religious practices.



2 Management of death at sea

The information in this section is taken from a practical guide sheet for Masters prepared by the Marine Advisory Medical Service for the Standard P&I Club.

Never consider anyone to be dead until you and others agree that:

- Breathing has stopped. Listen with your ear right over the nose and mouth. You should feel no air coming out and should see no chest and abdominal movement. A mirror held in front of the nose and mouth will form mist by moisture in exhaled breath in life, but no misting will occur in death;
- The heart has stopped. No pulse will be felt, and no heart sounds will be heard. Place your ear on the left side of the chest near the nipple and listen carefully. If you are unsure what to listen for, listen to the left chest of a living person first. To test if circulation has stopped, tie a piece of string tightly around a finger. In life the finger becomes bluish, but in death it remains white. Slight pressure on the fingernail or lip in life will cause the area to become pale and the colour is regained when pressure is stopped. In death, this will not occur; and
- The person looks dead. The eyes become dull and the skin pale. The pupils are large and shining a bright light into the eyes does not make them get smaller.

While each sign is not infallible, combined they will help you decide what to do.

2.1 Mistaken death

A person who has taken large doses of certain drugs, usually sedatives or tranquillisers, or is suffering from hypothermia, may appear dead but could still be alive. Check carefully for shallow breathing, a pulse and heart sounds, as described above. Being aware of these possibilities may prevent a mistake being made. The circumstances surrounding the death may also help you to decide whether a drug overdose or hypothermia are possible.

2.2 Cause of death

It is important to try to establish the reasons for death which comprise two main groups: natural causes and illnesses/injuries, either accidental or non-accidental.

If the person has been ill on board, consult the records of the nature and progress of the illness and of any treatment given, and keep these records carefully for any further enquiries.

Record all telemedicine consultations.

Similarly, in the case of injuries, investigate and record the circumstances of the incident resulting in the injury or injuries. Carefully preserve notes of the investigations and medical records.

Medico-legal enquiries will subsequently be necessary even when there may appear to be no apparent criminal or suspicious circumstances surrounding a death. In cases of unusual death, sudden or unknown, or of potential criminal intent, a pathologist will perform a post-mortem examination.



2.3 Procedure after death

It is usually possible to keep the body on board until examination by a pathologist at a port. Make sure that every effort is made to retain and preserve the body until reaching the next port of call. It is vital to gather and preserve all the evidence of what happened.

When handling the deceased

- Avoid direct contact with the blood or body fluids from the deceased;
- Observe strict personal hygiene and put on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves, a water resistant gown/plastic apron over a water repellent gown and a surgical mask. Use goggles or a face shield to protect your eyes if there could be splashes from bodily fluids;
- Cover any wounds with waterproof bandages or dressings;
- Remove PPE after handling the deceased; and
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water immediately.

Before preparing the deceased

- Use a camera to take photographs to help illustrate how the death may have occurred for any investigation. All images should remain 'in confidence' and be treated in line with any company standard operating procedures (SOPs);
- Strip the body of all clothing, ideally without tearing or cutting it. Write a brief description of each article and note any initials or names on the garments;
- Any papers, wallet, money, or other articles should be listed. Any wet articles which are wet should be dried but not laundered, and placed into plastic bags, sealed, labelled, and kept in a safe place for handing over to the consulate, police, or other authorities at the next port. When handing over clothing and other articles, check each item against the list and get a receipt from the person to whom they are delivered. Any other possessions of the deceased should be treated similarly. If there is going to be a slight delay before reaching port, leave everything undisturbed; and
- If it is essential to bury the body before examination by a pathologist, examine the body carefully (photographs can help) and record the following data:
 - Race;
 - Skin colour;
 - Approximate or known age;
 - Height – straighten out the body with the legs fully extended. Make two marks on the deck, one in line with the heels, the other in line with the top of the head. Measure and record the distance between the lines;
 - Development of the body – note if fat, thin, wasted, muscular, etc.;
 - Inspect the head and face – record the length and colour of the hair; note the eyebrows and describe any facial hair. Describe the complexion (for example, sunburned; pale; florid; sallow). Record the eye colour and shape of the nose. Open the mouth and examine the teeth, noting if they are sound, decayed, or missing. Remove, clean and place dentures with items kept for future examination;
 - Inspect the rest of the body – record all birthmarks, moles, scars, or deformities from injuries. Note the exact position of all scars and describe their length and width. Use a diagram. Note if circumcised and if there are any vaccination scars;
 - Describe tattoos and note any words or letters. Record their size, position, general appearance and colour;



- Note wounds and bruises. Try to decide whether they could explain the death. Note their exact position, depth and dimensions. Describe their character – clean cuts from a knife, ragged tears or bullet wounds. Note any skin blackening or singeing of clothing around any entrance of a bullet wound. Seek the exit wound of a bullet (always bigger than an entry wound). Feel under the skin for any bullet lodged and note its position. Look carefully for bruising or any escape of blood as shown by clots, staining of the surrounding skin, on clothing or around the body. This will help to distinguish injuries caused during life which bleed, from those caused after death which do not;
- Note any broken bones;
- Record external signs such as boils, ulcers, varicose veins, or rashes; and
- Remember to have all observational notes countersigned, and to make all appropriate entries in the official logbook.

2.4 Suspected suicide

In a case of suspected suicide, a full detailed report should be made which includes:

- Any expression of intent, any reasons, circumstantial or otherwise given for the seafarer's altered state of mind;
- Any letters or suicide notes, which should be retained by the Master as key evidence;
- Reports made by each crew member who may have evidence for the death;
- Records of any dialogue and intervention made, including any telemedicine facility; and
- Records which are contemporaneous and accurate. Images should be taken of the body identified at the time of death/discovery.

2.5 Body positioning

- Lay the deceased on their back, straighten their limbs (if possible) with their arms lying by their sides;
- Place a pillow under the head to support alignment and help the mouth stay closed;
- Close the eyes by applying light pressure for 30 seconds;
- Clean the mouth to remove debris and secretions;
- Plug oral, nasal, and rectal orifices to prevent leakage of body fluids;
- Clean and replace dentures as soon as possible after death if necessary. If they cannot be replaced, send them with the body in a clearly identified receptacle;
- Support the jaw by placing a pillow or rolled up towel underneath the chin;
- Personal items/jewellery: With another person, remove the jewellery and document it;
- Be aware of religious ornaments that should remain with the deceased;
- Secure any remaining rings with minimal tape; and
- Clearly identify the deceased person with a name band on their wrist or ankle. As a minimum, the identification needs to identify their name, date of birth and address.



2.6 Body removal

Wrap the deceased in a bed sheet/linen. Ideally, they should be placed in a robust and leak-proof transparent plastic bag of not less than 150 cm thick, which should be zipped closed.

A deceased person who is soiled with blood or body fluids should be placed in a disposable plastic bag instead of linen. A secondary robust opaque body bag should be used with carry handles to ensure that the bag can be safely removed to refrigeration. Attach an appropriate identity label to the body bag before transporting it to the temporary 'on board mortuary.'

2.7 Body storage

When the unexpected death of a crew member occurs at sea, steps must be taken to preserve the body and show respect for the deceased and their family. Appropriate contact with family members by shoreside personnel is important and proper procedures for handling the body must be implemented. This is particularly critical if the ship is days or weeks from arriving at a port where the body can be disembarked.

Companies should provide their ships with advice on how to handle the body.

Do not place the body in the freezer

It is a common misconception that the best way to preserve a dead body is to freeze it. When a body is frozen, the tissues dehydrate and the body develops freezer burn, causing the skin to discolour. This can make it impossible for family members to recognise the deceased and may make interpretation of any pre-mortem injuries difficult. Efforts should be made to minimise distress to family members, who will clearly be going through an exceedingly difficult and emotional time.

Rapid freezing of bodies can also cause post-mortem injury, including cranial fracture.

Handling bodies when they are frozen can cause fractures, which will negatively influence the investigation and make medico-legal interpretation of examination results difficult.

It takes about three days for a frozen body to thaw before an autopsy can take place, and the body will decompose much more quickly than if it had been refrigerated. There is a danger of losing vital information if the body is frozen rather than refrigerated.

Store the body in the refrigerator

If it is anticipated that the body will not be stored on board for longer than two months, then the body should be refrigerated. In the unlikely event that a body must be stored on board for longer than two months, then freezing or embalming may be necessary. The P&I Club should be involved in all decision-making if it is necessary to store a body on board for a lengthy period.

Whenever possible, the body should be retained for post-mortem examination and for burial ashore by the family. For the sake of the deceased person's relatives, it should be preserved in the best possible condition, and kept in a suitable and secure place.

The body should be placed in a body bag and stored in a refrigerator or cold store, set aside for that purpose, at approximately 4° Celsius/39° Fahrenheit. Do not allow the body to be stored at temperatures below +2°C. Store off the cold chamber floor, if possible, with the identity label visible on the outside of the body bag.



2.8 Disposal of the body

- Retain for post-mortem examination;
- Liaise with the consular authorities for the national jurisdiction; and
- Liaise with the ship's agents in the next port to formalise the disembarking of the body.

2.9 Summary of immediate actions

Whenever possible a body should be retained for post-mortem examination or for burial ashore, to help the deceased person's relatives. If there should be a delay in reaching port, make sure that the body is kept in the best possible condition:

- Thoroughly wash and dry the body all over;
- Comb out and part the hair and pay attention to fingernails;
- Straighten the arms and legs and interlock the fingers over the thighs;
- Tie the ankles together to keep the feet perpendicular;
- Empty the bladder by firm pressure over the lower abdomen; and
- Place the body in a body bag and keep in a refrigerator or cold store set aside for this purpose. The body should not be frozen but stored at about 4°C. An alternative, if near port, is to lay the naked body on ice in a bath and cover it with plenty more ice.

2.10 Family and crew concerns

Following a death at sea there are likely be emotional responses from family and fellow crew members. Once the family has been notified of the death, religious or cultural customs may be requested. The sections below identify the different requirements for various faiths listed in alphabetical order.

Where a seafarer has died during a ship's voyage, the Member in whose territory the death has occurred or, where the death has occurred on the high seas, into whose territorial waters the ship next enters, shall facilitate the repatriation of the body or ashes by the shipowner, in accordance with the wishes of the seafarer or their next of kin, as appropriate.

If possible, it may be beneficial to have a priest, minister, or grief counsellor visit the crew on arrival at a port, particularly in cases of suicide.

The body should not be disposed of at sea unless there is a specific written request to do so from the family. Death at sea is difficult for crew members and family ashore. All parties should aspire to respect and preserve the remains, while maintaining traditional customs. With insurer and shipowner co-operation, the right process can ensure a dignified outcome if a crew member should die unexpectedly at sea.



3 Religious practices

3.1 Baha'i

Baha'i funeral services normally occur within two or three days after the death. Funeral customs and practices include:

- Aim to accommodate the family's personal preferences ;
- Do not permit embalming unless required by law;
- Prohibit cremation;
- The body is prepared by washing and wrapping in a white shroud. The body is then placed in a coffin for interment; and
- Traditionally require a body to be buried within one hour's travel time from the place of death to discourage people from being attached to a particular location.

3.2 Buddhism

There are no prescribed procedures for funerals for the various branches of Buddhism in the world and burial practices are also flexible. In some Buddhist cultures the bereaved family want to witness the cremation which may be possible at a crematorium and funeral directors usually discuss with family.

Funeral services may occur before or after cremation or burial. There may be an open coffin at the service. Those requiring a Buddhist funeral will usually have been actively involved in the community during their life.

There are many Buddhist denominations globally, with different rites and customs. Core to their faith is a belief in the cycle of life (saṃsāra), reincarnation, good deeds and enlightenment. Funeral rites aim to help the deceased in their future life.

Death is a natural part of saṃsāra, and how a Buddhist acts throughout their life will determine their future lives, through reincarnation. This is a unified belief across all forms of Buddhism, creating the foundation for Buddhist funeral customs. For many Buddhists, the aim is to liberate themselves from the cycle of death and rebirth to reach the state of nirvana. They must rid themselves of basic desires and all notions of self, ultimately attaining total enlightenment.

Saṃsāra

In line with saṃsāra, after death it is believed that a Buddhist will be reborn into one of six realms, depending on their karma:

Gods	Deva	Want power and wealth but lack compassion or wisdom.
Human	Manusya	The only realm to attain nirvana and escape saṃsāra.
Demi-god	Asura	Strong and powerful, but impatient, angry and envious.
Animal	Tiryagyon	Ignorant, stupid and not wishing to change.
Hungry ghosts	Preta	Compulsive, obsessive, and addictive.
Hell	Naraka	Angry, aggressive, with evil karma such as theft, lying and adultery during their lifetime.



Rites

Tradition suggests that death should occur in a calm, peaceful environment, with close friends and family in attendance to reflect on the good deeds of the deceased during their life, hoping it will assist their next reincarnation. Family and friends can perform good deeds which they hope will earn merit for the deceased.

Once a person is dead, their body should not be touched, moved or disturbed for at least four hours as Buddhists believe the soul does not leave the body straight away. The body must be kept cold and be cleansed and dressed in their everyday clothes.

Cremation

Because of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, cremation is usually the preferred choice when a loved one dies. The physical body holds little significance as it is merely a vessel to hold the soul. Buddhists also view organ donation as a good deed.

Funerals

There are no prescribed procedures for funerals for the various branches of Buddhism in different parts of the world and burial practices are also flexible. In some Buddhist cultures the bereaved family want to witness the cremation which may be possible at a crematorium and funeral directors usually discuss this with the family.

Funeral services may occur before or after cremation or burial. There may be an open coffin at the service.

Those requiring a Buddhist funeral will usually have been actively involved in the community during their life.

Buddhist funeral services are traditionally held in a monastery or at the family home. In line with Buddhist funeral traditions, Buddhist monks lead the ceremony and will read sermons and lead chants or sutras (Buddhist funeral prayers). The body is presented in a simple open casket with an image of the deceased and an image of Buddha is placed nearby. Mourners may also lay candles, fruit and flowers, and may light incense around the body. After the ceremony, the casket is sealed and carried to the crematorium. Friends and family may carry the casket to the hearse and mourners form a funeral procession behind.

Buddhist funeral customs	Offering cloth to the monk on the deceased's behalf
	Decorating the altar with images of the deceased person and Buddha
	Pouring water from a vessel into an overflowing cup
	Walking with sticks symbolising they need support for their grief
	Chanting or singing appropriate sutras (prayers)
	Bringing offerings such as flowers, candles and fruits
	Burning incense
	Ringling gongs or bells

On arrival, mourners should quietly proceed to the altar to pay their respects with a slight bow and hands folded in prayer and should think about the deceased and the life they led. Attendees can join in the chanting, but it is acceptable to be silent if unfamiliar with the chants. If monks attend, mourners should follow their cues as to when to sit and stand.

Depending on the wishes of the deceased and their family, a funeral will usually last between 45 and 75 minutes. At a traditional funeral, the family wears white or covers themselves with a white cloth. Mourners wear simple, black or dark clothing. Wearing expensive or flashy clothing/jewellery is not appropriate.



Mourning

The bereaved family may host a reception after the funeral for mourners to continue to pay their respects. Buddhists may also hold multiple services throughout the mourning period, usually on the 3rd, 7th, 49th and 100th day after the death.

3.3 Christianity

With around 2.4 billion followers globally, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. It is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and focuses on the relationship its followers have with God. The religion is divided into several sub-groups:

Roman Catholicism	Approximately 1.4 billion
Protestant	Approximately 1 billion
Eastern Orthodox	Approximately 250 million

Each Christian group follows their own set of customs and rituals, including how they approach funerals and death. All believe in the ‘forgiveness of sins, resurrection, and life everlasting’. ‘Forgiveness of sins’ refers to a belief that all humans sin and deserve to go to Hell but may be reconciled to God by Jesus’ death and resurrection and going to heaven.

Approaches differ between denominations. Baptism, Communion/the Eucharist and loving God and your neighbour are all important but may have different meanings. There may be formal ways of making penance, especially in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, while Protestants focus on a private, personal relationship with God. Catholics also believe in Purgatory, where souls of those who die in a state of grace are prepared for heaven.

‘The resurrection of the body’ refers to a belief that Jesus will return at the end of the world to raise the dead and establish a ‘Kingdom of God’ without sin or death. They believe that they will in some way return to their bodies.

Christians have traditionally preferred burial to cremation, and burial of ashes to the scattering of ashes, but in more recent times, many Christian groups have also practised cremation and the scattering of ashes. Organ donation is regarded an act of charity and accepted in most denominations.

All Christian traditions aim to respect the wishes of the bereaved, especially their family.

Funerals

Common funeral rites may include Bible readings, prayers, a short sermon, and possibly a hymn. The final resurrection of the dead, the love of God for humanity, and comfort for the bereaved are always important themes. Other practices are more specific by denomination.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians pray for the dead – particularly, in the case of Catholics, for their quick procession through Purgatory and into Heaven.

Catholic and Orthodox funerals may also include Communion/the Eucharist, if there is a priest who can perform it. In a Catholic funeral, the body will also be sprinkled with holy water that has been blessed by a priest.

Many Protestants, conversely, do not pray for the dead at all, believing God has already received them. A Protestant funeral is likely to focus more on remembrance, including a eulogy, which Catholic and Orthodox Christians may not include.



Often before the funeral there will be an informal gathering of those close to the dead, usually with the body present and a minister or priest. This is called a 'vigil' or 'wake', where it is common to exchange memories and share emotions in a less structured way.

The funeral is typically followed by burial of the body or ashes. A leader may provide short prayers or scripture readings.

3.4 Hinduism

Hinduism originated in India and is the third largest global religion. It teaches that God is within each being and object, and that the purpose of life is to become aware of this divine essence. The many denominations worldwide have slightly different customs and beliefs.

If death seems imminent, the person is transferred from the bed to the floor. A small amount of water from the Ganges or other sacred river is placed in the dying person's mouth. Hindu mantras can be chanted, or audio recordings played near to the deceased. Cotton is stuffed into the nose of the deceased person to prevent fluids coming out or air entering the body which can cause swelling. A 'diya' (lamp) is lit with the flame facing south. If Ganges water could not be inserted before death, a small amount of sacred water, if available, can be poured into the open mouth along with Tulsi (basil) leaves.

The faith centres around reincarnation – the belief that when someone dies, their soul is reborn in a different form. Although the physical body dies, their soul remains and continues to recycle until it settles upon its true nature. This can take many lifetimes, and with each death they strive to move closer to the Hindu God, Brahma. It is believed their soul's next incarnation will depend on the actions they took in their previous life – Karma.

Funerals occur as swiftly as possible. According to custom it should take place by the next dusk or dawn (whichever occurs first) and the body should remain at home until cremation, usually within 24 hours of death (but this may not be possible when the death occurs at sea). It is customary for family and friends to visit the home of the bereaved to offer their sympathy.

During body washing before the funeral, relatives wash the body in milk, yoghurt, honey and ghee and anoint it with spices. Turmeric is placed on the forehead of a deceased woman and sandalwood on a man. Embalming can take place, but it is not common.

Traditionally, Hindu funeral rites use chants or mantras overseen by an officiant, usually a Hindu priest or the eldest son of the bereaved. They will gather the family and friends and lead them in the various other Hindu death rituals, which include:

- Placing their palms in the prayer position and tying the big toes together;
- Dressing the deceased man's body in smart clothes (contemporary) or wrapping it in a new and unused white sheet. Women are wrapped in a saree or suit, again new and unused;
- If the person who died was a married woman who died before her husband, she should be dressed in red; and
- Placing a garland of flowers and 'pinda' (rice balls) around their loved ones.

There are different customs and traditions when visiting the deceased. Guests who come to pay their last respects bow down in front of the deceased's mortal remains and pray to God for 'Mukti' (spiritual liberation) while expressing their sympathy to the family. Close family and friends help wash the mortal remains, and a blood relative or very close family member dresses it for cremation.



Funerals

Hindu funerals occur in the deceased's own home or that of a close family member. Attendees are usually relatives and close friends, but this may vary depending on family size.

The casket is open and guests are expected to view it but not to touch the body.

After the funeral the deceased will be cremated, witnessed by family members and closest friends.

A Hindu priest and senior family members conduct the 'mukhagni' (cremation). Traditionally, this is only attended by men, but modern Hindu funerals allow women to attend.

Mourners recite prayers as the casket enters the crematorium. An open casket displays the deceased, and guests will view the body. This should be done respectfully and without touching the deceased.

The position of the body at this time is important – it must go through every doorway (leaving the house, entering the crematorium, and entering the incinerator) feet first. Ideally the feet point south at this stage. Traditionally, a pyre with wood is lit.

The day after the funeral, the ashes are scattered over a sacred body of water such as the Ganges or place of importance to the deceased.

If the body is incinerated on board, the ashes can be passed to the family to immerse in a sacred river as per their tradition or customs. If the transfer of ashes is not feasible, they can be immersed at sea. But burial at sea either of bodies or ashes is only permitted in extreme circumstances (and for children, infants and saints) as Hindus believe in cremating mortal remains and immersing ashes in sacred rivers to attain 'Mukti'. The family may oppose burial at sea based on their beliefs.

Hindu funeral services usually do not exceed 30 minutes, but this will vary depending on the wishes of the deceased and their family. In some regions, male relatives of the deceased shave their head and invite all friends and relatives to eat a simple meal together on the tenth or twelfth day to remember the deceased.

Funeral etiquette is that mourners should dress in white. No head covering is required for either sex and open-toe shoes are also acceptable. Women should dress conservatively, covering their arms and knees. Gifts or flowers should be given to the family ahead of the ceremony. Food is also not part of Hindu custom.

Cremation

After death, Hindus believe that the physical body serves no purpose, and does not need to be preserved. They cremate their loved ones as they believe it is the quickest way to release the soul and assist reincarnation. Historically, Hindu cremations occurred on the Ganges river in India, and the family would carry the casket to the crematorium site. Nowadays, Hindus are cremated locally.

Mourning

This lasts 10 to 30 days, during which families may display a picture of their loved one, adorned with a garland of flowers in their house. Visitors are also welcomed. On the 13th day of mourning, it is common for the grieving family to hold a ceremony ('preta-karma') to perform rituals to help release the soul of the deceased for reincarnation. On the first anniversary of the death, the family host a memorial event to honour their loved one.



3.5 Humanism

Humanist funerals typically follow these principles:

- The funeral is a bespoke celebration of the deceased person's life;
- The service includes songs or readings selected according to the wishes of the deceased or their family;
- There is normally a remembrance booklet to guide mourners through the funeral;
- The casket may be either open or closed, and the choice of casket material is open. There are no formal rituals for handling the deceased, or rules for whether there should be a burial or cremation; and
- Guidance is required to enable the celebrants to follow the wishes of the deceased as closely and safely as possible.

3.6 Islam

Islam views death as a transition to another state of existence called the afterlife. Where you go in the afterlife depends on how well you followed the Islamic religious codes during your life. Muslims, i.e. practitioners of the Islamic faith, believe that if you lived a good life, you will go to Paradise after you die. If not, you will be separated from all that is good.

Islamic funerals serve not only to comfort the grieving, but also to pray to Allah (the Islamic word for God) to have mercy on the deceased.

The departed are washed by close adult family members — men by men, and women by women. Then they are ceremonially wrapped in white cotton cloth ('Al-Kafan') and buried within 24 hours, if possible, of the time of death. It is a specific and detailed process that includes an odd number of washings and several steps dictating which body part is washed in what order.

Because of the shroud and the desire to bury the dead as soon as possible, Muslim funerals generally do not have a viewing, though this may be done by certain community members directly after the body is wrapped. The funeral will be delayed only if there are specific circumstances requiring an official investigation.

Most Muslim funeral traditions focus on respect and allow time for grieving, if needed, to help mourners recover from the loss.

Islamic funerals

A funeral is a very formal, traditional service generally held in a mosque, with little deviation over time. A series of customs must be observed. After leaving their shoes at the door, men and women sit on the floor in separate areas. Women must cover their heads with a veil or scarf and wear loose, modest clothing.

An Islamic funeral is considered a community event. Muslims believe a funeral to be a very spiritual occasion. Every attendee participates in group prayers, in which mourners pray that Allah will have mercy not only on the deceased but on all deceased Muslims.

Islamic funerals are intended to help mourners cope with their grief and to offer hope for a good afterlife for the deceased. The service lasts from 30 to 60 minutes.

Mourners at an Islamic funeral may express grief, but only within certain standards of decorum. Loud wailing, for example, is not permitted. Neither are other outward signs of extreme emotion, such as ripping of clothes, thrashing about, sacrilegious speech and self-injury. Crying is permitted.

Traditional Muslim funeral etiquette forbids mourners from taking photographs or in any other way recording any part of the funeral prayer service.



Islamic families and communities are generally very close, and this means that many attend the funeral to show their support, pay their respects and grieve the loss of a loved one. In keeping with Islamic traditions, the funeral and burial happen as soon as possible to free the soul from the body.

After the prayer service and the burial, mourners may gather at the home of the immediate family, often for the entire day, during which they express their condolences to the family and support them in their grief. Traditionally, a meal is served. Socialising is believed to help the family cope with their loss.

During the first three days of the 40-day period of mourning, community members should bring food to the family. Many modern Muslim communities observe a shortened mourning period of 3–7 or more days.

Widows will customarily observe a longer mourning period (4 months, 10 days at home: only leaving for necessary matters). Whatever the time frame, it is important that the community visits and offers to help in any way they can, abiding by the rituals and customs that the family desires to show respect to their loved one.

Rites and traditions

One very important funeral rite in the Islamic faith is that burial take place as quickly as possible after death. For this reason, there is no viewing, wake, or visitation. Immediately after death, the body is washed and wrapped in a sheet by family members. The hands are placed as if in prayer. Then the body is transported to the location of the funeral or a mosque. There is rarely an open casket at an Islamic funeral.

The funeral is typically held outside the mosque, in a location such as a prayer room, community square or courtyard, where members of the community may gather. The body and all attendees are all turned to face Mecca, which is the holy centre of Islam.

There are no eulogies at a Muslim funeral, only prayers and readings from the Koran. The holy leader, the Imam, leads the prayers, which are then repeated by mourners. The congregation will line up in rows behind the deceased coffin to perform the 'Janazah' (funeral) prayer, men first, children second, and women in the third row. Afterwards, the congregation forms two lines and pass the coffin from shoulder to shoulder towards the grave site in a silent procession.

Some Muslim communities allow women and children to attend the burial, but traditionally it is just men. Another important Islamic burial rite is to have each person at the burial throw three handfuls of dirt onto the open grave.

Since Muslims believe there will be a physical resurrection of the body on Judgement Day, the faith prohibits cremation. Similarly, autopsies are strongly discouraged, as they delay burial and are considered a desecration of the body. Muslims also prefer not to move the body away from the site of death, and this makes an autopsy even more unsettling for them. Embalming, considered yet another desecration of the body, is performed only if required by law.



3.7 Jainism

A Jain cremation ceremony is simple and short, following this order of rites:

The body is prepared and dressed:

- Natural flowers should be avoided;
- A sandalwood mala (garland) is placed;
- A swastika is placed; and
- On top of the swastika, a whole coconut, a divo (lamp) and agarbatti (incense stick).

Stavans and bhajans (devotional songs) are recited for about an hour.

A eulogy is given by family and friends.

There is a final viewing by visitors.

Family members gather by the casket and apply:

- Water and rice three times on the body;
- Sandalwood powder on the body; and
- Ghee on the forehead, hands and feet.

Cremation

Jains cremate the dead as soon as possible. First the body is rubbed with a wet cloth and then clothed and placed in a bier and covered with a kafan (shroud). The body is tied to the bier and taken to the crematorium. A suitable place without any living organisms such as grass or insects is selected to avoid harm. A wooden platform is erected.

The body is taken from the bier and placed on the platform with wooden logs over it. Ghee, camphor, and sandalwood powder are sprinkled all over the body and usually the eldest son performs the last rites and goes round the pyre three times sprinkling water all over the body, chanting the Namokar mantra and lighting the pyre. Later they pour milk over the area.

The remains are collected in bags and the place is thoroughly cleansed. A hole is dug into the earth and the remains placed there and sprinkled all over with salt to dissolve easily.

Jains believe that the dead soul is reborn immediately and death is a festival or Mahotsav. Loud wailing and observing anniversaries are not in the Jain tradition.

Faith communities across the world have set procedures laid down by the religion for conducting last rites but Jains have no priests to conduct such services.

It is a practice to request the support of an experienced person to conduct the last rites ('Antim Vidhi') at home and at the crematorium before cremation.

3.8 Judaism

This section begins with the customs and rituals of orthodox Jews. Differences observed by Reform or Liberal Jews are explained later.

Orthodox Judaism

Traditionally, when a Jew hears of the death of a loved one, they tear their clothing to show their grief. This is called 'kriah' and is a symbol of loss and grief, but it is now common to cut kriah before a funeral service.

On death, the body is washed and prepared for burial by members of a 'chevra kadisha' (burial society). In the run up to the funeral, the body is not left alone.



Ensuring that a Jewish person has a proper burial is both an act of kindness and regarded as an honour and a sacred duty. The chevra kadisha is a voluntary group with members worldwide, performing final rites for Jewish people. They are often older members of the community, appointed for their learning and community engagement.

The chevra kadisha work with funeral directors, cemeteries, hospitals and families to ensure that the person's death and burial are in accordance with Jewish teachings and customs. Their work often starts with visits to a dying person. When the person dies, the group will be involved in the burial and mourning rituals.

A close relative (a parent, child, sibling or spouse) of the deceased becomes an 'onan' (a person in mourning) while awaiting the burial. Out of respect for the deceased person, immediate relatives must fully focus on the burial, even if they are not involved in making burial arrangements.

A Jewish funeral usually happens at the gravesite. It is preferable for a funeral to be within 24 hours of the death but may be delayed, usually by not more than a couple of days, for family members to attend. Burial can also not occur on Shabbat or Jewish festivals.

Families arrange for a gravestone so that the dead are not forgotten.

Ritual purity is fundamental and dead bodies are viewed as ritually impure. It is prohibited for anyone to touch a dead body, apart from the ritual washing/purifying conducted by the chevra kadisha members shortly before burial. Hand washing is essential to maintain ritual purity and hand washing facilities are available at all gravesites, to be performed on entry and exit. Jewish burial sites are limited but there is a religious requirement for burial in a Jewish cemetery.

A body should never be left unattended following a death. Usually, members of the chevra kadisha stay with the body reciting psalms. It is common for people to rotate in this role. This can take place in the deceased's home, at a hospital or at a mortuary.

Orthodox funerals

A funeral service consists of a few psalms, a prayer for the dead and often a eulogy. It can sometimes be attached to a regular weekday afternoon service. Orthodox men and women stand on separate sides of the room and the closed coffin is usually placed in the middle of the room.

Mourners follow the coffin with men holding sides of the cart with the coffin. A rabbi usually leads the procession and says a prayer on entry into the burial ground. But if the rabbi is a 'cohen' (a High Priest) he will not be allowed near the body. The level of religious observance and medical circumstances will determine whether women and other people attend the funeral and visit the burial grounds.

After the body is lowered into the grave, family members begin to cover the coffin with dirt. It is also common for mourners to shovel some earth into the grave.

Kaddish is a prayer for those who mourn and is traditionally said on the day of the burial by the closest male relative to the person who has died. Many Jews feel that the act of saying this prayer helps people to focus on God at a time when they may feel far from him.



Stages of mourning

Shiva	<p>This is the intense seven-day mourning period for close family members immediately after a funeral, but will terminate earlier if it falls just before a religious festival.</p> <p>Orthodox Jews do not leave home during the mourning period. Others visit to create a 'minyan' (a quorum of ten Jewish men) for communal worship in the home.</p> <p>Shiva does not occur over the sabbath or on festivals. These days are subtracted from the seven-day total.</p> <p>Mourners usually try to pray three times a day (morning, afternoon, and evening) with the minyan.</p> <p>Friends and family will visit the mourners and often daily services are held in the mourning house rather than the synagogue so that the mourner can say Kaddish.</p> <p>Shiva houses can become very crowded at prayer times (particularly on the first and last days) as many people may come to pay their respects to ensure that there are enough for a quorum.</p> <p>Services last approximately 30 minutes and may also include eulogies.</p> <p>Shiva prayer books are often shared between communities and used by several shiva houses.</p> <p>Shiva house visitors wish mourners "long life" and may shake hands with all the mourners.</p> <p>Mourners cannot prepare food, so visitors often prepare meals for them and take them to the house during the shiva week.</p> <p>A shiva is usually in the mourner's home or home of the deceased (if their spouse is still alive).</p>
Avelut	<p>Someone who loses a parent will mourn for a whole year. During the avelut year they will not attend parties and will say a Kaddish every day.</p> <p>Mourners recite the Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer only recited by mourners in the year after a close relative's death.</p>
Yahrzeit	<p>The Mourner's Kaddish is recited by mourners on the anniversary of their death or at the Yizkor service on High Holidays.</p>

Reform/Liberal Jews

For Reform and Liberal Jews, a funeral closely resembles the Orthodox ceremony, though both men and women can participate. Likewise, women can form a minyan.

Cremations are permitted and a short service is held beforehand.

Reform or Liberal Jews may also choose to have a shorter shiva period.



3.9 Sikhism

Sikhism is an eastern religion originating in the Punjab region of southern Asia. Sikhs believe in reincarnation and karma and think the purpose of life is to gain enlightenment through meditation and the teachings of the gurus. According to Sikhism, death is a natural process. It is only the physical body that dies, and the soul lives on through transmigration and reincarnation. The purpose of life is to move closer to Waheguru (God), and death will help break the cycle of reincarnation. Through good deeds, honesty and Waheguru’s ‘nadar’ (grace), the soul will eventually leave this earth to be united with the ‘Wondrous Giver of Knowledge’.

Funerals

Arrangements for a Sikh funeral usually begin immediately after death, ideally within three days. Before the funeral service, the body of the deceased is washed and dressed by close family members. If the deceased has had an Amritdhari (i.e. if they are an initiated Sikh) they are dressed in their articles of faith (‘kakars’).

The five articles of Sikh faith	Kesh (uncut hair)
	Kanga (a small wooden comb)
	Kachera (an undergarment, usually shorts)
	Kara (an iron bracelet)
	Kirpan (a sword/dagger)

The body of the deceased is surrounded by flowers, usually orange and white chrysanthemums or marigolds, which are mourning flowers across Asia.

Sikhs believe in mourning quietly and privately and are discouraged from showing public displays of emotion. Instead, to mourn the loss of a loved one, the friends and family members will gather at the gurdwara (place of worship) where shabads (hymns) are sung and funeral prayers recited. This is to show their dedication to God and accept his decision to take their loved one away.

The Sikh funeral is known as ‘Antim Sanskaar’, which translates as ‘final rite’ or ‘the last rite of passage’. The service does not focus on the pain or grief of losing a loved one but treats it as a celebration of the soul. For this reason, a Sikh funeral service is usually simple.

A funeral ceremony can happen either at the family home, at the gurdwara, outside, or at a crematorium. It traditionally includes a community prayer, ‘Ardas’, and two daily prayers, ‘Japji Sahib’ and ‘Kirtan Sohila’. It is a very religious ceremony, so long or emotional eulogies are discouraged as they do not support the belief that the physical body is a vessel for the soul.

It is funeral etiquette to wear smart, modest clothing. White is traditionally the colour of mourning in most Asian cultures, but if the funeral takes place in a western country, black, navy or grey are more common. Those who are unsure what colour to wear should check with the family of the deceased. Head coverings are usually worn, and shoes must be removed upon entering the gurdwara or Sikh homes. Flowers and donations are not considered part of the Sikh funeral rites, but those who wish to send flowers should check with the family of the deceased first.

On the funeral day, friends and relatives will gather in the gurdwara before the cremation for prayers. Some families choose an open casket which will be surrounded with flowers.

Sikhs do not believe in what they perceive to be superstitious rituals, so funerals are usually more simple affairs. Friends and family will visit the gurdwara before and after the cremation for prayers, although this can be open to the whole community. Following the cremation, attendees will eat ‘langar’ (food) together.

Only close family members can witness a cremation. In countries such as India cremation may be via outdoor funeral pyres but is restricted to crematoria in other countries.



Sikhs believe that the physical body serves no purpose but to house the soul. Cremation is usually preferred, but burying at sea is also accepted in exceptional circumstances. However, no headstone or monument is allowed. This is because, through reincarnation, the soul has already passed into another body and so it is only the shell that remains. Instead, to commemorate their loved one, Sikhs will scatter the ashes of the deceased over flowing water or a place of significance. It is believed that this helps the departed soul to attain 'Mukti' from the sins of birth.

Where a death takes place on a ship, every effort should be made to send the mortal remains to the family as it is very personal and emotional for them to be able to conduct last rites. In extreme circumstances, where it is not possible to send the remains, photographs and/or videos of the mortal remains should be taken (to share with the family later) and the body may be incinerated on board, the ashes scattered by ship mates or the crew members closest to the family. But if ashes are preserved on board, these need to be handed over to family to immerse in a sacred river as per their customs and faith.

After the funeral ceremony, the deceased's loved ones will congregate and read the Sikh holy scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, at home or at the gurdwara. This commonly takes place in a single sitting lasting around three days (or across a longer period, usually ten days) and is known as the Akhand Paath. If the funeral is delayed, however, the family may choose to begin the reading before the ceremony.

The reading's completion ceremony, known as the 'Bhog Paona', generally coincides with the funeral day. This needs to be reviewed as it may be difficult to repatriate the body in time, so religious advice should be sought. Normally, Akhand Paath are organised once the funeral ceremony is completed, but the family can keep Paath at home, as this is like praying to God (reciting shabads) to give 'Mukti' to the departed soul to be reincarnated. On the first anniversary of a death, the bereaved family gather to pray, eat, and celebrate the life of the person lost. They may choose to do this at the gurdwara and share the meal with the congregation.

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