

Bereavement Traditions in different cultures:

Muslim/Islamic

- Concept of death - “from God (Allah) we have emerged and to God we return.”
- 3 days of mourning This period is an ‘official’ recognition of a person’s death and an opportunity for the bereaved family to wholly embrace their grief before life intrudes once more and offers a time for condolences to be made to all members of the family together.
- The wife will observe a mourning period of four months and 10 days - this period is called *Eddat* (or *iddat*).
- It is also customary for community members and relatives to go to the home of the bereaved family and begin to read prayers with the family. The Quran may be read to completion a number of times over the next three days. Those relatives who have come a long distance will, in all likelihood, reside in the family’s home.
- The body is washed by family members of the same gender as the deceased.
- It is swathed in a simple white cotton sheet or shroud; all Muslims are dressed alike to symbolise their equality before God.
- The body is then placed in a unlined coffin.
- The body is buried and should take place before noon, in Britain delays are inevitable, nevertheless, custom prescribes that the burial should take place with the minimum delay.
- The usual practice is for the deceased to be taken to the mosque, where special prayers are recited, before proceeding to the graveyard. A brief prayer session is also held at the cemetery. The body is then buried in the grave with the head and right had side facing Makkah (i.e. south east in the UK).
- During the three days of mourning normal life ceases to allow the Muslims believe that there is one God, Allah.



- Muhammad is the prophet of God.
- There is only one life to be lived. There will be a day of judgement when each soul is judged according to their deeds on earth.
- Extravagant expressions of grief are against the will of Allah.
- Mourning is demonstrated by readings from the Qur'an (Koran).
- The burial should take place before noon, and with the minimum of delay.
- The body is washed and wrapped in a simple white cotton sheet or shroud. All Muslims are dressed alike to symbolise their equality before God.
- The body is buried with the head towards Makkah (south east in the UK).
- On the first days after the burial prayers are said at home of the deceased.
- After the Eid celebrations visits are made to the cemetery to say prayers at the family grave. This is a reminder that even in the middle of happy celebrations, life is temporary and that it is important to live correctly to ensure eternal life with Allah.

Christian

- Christian belief and practice is based on the mysteries of incarnation and resurrection.
- Belief is in one God and Jesus of Nazareth in whom God assumed human form.
- Personal identity is retained after death.
- Human beings are in continuing fellowship with God throughout life and death.
- Some Christians maintain a clear belief in heaven and hell.
- Roman Catholics believe in a state called purgatory - a place where a soul is purified in preparation for entry into heaven.
- A person lives only one physical life.
- The body is placed in a coffin by an undertaker and subsequently taken to a church or crematorium. Following a memorial service the body is buried or cremated.
- Flowers may be used in the form of wreaths. These are traditionally rounded to symbolise continuity and eternity.



Jews

- Jews believe in one God and that there is only one life to be lived.
- After death the body is washed, dressed in a white shroud and placed in a coffin.
- Whenever possible, burial should take place within 24 hours.
- No flowers or music are provided, ensuring that there is no discrimination between rich and poor.
- Mourners ritually cut a slit in their outer clothes as a sign of grief.
- There are seven days of intensive mourning during which close relatives say prayers throughout the day, and neighbours and friends visit to offer condolences and help.
- For the following eleven months the Kaddish is said every day.
- Every year on the anniversary of the death, the family say the Kaddish and burn a candle for 24 hours.

Humanistic

- Humanists believe that there is one life and that we should make the best of it by living happy and fulfilled lives and helping others to do so.
- They look for evidence or draw on their own experience - rather than believe what someone else says - in order to form their beliefs and answer questions.
- They accept death as the natural and inevitable end to life. They do not believe in life after death, but rather that people 'live on' in other people's memories of them.
- There are no specific or obligatory rituals to follow at deaths or funerals; however expressions of sympathy and the acknowledgement of the bereaved person's feelings of grief are appreciated.
- Humanist may choose to be cremated or buried, and the ceremony can take place anywhere. If possible, all religious symbols (e.g. at a crematorium) are removed or covered.
- The funeral ceremony is intended to celebrate the life that was lived and properly honour that person's life. Through readings, poetry, music and personal tributes from family and friends, attendants are reminded of how their lives have been enriched through knowing the deceased.



Some questions to consider when thinking about your own response to a death

1. Your personal concept of what death and life means
2. How long is your mourning period?
3. How should friends and family respond to the death?
4. After the death what should happen to the body? (Think about washing, place of rest, visiting)
5. Burial or cremation - why?
6. What would the 'goodbye' event look like?
7. Thoughts on gifts, flowers, money etc

I did not create this list, it was given to me, but I don't remember where from so I can't reference it.

