

LO: To compare funeral rituals from different religions.

What happens when we die?

Learning Objective:

To understand how the death of a person is marked and commemorated in different religions and communities.



All living things eventually die.

Death is a natural stage in the cycle of all life on Earth. It is a part of life for everyone, and something that all living things, plants and animals, have in common.

Causes of death such as diseases, serious illnesses, accidents, or in the case of animals, being hunted are all types of 'external factor'.



If a living thing does not die of these external factors, it will eventually die anyway. Why?



All living things will eventually die of old age if their death is not first caused by an external factor.

The cells which make up every part of a plant or animal are constantly reproduced and replaced throughout the organism's lifetime. In old age, the rate at which these cells are replaced slows down, until the organs stop working properly.



The scientific term for death caused by ageing is 'cessation'.

In the United Kingdom, many people choose burial.

The body is placed in a coffin and buried in the ground, usually in a graveyard or memorial garden.



Some people choose to have 'eco-friendly' burials, the body is placed in a cardboard coffin (which decomposes quickly). Instead of a gravestone, a tree is often planted to mark the spot where the person is buried.

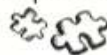
Many people choose cremation.

The body of the person who has died is burned completely in a special furnace, until only ash remains. The ash may be kept in an urn, buried or scattered.



Organ/body donation.

Many people choose to donate some of their organs, or their whole body when they die. The organs may be used in an operation to save another person's life.



Scientists and doctors can use donated bodies to learn how to perform operations, to develop new surgery techniques and to find cures for diseases.



People can ensure that their organs are donated by joining the Organ Donor Register.

What happens at funerals?

Funeral traditions, or funeral rites, can vary depending on whether the person who has died was religious or not, and where in the world the funeral takes place.



At a Jewish or Christian funeral service, people may sing hymns, say prayers, speak about the person's life, read poems or passages from religious texts. They may also light candles or place flowers at the grave.

Funeral traditions around the world

In New Orleans, Louisiana, there is a tradition of 'jazz funerals'. A jazz band leads mourners



through the streets. After the burial, the band play upbeat, lively jazz music and mourners dance in the street as a way of celebrating the life of the person who has died.

Funeral traditions around the world

In some Balinese cremation services, the body is placed inside an enormous carved and painted wooden bull or dragon. The wooden carving and the body are burned in order to release the soul of the person who has died.



Why are funeral rituals, traditions and ceremonies so important for many people? How might they help people who have suffered a bereavement?

This week we are going to look at funeral rituals for different religions

Muslim Funeral Traditions

Where possible, family members try to be at the side of a loved one at the time they die. They will pray to Allah for forgiveness.

Preparing the body

Family members who are the same sex as the person who has died will prepare the body for burial. The body must be buried as soon as possible after death. The body is washed at least three times, dressed and wrapped in white cloth. In the United Kingdom, preparation of

the body is often done by a funeral director.

Funeral rituals

The body of the person who has died is taken to a mosque. There, family, friends and community members will pray for the person who has died. Traditionally, only men attend the burial ceremony which follows this, however in some communities, women also attend.

Burial

Traditionally, it is preferred to bury the body wrapped in a shroud, and not inside a coffin.

However, in some places, this is not allowed. Cremation is not permitted. The body is buried on its side, or with the head turned to face Mecca. The grave is normally marked with a simple stone or plaque.

Mourning

After the burial, relatives observe a period of mourning, during which time they will pray. A banquet is held to remember the person who has died, and relatives may visit the grave to pray and recite passages from the Qur'an.

Jewish Funeral Traditions

When a Jewish person dies, burial must occur as soon as possible, usually within two to four days of death. Funerals may not be held on Shabbat (Saturday) or on any other Jewish holiday.

Preparing the body

When a Jewish person dies, relatives recite prayers and stay at the side of the body, which must not be left alone until it is buried. The body is washed and wrapped in a white shroud. The

bodies of Jewish males may also be wrapped in a prayer shawl called a 'tallit'. The body is placed in a simple wooden casket. This is because it is important that the body is allowed to decompose naturally.

Funeral traditions

Special prayers are recited and there are readings from the Hebrew Bible. Relatives may give eulogies, where they speak about the person who has died. Traditionally, an item of clothing may be torn during the funeral service. This represents the need

to express feelings of grief. Instead of tearing clothing, a black ribbon may be torn instead.

Mourning

Relatives of the person who has died will light candles, and pray every day for seven days. They will usually stay at home during this period, and guests may come to visit them. Every year, on the anniversary of a person's death, a candle is lit and a special prayer called the Mourner's Kaddish is recited.

Roman Catholic Funeral Traditions

Up until 1963, when the Vatican permitted cremation, burial was the only type of funeral allowed.

The vigil

Prior to the main funeral service, it is traditional for the body (in a coffin, or casket) to be kept in a chapel or, occasionally, at the home of relatives. A priest or a close relative will stay with the body at all times, and visitors are invited to come and pay their respects as well as pray for the person who has died. Before the

coffin is moved to a church or straight to the burial site, a priest may sprinkle holy water on and around the coffin.

Funeral mass

Mass is the name given for a Catholic religious service where an important rite takes place: Eucharist. During Eucharist, Catholics recite commands Jesus gave his disciples at the last supper, then they eat special bread and drink wine which represent the body and blood of Jesus. This is important because it reminds Catholics of the Last

Supper, which took place before Jesus' death. The funeral mass is intended to help the spirit of the person who has died on its journey to heaven, and also to provide comfort for the bereaved.

Committal

Following a service in a church or chapel, mourners gather around the grave and pray together. If the body of a Catholic who has died is cremated, the ashes are buried in the same way that human remains are.

Buddhist Funeral Traditions

Buddhist funeral rites vary from country to country. Families may also have specific traditions. There are few 'rules' about funerals for Buddhists, compared to other religions.

Preparing the body

The body of a Buddhist person who has died is normally dressed in their everyday clothes and placed in a simple casket.

Cremation

Most Buddhists prefer cremation, although burial is

permitted. Organ/body donation is also allowed.

Rebirth

Buddhists believe that when a person dies, they are reincarnated, or 'reborn' in the body of another living being. It is important that the body is not cremated for several hours after death, to allow the stages of reincarnation to occur. Tibetan Buddhists prefer to wait for up to three days before cremation.

Prayer and rituals

Before the cremation there may be a service in a temple, where

offerings of flowers, food, water or incense may be placed at shrines. In some Buddhist cultures, family members may conduct a bathing ceremony, where one hand of the person who has died is 'washed' with water. Monks may lead mourners in chanting, or read Buddhist texts. People may spend some time sitting and reflecting quietly on the life of the person who has died. People try not to cry or appear to be too upset at Buddhist funerals, for fear of upsetting the spirit of the person who has died.

Choose 2 of these religions to compare their funeral rituals

You can set your work out in paragraphs, as lists of similarities and differences, a Venn diagram or in whatever way you choose. Make sure you are clear about which two religions you are comparing.