

LO: To understand what Buddhists believe happens when someone dies.

Buddhism  Islam  ?  Judaism  Sikhism

Do you know what members of these religions believe happens when a person dies?

Hinduism   Christianity 

Islam

Muslims believe that one day, on a day of Allah's choosing, people who have died will be raised from the dead and judged. Until this judgement day, Muslims remain in their graves. Those whose good deeds outweigh the bad go to paradise. Those who have committed many bad deeds will be punished in hell.

Judaism

While Jewish people believe that the soul is eternal, and there is a life after death, there is little written about it in Jewish religious texts. Some Jewish people may believe in a day of judgement, heaven and hell, or forms of reincarnation. Jewish people prefer to focus on good deeds and actions done during their lifetime.

Sikhism

Sikhs believe in reincarnation. By living a good life, trying to be loving and taking action to improve their own lives and the lives of others, they hope to free themselves from the cycle of rebirth and achieve 'mukti', which means liberation. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, taught that all those who live good lives, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, can achieve mukti and enter paradise.



How might these ideas help and comfort members of those religions when they suffer a bereavement?

Are your own ideas similar, or the same as any of these ideas? Are your ideas completely different?



What happens when a person dies?

This is a difficult question. It is OK not to know the answer to big, difficult questions such as this.

Even the explanations offered by religions are discussed, debated and can change over time...

In 2013, Pope Francis (leader of the Catholic Church) said:

"You ask me if the God of the Christians forgives those who don't believe and who don't seek the faith. I start by saying, and this is the fundamental thing, that God's mercy has no limits if you go to him with a sincere and contrite heart. The issue for those who do not believe in God is to obey their conscience."



Before this, the official view of the church was that 'non-believers' such as those who are members of other religions or atheists did not go to heaven.

People who are not religious may not believe in an afterlife or reincarnation.

There are lots of names for people who are not religious. Some people call themselves atheists or humanists. Others may say they are 'agnostic'.



What thoughts and ideas do you think might offer them comfort when they suffer a bereavement?



These quotes explain some of the ideas that may offer comfort to people who are not religious. What do you think they mean?

Kurt Vonnegut,
writer.

Being a humanist means trying to behave decently without expectations of rewards or punishment after you are dead.

The humanist view of life is progressive and optimistic, in awe of human potential, living without fear of judgement and death, finding enough purpose and meaning in life, love and leaving a good legacy.

Polly Toynbee,
journalist.

Today we are going to focus on what Buddhists believe about life after death.

What do Buddhists believe happens when a person dies?



Samsara, or Rebirth

Many Buddhists prefer to use the term 'rebirth' instead of 'reincarnation' to describe their beliefs about what happens when a person dies. This is because Buddhist ideas are very different to the ideas many people have about reincarnation.

Many people of different religious backgrounds and beliefs believe that humans have an eternal soul, and that this soul

leaves the body when a person dies, and is reincarnated in the body of another living thing. This is called 'reincarnation', and it is very different to Buddhist beliefs.

Buddhists do not believe in an eternal soul. However, they do believe that energy flows from one living being to others when it dies. This constant flow of energy is all around us, it temporarily inhabits humans' bodies for the short period of time they are alive, when a person dies, their energy may re-materialise in a number of other living things. The Buddhist name for these ideas is 'Samsara', which means 'recurrent wandering'.

Nirvana

Non-Buddhists frequently misunderstand the concept of Nirvana. Nirvana is not a place, like heaven or paradise, where the soul of a person goes when they die. The word 'Nirvana' means 'cessation'; it is the end of suffering. The Buddha taught that Nirvana is a state of being that can be achieved by anyone, during their lifetime or after they have died. Those who achieve a state of Nirvana will be happy and content, because they are free from suffering.

The Path to Enlightenment

Buddhists spend their lives working towards becoming 'enlightened' and moving closer to achieving a state of Nirvana. They do this by following the guidance and teachings of the Buddha.

The Noble Eight-fold Path is a guide for how live your life as a Buddhist. It is represented by the symbol of the eight-spoked Dharma Wheel.

Guidance includes having a good understanding of the key principles of Buddhism, being selfless, kind and loving, being truthful and not saying unkind things, not harming others and focusing the mind through meditation.



In your books summarise what Buddhists believe about life after death. You can do this as bullet points, paragraphs or in any way you want. How does this compare to your beliefs?