



### **Cultural and Religious Customs for Funerals and Burials** **Christian Funerals**

While the funeral services of each Christian denomination may be unique, there are common features that will most likely be present when remembering the death of a loved one. Prayers, readings from scripture, a eulogy or message from a priest or minister as well as from members of the family. The service length can be anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour.

A Catholic funeral will almost always be held at a church, not a funeral home, and it may include a Mass and communion. A Protestant funeral can be held at a church, a funeral home, the graveside, or at another location.

Music is an important part of many Christian services although it's not essential.

### **Jewish Funerals**

Jewish funerals generally take place early in the day in the funeral home, rarely in a synagogue. They're also held as close to death as possible, ideally within twenty-four hours if possible.

At Orthodox and some Conservative services, no flowers are placed on or around the casket or in the room. Instead of flowers, friends and family members are asked to give donations to charity in the name of the deceased.

In all congregations, the service will include a reading of Psalms by the rabbi, a eulogy by the rabbi, or a close friend or relative and the recitation of the memorial prayer. After this prayer, close friends and family follow the coffin to the burial service.

At the graveside, the first memorial prayer, or kaddish, is recited. Male mourners drop a handful of earth into the grave, followed by all other men ( and women if that is what the family wishes). It is customary to stay at the site until the coffin is covered.

For seven days following a Jewish burial, mourners follow the custom of sitting shivah ( Hebrew for seven). The period begins the moment the family returns from the cemetery. Friends will have set out food and a memorial candle which will burn for seven days. The mourners will wear black and sit on a low stool. Religious services called a minyan are held twice a day and might occur when friends are visiting.

### **Islamic Funerals**

Islamic burials should take place within twenty-four hours of the death if possible. In preparation for the burial, the eyes are shut and the body is ritually washed. While in a Muslim country, the body is always prepared at home or at a mosque, but in the United States, the body must be prepared at a hospital, funeral home, or some site that meets health department codes.

To Muslims, saying the funeral prayers is considered a community obligation. Led by an imam, the funeral prayers are recited by family and members of the community, preferably outside of the mosque. Only men attend this service.

Muslims are never cremated, but are traditionally buried without a coffin. In the United States however, cemetery codes require the body to be placed in one. The deceased is placed in the grave or coffin lying on his right side. Muslims discourage ostentation of any kind so a plain pine casket is preferred. After the coffin is lowered and the deceased's face is turned toward Mecca, members of the family shovel earth into the grave and recite a verse from the Qur'an. Graves are not adorned with tombstones or flowers.

Three days is the generally prescribed mourning period. This is a time of both sadness and

reflection. Weeping is permitted, but other overt displays of emotion are frowned upon.

### **Hindu Funerals**

Hindus believe in reincarnation and death is merely the moving of the soul from one body to the next.

In Hindu tradition, the body remains at the home of family until the time that it is cremated. At this time the burning of the body is viewed as the release of the soul to the gods. This usually will occur one to two days after the death of the loved one. Friends are invited to visit the family at home before the cremation and there is always an open casket. When visiting the family, black is not to be worn, but rather white in memory of the deceased. Custom allows for flowers to be placed at the deceased's feet, but bringing food is not a part of the tradition.

Ten days later a ceremony is held at the home of the family and guests are expected to bring fruit. The mourning period can last anywhere between 10 to 30 days after the death.