

Mourning continues for 30 days after the burial and mourners do not go out for pleasure. This is called 'Sheloshim'.

The dead person is remembered each year, on the anniversary of their death, by the lighting of a candle and reciting the Kaddish.

- **Meaning:** These rituals and prayers are to show respect to God and to the dead person and to help to keep them in the memories of their loved ones.



■ Jewish burial ritual

Muslim funeral rites and their meaning

When a Muslim is close to death they try to repeat the final words of Prophet Muhammad: 'God, help me through the hardship and agony of death'. Those around the person will respond: 'To God we belong and to God we return'.

The **Kalimah** (often referred to as the Shahadah) is whispered into their ears, just as these words were whispered into their ears as a new-born baby.

- **Meaning:** This emphasises the belief that, at death, we are returning to our creator (God).

If possible, funerals take place within 24 hours of death. The dead person's body is washed: this is called ghusl. The body is then wrapped in a white shroud. In Britain it will be put into a coffin, but in some Islamic countries Muslims prefer to be buried without one.

- **Meaning:** The simple white shroud represents purity and equality: all are equal before God in death.

Muslims do not approve of cremation. Bodies are buried facing Makkah.

- **Meaning:** Muslims believe that the body must remain intact, facing the Holy City. This will allow the person to be resurrected on the Day of Judgement.

At the graveside they recite the first chapter (surah) of the Qur'an, (the al-Fatihah):

'In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds ...'

When the body has been lowered into the grave, the following words are spoken:

'From the earth We created you. And into it We shall cause you to return and from it We shall bring you forth once more.'

Qur'an 20:55

- **Meaning:** These prayers emphasise the greatness of God and the belief that he will bring people back to life.

Muslims do not usually have gravestones, but the site of the grave is often raised in a mound, above the level of the ground.

- **Meaning:** everyone is equal in death.

Kalimah (Shahadah) the statement: 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet'.

► How do funeral rites reflect people's beliefs about the afterlife?

When people die it is common to mark their death and celebrate their life in some sort of ceremony. Different religions have their own specific rituals and practices. This section gives details of religious and non-religious funeral **rites**, explaining how these ceremonies reflect beliefs about the afterlife.

Rite a ritual or solemn ceremony.

Christian funeral rites and their meaning

When someone is close to death, if it is possible, a priest is called to say the last rites. Prayers are said for the dying person and they can ask God for forgiveness of their sins. The last rites is a Catholic practice, which might also involve the priest giving Holy Communion.

- **Meaning:** This helps to ease the dying person into the afterlife, enabling them to die at peace, having asked for God's forgiveness.

The funeral itself is usually held in a church. The coffin is carried to the front of the church and a service is held in honour of the dead person: flowers are displayed, prayers said and candles may be lit. The minister reads the words of Jesus:

'I am the resurrection and the life.'

John 11:25

- **Meaning:** The candles represent Jesus as the 'light of the world', because he guides a path into heaven. The passage 'I am the resurrection' reminds the congregation that those who believe in

Jesus will be resurrected, to spend eternity with God.

Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd', is often read at funerals. It says that even when I am 'in the valley of the shadow of death', God is still by my side. Catholics may hold a Mass (Communion service) with bread and wine at a funeral.

- **Meaning:** We are not forgotten by God; he will comfort those who mourn and accompany those who have died.

After this the person is buried, with the words 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. Today, many Christians prefer to be cremated, but traditionally the dead had to be buried.

- **Meaning:** Christianity used to teach that the bones of the dead must be left intact, so that on the Day of Judgement they could reform, rising to bodily resurrection with God in heaven. Some Christians today believe that only the soul goes to heaven, so it is acceptable to cremate the body.

Jewish funeral rites and their meaning

As they are dying, Jews try to say the Shema prayer: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.'

- **Meaning:** This shows their deeply held belief in one God.

When someone dies, arrangements must be made for burial as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours of death. The body will be washed and dressed in a simple white shroud (tachrichim). Men may also be wrapped in their prayer shawl (tallit), which is sometimes cut. The body will then be placed in a simple coffin.

- **Meaning:** Being washed and dressed in a simple white shroud and placed in a simple coffin is to show that the rich and poor are alike in death.

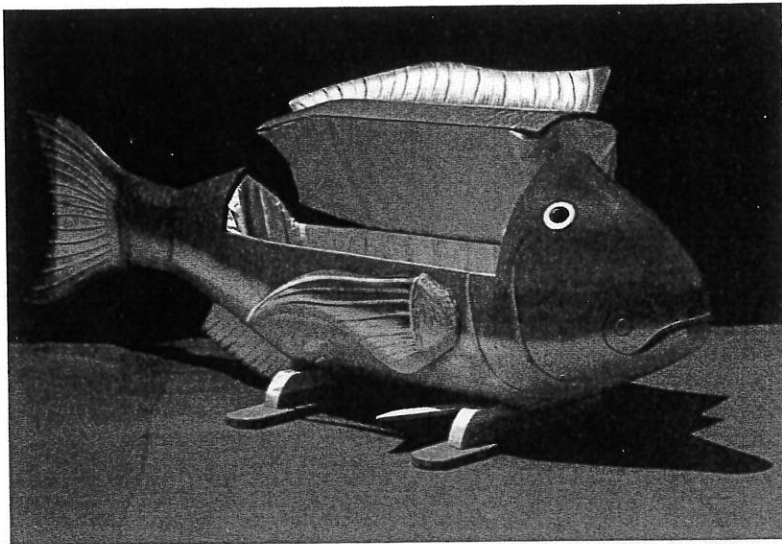
Before the burial takes place the mourners make a tear in their clothes. This is called a keriah.

- **Meaning:** The prayer shawl fringes are cut off to show that now they are dead they are now free of any religious laws. Tearing their clothes represents the grief felt by close family and friends.

Orthodox Judaism does not permit cremation, but some progressive Jews allow it. After the burial a blessing is said: 'May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.'

For the next seven days the family observes shiva, when they stay at home and a candle is kept burning. Kaddish is said three times a day. All the mirrors in the house are covered, people sit on low stools and do not shave or cut their hair.





Unusual coffins, designed to show something special about the life of the person who has died



Green burials are becoming more common in the UK. A growing number of people are choosing to have woodland burials

Non-religious funeral services

Many people today are uncomfortable with religious ceremonies and, as a result, non-religious funeral services are becoming increasingly popular. Many people want a more informal, personal ceremony, where they can choose the songs and readings and where there is no mention of God.

At a humanist funeral those present will remember the life of the person who has died, reflecting on their contribution to the world and to others. It may include:

- ▶ music
- ▶ a non-religious reflection on death
- ▶ readings of poetry
- ▶ reminiscences about the person
- ▶ a eulogy (a description of why they were special)
- ▶ lighting candles
- ▶ moments of quiet reflection.

The service will be led by a humanist celebrant.

- ▶ **Meaning:** The service will try to show respect for the dead person without suggesting that they are going to a better place. They will be remembered for their special, unique qualities, the life they led and the achievements they made.

Tasks

- 1 Copy and complete the table below, identifying the key rites during a Christian funeral and their symbolism or meaning.

Funeral Rite	Symbolism/Meaning

- 2 Explain the key benefits of a funeral for both the living and dead. Where possible provide specific examples from the religious traditions or denominations you are studying.