

HINDU FUNERAL TRADITIONS

Hinduism is considered the world's oldest religion. With roots in the Vedic culture of ancient India, Hinduism is a complex religion with many variations and different schools of thought. However, several beliefs are shared by most Hindus, including the belief in one Supreme God, reincarnation and karma — the cosmic law of cause and effect.

Hindu funeral traditions

In Hinduism, death is considered a great departure. Hindu funeral traditions serve as both a celebration of life and a remembrance of the person who has passed away.

Shortly after someone passes away, it is the traditional Hindu custom to light a lamp at the deceased's head. This symbolizes a light to guide the soul as loved ones gather around to pray. It's not customary to touch the deceased, so Hindu families typically want to move their loved one to a funeral home as quickly as possible. At the funeral home, the body will be washed, sanitized and dressed in white.

Hindu cremation and Hindu mourning period

In Hinduism, it is thought that the body can impede the soul from moving on to the next journey. For this reason, funerals typically take place rather quickly. Ideally, the family will want to hold the funeral right away so the body can be cremated in order to liberate the soul.

In India, the cremation ritual takes place on a pyre. A member of the family lights the pyre to start the cremation process. Hindu cremation in the United States may be accommodated by allowing a family member to start the cremation process.

Hindu funeral services may be held in a funeral home chapel or sometimes at the crematory. These Hindu funeral ceremonies are typically conducted by a Hindu priest, and songs, chants and scripture readings may be part of the service. At the end of the service, guests file past the casket and leave a single flower to pay final respects. After the conclusion of the ceremony, the cremation will occur.

After the cremation, the family usually has a meal and offers prayers in their home. This is the beginning of a 13-day Hindu mourning period during which friends and loved ones will visit to offer condolences. Sometimes the Hindu mourning period includes another ceremonial memorial within the month after the deceased has passed away. This Hindu funeral ritual is meant to support the spirits of the dead on their journey to the next life. In some instances, it's also used to provide the community with another opportunity to say goodbye. The timing of this memorial can be determined by the family and their Hindu faith tradition.