

Multi-faith practices:

Guidelines for Caregivers



Enhancing Life

Authors:

Marianne Mellinger, D.Min.

Theme Leader, Spirituality and Aging

Schlegel-University of Waterloo Research Institute for Aging (RIA)

with

Laura Morlock

Department of Religious Studies (Ph.D. Cand)

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON

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Introduction

We live in an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith world. Thirty years ago most residents living in Canadian long-term care and retirement communities were European-Canadian and Christian. Today a variety of religions and spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, are practiced by residents and team members. Wishing a Muslim resident Ramadan Kareem during Ramadan, a Jewish resident Shabbat Shalom on the Sabbath, or knowing that certain birthdays are important to Buddhists, honours and respects the various traditions that make up our communities. This brief and user-friendly multi-faith resource was created as a practical guide for all team members in retirement and long-term care settings. The guide provides information on six major religions:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Sikhism

The guide provides the following information about each religion:

- A brief description of the religion and its major beliefs
- Holy Days, holidays, and ritual observances
- Caring practices during late life or illness
- Rituals and other practices that are important near the end of life
- Sacred texts, scriptures, and prayers that may provide comfort at times of distress or when someone is dying.

It is important to remember that spiritual practices can be very different even within the same religion, so it is always best to ask residents, family, or caregivers about their personal practices and preferences. This is particularly important when a resident becomes palliative. Some family members may not know the personal practices or preferences of the resident, and they may appreciate suggestions or guidance.

We hope that the information provided in this guide will help all team members to understand and appreciate the religious traditions and faith practices that are important to the community they serve.

Marianne Mellinger

Laura Morlock



Buddhism

Beliefs and Values

There are three main Buddhist traditions:

- Theravada (practiced primarily by people from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka)
- Mahayana (practiced primarily by people from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam)
- Vajrayana (practiced primarily by people from Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Siberia, Bhutan, western China, and parts of India)

Buddhism is arguably the most diverse of the world's major religions. There are many differences among the three main Buddhist traditions, and groups within each tradition also have different practices. Many people in North America and Europe now practice Buddhism, often in ways that are different from the practices in Asian Buddhist cultures. However, all forms of Buddhism are based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE) or “Buddha”, The Enlightened One.

Core Beliefs Include

Buddhas and various spiritual figures help people in the quest for peace, but each person is ultimately responsible

to learn perfect wisdom and compassion in order to reach enlightenment.

Suffering: Suffering occurs when people ignore the law of impermanence. Because all things in life are constantly changing (impermanence), suffering occurs when people try to hold on to the present.

Self: Because all things change, Buddhists do not believe in a permanent “self” or “soul.” Most Buddhists believe that when they die they are reborn into an endless cycle driven by karma (the force of action caused from good or bad deeds). This cycle ends only when greed, hatred, and delusion are completely eliminated. When this occurs, one has reached nirvana, a state of perfect peace that is beyond birth, death, life, or suffering. Nirvana can be reached through a combination of moral conduct or good behaviour, seeking wisdom, and meditation. The practice of reaching nirvana is very difficult, so the average Buddhist attempts to create good karma during life and seeks help from Buddhas and other spiritual figures at the time of death in the hope of a favourable rebirth into the next life.

Morality: Buddhist morality is based on five principles: not killing or harming any living thing; not taking anything that

is not yours; not lying or speaking falsely; avoiding sexual misconduct; and avoiding the use of substances that could cloud the mind. Different traditions and different people interpret these guidelines in different ways. Monks and nuns live by hundreds of other rules that vary from tradition to tradition. ¹

Sacred Texts

Buddhism is not a text-based religion. Although there are sacred texts (including the Sutras, the Sastras, and the Vinaya), the typical Buddhist does not usually read them.

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

Buddhists celebrate a large range of holidays depending on the region they practice in, their traditions, and personal preferences. Local traditions are often more important than holy days that are recognized across the culture. The following list of holy days will not apply to every Buddhist, but provides some examples:

For the Theravada Buddhist

Vesakha Bucha: This holy day marks the birth, awakening, and death of the Buddha. It is celebrated on the full moon in the month of May (in the western calendar), and is marked

by special food and festivals, as well as times of silence and meditation.

For the Mahayana Buddhist

Birth of the Buddha: The timing of this holy day changes, but it usually falls on April 8 in the East Asian tradition.

Enlightenment of the Buddha: The timing of this holy day also changes, but it is often celebrated on December 8 in the East Asian tradition.

Death of the Buddha: Once again the timing changes, but it is often observed on February 15 in the East Asian tradition.

For the Vajrayana Buddhist

Losar: This holy day celebrates the end of the year and the opportunity for a fresh beginning. In Asia this holiday includes dances and ceremonies by monks wearing costumes. The date of Losar changes according to the cycle of the moon, but is often celebrated in February.

Late Life Celebrations

For the Theravada Buddhist

Su kwan: This ritual is intended to re-energize a person's spirit as a means of blessing or expressing good will to the person. The rituals may be performed by a cleric or an elder. While many Buddhists, particularly in Laos and Thailand, observe this, others consider this a non-Buddhist observance.

For the Mahayana Buddhist:

Birthdays at ages 60, 70, 77, 80, 88, 90 and 99 are especially important milestones in some cultures. The 60th birthday, known as kanreki, is very important to some people in Japan.

Caring Practices During Illness:

- Some Buddhists will refuse pain medication if they believe it will cloud their mind. Health care providers should be very specific when talking about medications that may affect a resident's awareness. However, mild painkillers may help a resident to concentrate better if he or she is struggling with pain.
- Many Buddhists, particularly those of Asian ancestry, also use alternative treatment options, such as traditional Chinese medicine.
- Most residents will prefer a care provider who is the same gender, however this has more to do with Asian cultural practice than with Buddhism itself.
- Some residents will ask for peace and quiet because of the importance of mindfulness to Buddhists.
- Many Buddhists are vegetarian. This includes not eating animal byproducts or taking medications that contain animal byproducts.
- Residents and family members might pray or chant quietly for long periods of time.

- Buddhists often use prayer beads, and most find comfort in having a picture of the Buddha nearby. Burning incense and candles is a common practice, but if this is not permitted in the care home, a bouquet of flowers or electric candles may be offered instead.²

End of Life Practices

- Relatives want to be told when death seems near so they can make the necessary preparations.
- Buddhists place great importance on preparing the mind for death and making the process of dying as peaceful as possible.³ Some Buddhists prepare for death by practicing anticipatory death through meditation.
- Leaving this life with a quiet and peaceful mind is important for a favourable rebirth.⁴
- Anyone present with the dying person should provide hope and words of encouragement such as naming positive things the person has done in his or her life. Buddhist mantras may be whispered in the person's ear.
- The dying person is encouraged to forgive themselves and others for any failures or mistakes.
- As a person approaches death, team members should try not to disturb the resident's concentration. In Buddhism, death is a very important time of transition.
- Near the time of death, a Buddhist's family may stand several feet away from the resident and they may appear

unemotional. This too, is to prevent interrupting the resident's concentration.

- The body should be left in place for as long as possible. If a Buddhist monk is available, prayers may be recited for approximately one hour afterwards, even if the body is not present.
- A male family member ritually washes the deceased resident's body, and wraps it in burial cloths.
- Some Southeast Asian traditions place a coin in the deceased person's mouth to buy passage into the afterlife.
- A vase of flowers to honour the Buddha may be placed nearby. Some Buddhists believe that the conscious self remains with the body for three days, which is why cremation should not take place until three days after death.⁵

Readings and Prayers

A Buddhist's family members and/or cleric will likely choose their own prayers, and the following are examples of prayers and readings of some Buddhists.

Honor to Buddha, the supreme sage,
the cosmic overlord who awakens
all beings from drunken ignorance
by manifesting the hundredfold light
of truth's brilliant door.
--the Seventh Dalai Lama

Nine Bows

Homage to all that is healing
in a person's life,
in Traditions,
and in the world

Homage to all that is healing
in the lives of Saints and Sages,
in this practice,
and in my own mind

Homage to all that is healing
in the Stream of Ancestral Teachers,
in the immediate Community of support,
and in our positive motivations.

Taking and Giving Prayer I

May I have the actual knowledge
of the sufferings and needs that exist
in other beings lives everywhere
and may that knowledge completely destroy
whatever deluded self-preoccupation I have
and may it never arise again.

May I then have a compassionate mind,
and respond to them in a way that frees all of them
from all of their suffering forever.

May they have every happiness,
and the cause of happiness,
and may that happiness last forever.

A Buddhist Prayer for the Dead and Dying

Oh Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abiding in all directions,
endowed with great compassion,
endowed with foreknowledge,
endowed with divine eye,
endowed with love,
affording protection to sentient beings,
please come forth through the power of your great
compassion,
please accept these offerings, both actually presented and
mentally created.

Oh Compassionate Ones, you who possess
the wisdom of understanding,
the love of compassion,
the power of doing divine deeds,
and of protecting in incomprehensible measure,
[Name] is passing from this world to the next,
he/she is taking a great leap,
the light of this world has faded for him/her,
he/she has entered solitude with their karmic forces,
he/she has gone into a vast silence,

he/she is borne away by the great ocean of birth and death.

Oh Compassionate Ones, protect [Name] who is defenseless.
Be to him/her like a mother and father.

Oh Compassionate Ones, let not the force of your compassion
be weak, but aid them.

Let [Name] not go into the miserable states of existence.
Forget not your ancient vows.

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Christianity

Beliefs and Values

Christianity grew out of Judaism. It is based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His followers believe he was the long-awaited Messiah that was promised in the Jewish teachings. Jesus showed special compassion to the poor and outsiders, and taught unconditional love and forgiveness towards all people, including one's enemies. His ministry as a teacher and healer attracted a large number of followers. This success threatened the positions of other religious and political leaders of his day and led to his crucifixion. Three days after his death he was restored to life or "resurrected". His followers proclaim that in him God took on human form, and that through him humanity can experience forgiveness and salvation. Christians believe that as they live in right relationship to God and to others (Mark 12:30-31), and to creation (Genesis 1:28-31), God's way of love and peace is demonstrated to the world. Christians believe that life continues after death in communion with God. Most Christians agree that a central commandment of the Christian faith is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).¹

There are many different branches within Christianity. The most common are: Roman Catholic; Eastern Orthodox; mainline Protestant denominations (including Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, United Church of Canada); evangelical groups (such as Pentecostal, Baptist, and Church of Christ); historic peace churches (such as Anabaptist/Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, and Quaker) and a variety of other denominations. There are many differences among these groups, generally along the lines of East and West, and Catholic and Protestant. A person who is Greek Orthodox will expect prayers and rituals that are very different from a Pentecostal resident. However, despite these differences there are similarities, and general principles and practices are provided below. To offer the best spiritual care for a resident it is always best to ask about an individual's particular tradition.

Sacred Texts

All Christian groups accept the Old (Hebrew) and New (Greek) Testaments of the Bible as their sacred Scripture. Catholic residents will appreciate a Bible that includes the Apocrypha (a set of texts Protestants generally exclude). During times of illness or distress several of the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer are important to Christians.

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

Lent: Lent takes place in the forty days leading up to Easter. Christians prepare themselves for this season through prayer, penitence, and for some, fasting.

Good Friday: This marks the day Jesus was crucified and laid to rest in a tomb. Many Christians attend worship services on this day. Good Friday occurs in late March or April, two days before Easter.

Easter Sunday: This is the holiest day in the Christian calendar. It celebrates the day Jesus Christ arose from the dead. It takes place on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox for all Christians. In the Eastern Orthodox church, this day is calculated differently and is often a week later. It is celebrated with joyful worship, music, and flowers. Traditionally children colour or paint eggs, which symbolize new life, and receive chocolate candy.

Christmas: Christmas takes place on December 25 for most Christians, or on or around January 7 for the Eastern Orthodox. This holiday marks the birth of Jesus Christ. People usually give gifts, and this tradition is based on gifts the Magi or Wisemen brought to the baby Jesus.

Holy Communion/Eucharist: This is based on the Lord's Supper recorded in the New Testament Gospels Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25), and Luke (22:14-20) and is the central ritual of the Christian church. Most Christians believe that Jesus is present in the bread and wine and that eating and drinking the bread and wine unites them with Christ in a special way. Christian denominations hold a variety of viewpoints on the meaning of Communion. Communion is typically offered by a priest, clergy person, or a lay minister. Many denominations require the bread and wine to be consecrated or blessed by the priest or minister after which it may then be served by persons appointed to this task.

Anointing of the Sick: This practice is connected to Jesus's compassion for the sick. A simple anointing includes making the sign of the Cross on the person's forehead with oil and saying, "I anoint you in the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit." The following prayer may be used: "May the God of love and mercy release you from suffering, forgive your sins, preserve you in goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ. Amen." This practice is intended to give the resident peace and strength and invoke God's presence in the life of the sick person in a special way. If a resident asks to be anointed and a clergy person is not available, most Christian groups will

accept another person. However, Catholics require a priest or bishop for anointing the sick.

Baptism: In most Christian groups baptism occurs in infancy or in early adulthood, however some people may request a baptism later in life. In most denominations baptism includes pouring or cupping a small amount of water on the individual's head and saying: "[Name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This may be followed with the Lord's Prayer. Baptism symbolizes the forgiveness of sin, the acceptance of salvation, and marks one as a part of the church. If someone requests baptism and a clergy person is not available, anyone may baptize in an emergency.

Caring Practices During Illness

- Most Christians appreciate a visit from their priest or minister.
- Prayer is important. The Lord's Prayer/Our Father is familiar to all Christian groups.
- For some groups, Communion or anointing is especially important. Catholics may appreciate receiving the Sacrament of the Sick from their priest.
- Music is important to most Christians. Caregivers can check with the resident and family to determine which hymns or songs would be most appreciated.

- Family members often gather with the person who is dying. Most appreciate the presence of a chaplain or clergy and the offering of a reading or a prayer.

End of Life Practices

- Because Christians believe that human life flows entirely from God as a gift, after death, bodies are to be treated with great dignity and respect.²
- After a death has occurred, most Christian groups appreciate a prayer for the deceased person and/or for the family.
- Burial or cremation typically occurs 2-5 days after death.

Readings and Prayers

Scripture readings for someone who is ill or dying:

- Psalm 23; Psalm 27:1-5, 13-14; Psalm 46: 1-7, 10-11; Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 91; Psalm 103: 1-5, 15-22, Psalm 130, Isaiah 46:3-4
- Matthew 11:28-30, John 14:1-7, Romans 8:38-39

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father): Matthew 6:9-13:

Our Father who art in heaven;
hallowed be thy name.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done
on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our

trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory
forever.*

Amen. *(Roman Catholics omit this line)

Prayers for someone who is sick or in distress:

Gracious God, you are loving and caring, and we trust you.
Help us to know that you strengthen and hold us at all times.
We pray now that you will grant to [Name] a strong faith,
an inner peace, and a calm spirit. Touch [Name] with your
renewing love, that he/she may know wholeness in you and
that your light may shine through the darkness of this time of
suffering. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.³

Support us, O Lord,
all the day long of this troublous life,
until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes,
the busy world is hushed,
the fever of life is over,
and our work is done.
Then, Lord, in your mercy grant us a safe lodging,
a holy rest, and peace at the last;
through Christ our lord.
Amen.⁴

Prayer for someone who is dying:

Loving God, you are our refuge and strength. In the good days
and in the days marked with pain you are with us. We pray
now for [Name]. Grant to him/her faith, courage, and your
loving presence for the journey from life to life. Let death
come as peacefully as evening, promising a new morning of
joy in company with Jesus Christ, the Lord of eternal life.
Amen.

Contemporary Meditations

At the last, let it be a sweet good-bye.
All business finished.
All affairs tidied.
All loose ends attended.
All regrets squared away.
All loved ones gathered.
All words of love spoken.
All life lived fully.
One last look,
one last squeeze of the hand,
one last deep breath,
one last sweet good-bye
and a final eager step towards Jesus.
--Carol Penner

At the last kiss,
at the final true laugh,
at the bottom of the body's decline,
at the mind's last conscious thought,
at the moment when love vanishes,
at the end of all remembering,
be the God at the last.
Be the God of wrinkled bodies and stooped shoulders,
the God of vacant eyes and open mouths,
the God of incontinence and shaking.
Be the God who holds the hand,
the God who soothes the brow,
the God who whispers words of comfort
and the God who hums a lullaby
until the last sleep falls.
--Carol Penner ⁵

Prayer for the Deceased

Depart, O Christian soul, out of this world,
In the name of God Almighty who created you;
In the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed you;
In the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you;
May your rest be this day in peace,
And your dwelling place in the Paradise of God. Amen. ⁶

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Hinduism

Beliefs and Values

Hindu traditions are thousands of years old, but there was no Hindu “religion” before British colonialism.¹ Hinduism’s history is closely connected to political and social developments, including the rise and fall of various kingdoms, colonial rule, and modern independence.² Today, Hinduism is a collection of many traditions and philosophies that are native to India. It includes several major sects or groups, and practices may differ depending on where one lives.

Hindus believe that time is cyclical and eternal, rather than linear with a final ending. Time cycles through successive ages (golden, silver, copper, and iron) and this series of ages is called yuga. During the golden age, people followed and believed in dharma, which means law, duty, and truth, but in each age that follows (silver, copper, and iron), the good qualities have decreased. According to Hindu tradition, we are now living in the fourth age, iron, which is an age of quarrels and deceit. It is believed the end of the iron age will lead to the dawning of another golden age.³

Personal spirituality is very important in Hinduism and many Hindus worship a large number of deities or gods.

Others believe in a Hindu trinity (trimurti) which is made up of three deities: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Shiva (the destroyer and regenerator). Some people believe in a form of monotheism, where all gods are manifestations or different forms of one true God. Hindus believe that God is personal and also transcendent, that is over and beyond the whole world. The purpose of life is to become aware of the soul, or True Self. Hindu Sacred texts suggest Listening, Remembering, and Meditation as three methods to discover one’s True Self. Even though the body dies, the True Self does not and it cannot be destroyed. Hindus believe that death is a transition stage for the True Self, and not a final end point. The True Self will either be reborn in a new body, or will be united with Brahman.

Hinduism includes the following main beliefs or concepts:

Samsara: All beings are reincarnated or reborn over and over again.

Karma: The results of our actions affect future lives.

Dukkha: Suffering causes endless rebirths.

Moksha: The True Self can only find liberation from this suffering through spiritual knowledge.⁴

Sacred Texts

The Hindu collection of sacred texts is called the Sanatana Dharma which means “The Eternal Teachings”. There are two categories of texts within this collection: Shruti texts are older and considered to be of divine origin, Smrti texts consist of knowledge acquired after the Shruti were recorded. Shruti generally refers to the Vedas, the Brahmanas, and the Upanishads (some Hindus also classify the Bhagavad Gita as shruti). Smrti generally refers to everything else: a vast collection of stories, epic texts, poetry, and traditions. ⁵

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

Diwali, Deepavali, or Festival of Lights: This is the most popular Hindu festival, and means “row of lamps.” It is a reminder that justice brings victory, such as the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. Hindus exchange gifts with family and friends, and celebrate over a number of days that includes the Hindu New Year. Many people light oil lamps to represent that light has triumphed over darkness, and to make the goddess Lakshmi feel welcome. Fireworks also represent the light, while frightening away evil spirits. Diwali falls in late Ashwin (usually September-October) and ends in early Kartika (October-November). It is necessary to check the date each year.

Holi: This is the Hindu spring festival called the Festival of Colours. People cover each other with coloured powder, and throw coloured water. This symbolizes breaking down barriers between people because everyone looks the same. There are many religious stories associated with Holi, including one about Krishna that is the source of the coloured powder tradition. Another story, about Prahlada and Holika, teaches that good wins over evil and is the reason certain regions of India light bonfires.

Rama Navami or Ramnavmi: This holiday celebrates Lord Rama’s birthday and focuses on moral reflection and charity to others. Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, and the hero of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana. Hindus read parts of this story in temple as part of the celebration. Tradition states that Rama was born at noon, and Hindus say special prayers at this time, and offer Prasad (blessed food) to a picture of baby Rama. The food is shared with those who are present. Hindus decorate their homes for this holiday, and place fruit and flowers on the family shrine, a space in Hindu homes dedicated to worship and meditation. The youngest female family member puts a tilak (red mark) on the other family members before they all join together in worship. This festival is celebrated in the Spring. ⁶

Caring Practices During Illness

- It is both a cultural and religious practice for Hindus to visit people who are sick. Many Hindu residents will have a large number of visitors, including people outside of their immediate family. Visitors should be accommodated as much as possible.
- Hinduism considers the needs of an individual within the larger context of family, culture, and environment. Therefore, family plays an active role in care decisions.
- Hinduism emphasizes respect for elders, and children have a strong responsibility toward their parents. It is a family obligation to care for the elderly and sick, and healthcare providers should take this into consideration when developing care plans.
- Hindu residents may want to have religious statues or icons near them. Kali, the dancing Shiva, Ganesha, and Nataraja are popular choices.
- Prayer and meditation are important to most Hindus, but there are no set times for these to happen.
- Purity is a principal concept in Hinduism, and bathing and cleanliness are very important. Oral hygiene can include brushing teeth, using a metal tongue scraper, and chewing mint leaves, cloves, or fennel seeds.
- Most Hindus have morning rituals of cleaning and prayer.

They brush their teeth immediately after waking up, followed by bathing, prayer, and then eating. Many Hindus won't eat until these morning rituals are done.

- Hindus traditionally eat with their right hand because the left hand is considered unclean. It is very important to wash hands before and after a meal. If a resident needs help eating, use the right hand if touching the food directly. Either hand is acceptable if utensils are used.
- Hindu spirituality includes a belief in non-violence, and for many this includes animals. Most Hindus are strict vegetarians. Some will eat dairy products, and some will eat meat, except for beef or pork. Cows are considered sacred, and pigs are considered unclean.
- Some medications contain animal byproducts which may be forbidden for Hindus. If there is no other option, healthcare providers should discuss the medication with the resident and their family.
- Fasting is a common practice in Hinduism.
- Many Hindus practice Ayurvedic medicine and which is highly regarded in India. It uses a combination of spiritual remedies and Western medicine. It teaches that all illnesses (both physical and mental) have biological, psychological, and spiritual elements. Ayurvedic medicine is available in Canada, but Hindu residents may not tell healthcare providers if they are using these medications.

Healthcare providers may need to ask about all medications being taken to provide holistic health care.

- Hindus may use vibuthi (holy ash) as a spiritual remedy. Vibuthi is used in religious worship, and many believe it contains protective, purifying, and healing properties when smeared on the skin, eaten in small amounts, or carried in a pouch near the body.
- Modesty is very important to both Hindu men and women. Most Hindus will want a health care practitioner that is the same gender for examinations and procedures. Invasive examinations will need to be carefully explained to the resident or family.
- Many Hindu women wear a sacred thread, gold chain, or ring around their neck. Many Hindu men wear a sacred thread across their chest. Some wear sacred tulsi beads around their necks. If these need to be removed for an examination or procedure, caregivers need to ask the resident or family's permission first.

End of Life Practices

- Information about a terminal diagnosis is usually given to the family instead of being told directly to the resident. Families are involved in deciding what information is given to the resident.
- Most Hindus want their final words and thoughts to be

about God. It is important to surround residents with the holy, for example, water from the Ganges River, or chanting soothing Vedic mantras.

- Dying at home has particular religious significance and will likely be the preference for most Hindus.
- The resident's oldest son (regardless of his age) is expected to be present before, during, and after death. The son's role in end of life care is essential. If there is no son, an uncle may perform the rites. Other family members may also be present.
- End-of-life rituals may include:
 - Tying a sacred thread around the resident's neck or wrist.
 - Placing a sacred tulsi (holy basil) leaf on the resident's tongue.
 - Giving the resident a few drops of water from the Ganges River.
- If the resident wears sacred tulsi beads around their neck, they must stay on their body at the time of death. If they must be removed, they should be re-tied on the resident's wrist (preferably the right wrist).
- The resident's family may wish to light a small lamp, or burn incense, near the deceased.
- Family members may wish to wash the deceased's body.

- All jewelry, religious objects, and sacred threads should be left in place, if possible. If it is necessary to remove any of these items, caregivers should ask family members first.
- Non-Hindu individuals should wear gloves when handling the body.
- Most Hindus observe thirteen days of mourning after death. Family members may require more time away from their normal lives than is common practice in North America. During this time, Hindus perform ceremonies and pray together as a family and as a community.
- Hindus generally consider autopsies unacceptable, but will usually give permission when it is required by law.
- It is important for Hindus to be cremated as soon as possible after death.⁷

Readings and Prayers

Readings and Prayers are from the Bhagavad Gita. Given the differences within Hinduism, it is important to check with the resident and/or the family to see if the following are suitable prayers for their tradition.

Impermanence of Life

(2:11-13) The wise grieve not for those who live; and they grieve not for those who die – for life and death shall pass away. Because we all have been for all time: I, thou, and kings

of men. And we shall be for all time ... As the Spirit of our mortal body wanders on in childhood, youth, and old age, the Spirit wanders on to a new body ...

(2:20) He is never born, and he never dies. He is in eternity; he is for evermore. Neverborn and eternal, beyond times gone or to come, he does not die when the body dies.

(2:22) As a man leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the Spirit leaves his mortal body and then puts on one that is new.

Devotion to God

(2:47) Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work. Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind – a peace that is ever the same.

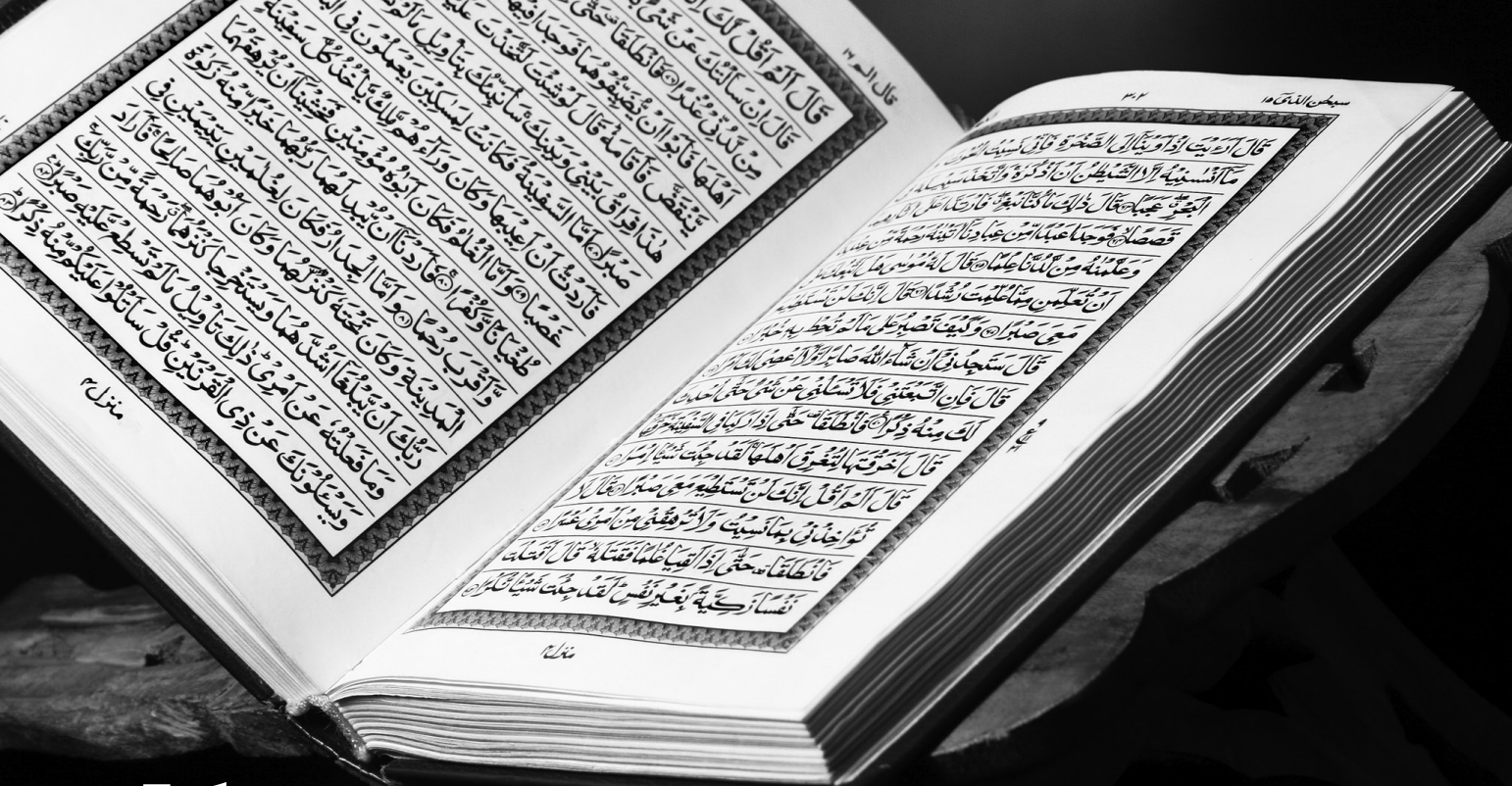
(8:20-22) Beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is an Invisible, Higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains forever and ever. The Invisible is called the Everlasting and is the highest End supreme. Those who reach him never return. This is my supreme abode. This Spirit Supreme, Arajuna, is attained by an ever-living love. In him, all things have their life, and from him, all things have come.

The Matyuijaya Mantra

Ommm. We worship and adore you, O three-eyed one, O Shiva. You are sweet gladness, the fragrance of life who nourishes us, restores our health, and causes us to thrive. As in due time, the stem of the cucumber weakens, and the gourd is freed from the vine, so free us from attachment and death, and do not withhold immortality.

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Islam

Beliefs and Values

Islam is a monotheistic (meaning belief in one God) religion, that began in the Middle East during the 7th century C.E. The word Islam means “to submit oneself” and the word Muslim means “one who submits.” Therefore, a Muslim is one who submits to or serves Allah/God. The word Allah is the Arabic word for God, and is also used by Arab Christians. Muslims, Christians, and Jews, worship the same God, and Abraham is the spiritual ancestor common to all three religions. Muslims believe in the absolute oneness of God/Allah, meaning that Allah has no other partners who share his divinity. Islam is based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets sent by Allah, and Muslims believe he wrote down and communicated God’s complete message to humans. Other prophets include Abraham, Moses and Jesus (Issa). Muslims consider Jesus (Issa) to be one of the most important prophets. Muslims say “‘alayhi s-salam” which means “peace be upon him” when they hear the name of a prophet or an archangel.

There are two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shi’a. About 85% of Muslims are Sunni. There are significant differences

between Sunnis and Shi’as, one difference being their views on the role of clergy. There are also many differences within each branch. There are also several other small sects, including Sufis who are Islamic mystics.

Islamic spirituality is expressed through living and acting according to God’s will, loving God with one’s whole being, and cleansing oneself from all evil traits.¹

Muslim spiritual practices are expressed through Arkan Al Islam Al Khamsa (the Five Pillars of Islam):

Al Shahadatan (Confession of Faith): This is practiced daily in front of witnesses, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

Al Sala (Prayer): This is practiced five times a day facing Mecca or northeast from most areas of Canada. This prayer practice includes washing (wudu), ritual, and gestures.

Al Sawm (Fasting): This is practiced during the holy month of Ramadan during which Muslims fast each day from before sunrise until sunset. The fast is broken in the evening with a celebration with friends and family.

Al Zakaa (Charity): Each year, Muslims donate at least 2.5% of their wealth to the poor as a sign of Islamic family ties. However, those who receive the donation do not need to be Muslim.

Al Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca): If at all possible, Muslims make this pilgrimage trip at least once in their lives. A person who has made the pilgrimage receives the honoured title Hajji (for men) or Hajjah (for women). Using these titles is a sign of respect.

Sacred Texts

The Qur'an (Koran) is the primary book of divine guidance for Muslims. The original Arabic text is considered to be the final revelation spoken directly to the prophet Muhammad from God. Muslims also accept the Jewish Torah and Psalms, and the Christian Gospels as texts of God. The Qur'an refers to Jewish and Christian people as Ahl al-Kitab which means "people of the book" or "people of the Scripture."

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

- Ramadan is the holy month of Islam, and occurs each year in the ninth month of the Hejiri calendar (usually between June and August in the western calendar).

- Muslims fast (sawm) from sun-up to sun-down during this month and use this time to reflect on their lives, purify their souls, refocus their attention to God, and practice self-sacrifice. Sawm literally means "to refrain".
- Fasting is not only avoiding food and drink, but is a commitment of the believer's entire body and soul to the fast. The tongue cannot speak harmful words, the eyes cannot look at haram (unlawful) things, the hand cannot commit sins, the ears cannot listen to gossip or obscene words, and the feet cannot go to places of sin.
- During Ramadan, Muslims are expected to seek peace both within oneself and toward others, strengthen ties to family and friends, and do away with bad habits. Many Muslims give their Zakaat (charity) at this time.
- During Ramadan you may wish a Muslim "Ramadan Kareem" (Happy Ramadan or Generous Ramadan). The appropriate response to this is "Allahu Akram" (Allah is most generous).
- Eid al Fitr: This is a three-day festival celebrating the end of Ramadan. It is a very social time, with a lot of visiting, feasting, and parties. Arab and Persian cultures place a strong emphasis on personal appearance. For Eid parties (which often have different sections for men and women), attendees wear formal clothes with lots of accessories, hair, and makeup. During Eid, it is appropriate to wish a

Muslim “Eid Mubarak” (meaning Blessed Eid). Muslims often appreciate hearing this greeting from non-Muslims. Children often go from one house to another and receive small candies. Children also receive gifts for Eid.

- Eid al Adha: (Feast of the Sacrifice) This occurs at the end of Hajj, (the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) and commemorates Abraham’s (Ibrahim) willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (Ismail) to God.
- Because Muslim tradition focuses on religious celebrations rather than personal ones, many Muslims do not celebrate birthdays as in North America. However, most Muslim residents would be happy to receive birthday wishes, but caregivers should not be surprised if family and friends do not bring cake and presents.

Caring Practices During Illness

- Muslims may see their illness as purifying their sins, and believe that enduring trials on Earth will result in greater Divine reward. Others might fear that their illness is Divine punishment.
- Islam follows a halal diet (described below). It is best to ask residents and their families about dietary restrictions.
 - Pork, bacon, ham, or any pork byproduct (e.g. gelatin, which is used in many soups, yogurt and margarine) is haram or forbidden.

- Other than pork products, all meat is allowed if it is halal. This means that it is sacrificed according to Islamic law. Most Muslims will accept kosher meat, and many Muslims will eat meat that is not specifically halal, as long as it was not slaughtered in the name of another god.
- It is acceptable for Muslims to eat meat prepared by Christians and Jews according to Surah al-Maida, v.5 in the Qur’an, and also Muhammad’s own practices as recorded in the hadith (Islamic traditions).
- There are no restrictions on seafood, vegetables, dairy products, or fruit.
- Alcohol is forbidden, even in cooking.
- People who are unwell are not required to fast during Ramadan. However, many Muslims will want to try to participate even if they are ill. It may be helpful to have the family or other caregivers involved in negotiating fasting practices.
- Many Muslims prefer to use their right hand for eating and drinking. If a resident needs help eating, use the right hand if touching the food directly. Either hand is acceptable if utensils are used.
- Modesty is extremely important for Muslim men and women. Genders are usually separated, unless the person is a close relative. Most Muslims will want a health care practitioner that is the same gender. Only the areas on the

body that require attention should be touched or exposed.

- Some Muslim women will not allow a male health practitioner to touch them. Residents who strictly follow these practices may find it challenging to let them go even for medical reasons. However, many Islamic leaders refer to Surah al-Baqarah v. 185 of the Qur'an, which explains that keeping harm away from a person is more important than spiritual benefits. A devout Muslim is required to do all in his or her power to ensure their wellbeing, and protecting and preserving health overrides modesty rules.
- Both Muslim men and women are required to dress modestly. While there is great diversity, many Muslim women wear the hijab (head covering), and other modest garments when in the company of men.
- Muslims perform ritual washing (Wudu) before prayer. Providing a basin of water at the bedside for bedbound residents is appreciated. If a person is unable to wash with water, they are permitted to perform Taiem-mum which is a dry, symbolic cleansing.
- Residents may prefer a chapel for prayer or will pray in their own rooms. Praying on a prayer rug is preferred, but a clean sheet or towel can also be used. If it is difficult for a resident to face Mecca to pray, it is acceptable for the person to pray anywhere, facing any direction.

- Family plays an important role in the life of an elderly or sick person, so it is not unusual for there to be a large number of visitors. It is considered a virtue to visit the sick.
- Muslims residents will appreciate being assisted to perform Islamic acts of worship, including access to a Qur'an. An imam, (a Sunni Islamic spiritual leader), or a family member (or Christian clergy if neither are available) may recite portions of the Qur'an with the resident. ²

End of Life Practices

- Muslims believe God predestines on death's timing, and are often accepting of dying.
- A dying person should face Mecca if at all possible. The head should be elevated.
- Death is considered a passing stage between this life and the life to come. Muslims believe that the spirit departs from the body at the time of death. Around the time of death, all family members, including children, gather to reaffirm the central beliefs of the Islamic faith with the resident (Al Shahadatan).

- After death, only Muslims of the same gender, or a close relative of the opposite gender, may handle the body. A Muslim body is afforded the same dignity and respect as a living person.
- *Preparation of the body includes:*
 - Eyes and mouth should be closed immediately.
 - The lower jaw should be bandaged to the head to keep the mouth closed.
 - Straighten the body.
 - The body is ritually washed and perfumed.
 - A woman's hair is braided according to ritual.
 - A man's head is wrapped in a turban, and a woman's in a veil.
 - Do not cut the nails.
 - Bind the feet together.
 - Undress the body, and shroud the body in a white cloth.
 - While these tasks are performed, family members and the imam (if present) pray.
 - Most communities with a Muslim population have at least one designated person of each gender trained to oversee preparation of the body.
 - The body may be removed by a funeral director authorized by the Muslim community.
- The funeral is a very simple ceremony, and occurs the same night at a Mosque.³

Readings and Prayers ⁴

Many Muslims recite the first chapter of the Qur'an (al Fatiha - "the Opening") daily as an essential part of the five daily prayers.

Al Fatiha

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
 Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the world;
 most Gracious, Most Merciful;
 Master of the Day of Judgment.
 Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek.
 Show us the straight way,
 the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
 those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not astray.

For the Sick:

You are the All-Powerful, Benevolent God.
 We come before you not with confidence in ourselves but with full trust in you. You are the All Wise One who created [Name], who is before us in pain of body, distress of mind, and fearful in spirit. His/her illness is taking its toll upon him/her. We ask, Oh! Holy One, that you will be pleased to give [Name] patience to endure the pain in thankfulness to you. May strength to cope with each day's burdens be granted him/her. We ask this not for ourselves but that his/her faith in you and submission to your will may not falter. Grant that faith

will be sufficient unto the day when you summon all before the Judgment. On that Day, may [Name] be granted entry to Paradise. Insha'Allah (God willing).

For the Dying:

There is no God but Allah, the Forbearing, the Generous. There is no God but Allah, the High, the Grand. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths and what is in them, between them, and beneath them. And the Lord of the Great Throne, and praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Universe.

If possible, the dying person may recite:

O Allah, forgive me, have mercy on me and unite me with the Most High Companion. None is worthy of praise beside Allah. Surely death has many hardships and difficulties. O Allah, help me in overcoming the throes and difficulties of death.

After death: Recited by those who are present:

O Allah, forgive [Name]; and raise his/her status in Paradise – the Garden among the rightly guided people; and be his/her representative among his/her people who he/she has left behind and forgive us and him/her. O Sustainer of the worlds. And O Allah, make his/her grace vast and accommodating and fill it with light.

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A black and white photograph of a menorah with lit candles. The menorah is in the foreground, with several candles lit, creating a warm glow. In the background, there are many small, round coins scattered on a surface. The coins have a distinct design, possibly a religious or historical symbol. The overall composition is artistic and symbolic.

Judaism

Beliefs and Values

Judaism, which gave rise to Christianity and Islam, began nearly 4000 years ago in the land that is now Israel and Palestine. Abraham and Moses are important figures in Judaism. Judaism is based on the belief in one God and believes that human beings are created in the image of God. Human beings are given freedom of choice, and they serve as God's partners in completing creation. Jewish congregations range from the highly traditional (Hasidic, Ultra Orthodox, and Modern Orthodox) to the liberal (the Reform and Reconstructionist branches) with conservative Jews falling somewhere between these two. Many Jews are not religiously observant, but identify strongly with Judaism from an ethical, cultural, or historical perspective. However, religious practices are often integrated into daily life and separating religious practice from Jewish culture can be difficult.

Authority within Judaism comes from its sacred writings, laws, and traditions instead of from any person or group. Jewish people are obliged to debate and wrestle with their sacred texts. Judaism stresses performance commandments (mitzvot) rather than following a belief system. Religious Jews

place emphasis on living a moral and ethical life rather than on eternal rewards. Judaism stresses human responsibility in this life rather than attributing life events to "God's will".

*A summary of core beliefs and values includes:*¹

- God is both transcendent (above and beyond all of creation), and a divine presence.
- God is timeless and eternal.
- God chose Israel to carry out a unique responsibility in the world.
- Obeying God's commandments is central to being a faithful Jew.
- When this world becomes a place fit for the Divine, God will send a human Messiah who will bring an era of peace. (Messiah is understood differently among the various branches of Judaism, and it is also different than the Christian understanding of Messiah).
- The family is the central unit of society.
- Practicing charity is a legally binding obligation.
- There is a strong commitment to education, learning and work.
- Ceremony and tradition are very important.

Sacred Texts

The complete Jewish sacred text is called the Tanakh. This includes the Torah (the five books of Moses, known as the Law), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Kethuvim (the Writings). The Tanakh consists of the same books as the Old Testament in the Christian tradition, though ordered differently. Jewish sacred texts also include the Talmud, which is a collection of Jewish oral traditions interpreting the Torah.

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

Holidays are very important to most Jewish people, especially Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. These holidays may affect the scheduling of medical procedures, and may require dietary changes. All Jewish holidays begin and end at sundown:

Weekly Shabbat (Sabbath): This holy day occurs each week from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday and it is based on the text from B'reshith (Genesis): "So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." In health care settings, observing Shabbat may affect travelling, using elevators, signing papers, preparing for funerals, and removing the body after death. Burial and grieving are not permitted on the

Sabbath. "Shabbat Shalom", wishing the person the peace of the Sabbath, is a customary greeting. Any other time, Shalom (meaning peace, or wholeness/completeness) is a usual greeting and a farewell.

Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year): This is a time to think about mistakes of the past year and resolutions for the coming year. It is celebrated on the first and second of the month of Tishrei (in the western calendar, Rosh Hashanah typically occurs in September). During this time Jewish people reflect on their actions and seek to make amends with each other and with God. Many people eat apples and honey in hope of a new year that is happy, pure, and free from previous mistakes. It is a time of both celebration and serious reflection.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement): Yom Kippur occurs on the tenth day of Tishrei (eight days after Rosh Hashanah), and is the most important holiday in the Jewish year. It is a solemn day, a time to reflect on and to repent from and atone for sins of the past year. In Jewish tradition, this is the day God seals the Book of Life and Death for the coming year. The traditional greeting, "G'mar Hatimah Tovah" (May You Be Sealed for a Good Year) reflects the purpose of this day.

Sukkot (Feast of Booths), Pesach (Passover), and Shavout (Feast of Weeks): These are the three major festivals associated with Torah.

- Sukkot is a harvest festival, and begins five days after Yom Kippur.
- Pesach occurs in the early Spring, and begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan. It commemorates the exodus of Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, as told in Sh'mot (Exodus). On the first night of Pesach, Jewish families gather for an important ceremonial meal, called the Seder.
- Shavu'ot, occurs seven weeks after Pesach, and commemorates God giving the Torah (the five books of Moses) to Moses on Mount Sinai. Some Jewish people observe this holiday by studying the Torah throughout the entire first night of Shavu'ot.
- Chanukkah: This is an eight-day festival that commemorates the rededication and purification of the temple in 167BC. It begins on the 25th day of the month of Kislev (usually late November or December) and is celebrated by lighting a candle each day on the Menorah. It is a minor holiday in Judaism, but sometimes receives much attention because it takes place close to the Christian holiday of Christmas.² Traditional games and gifts are a part of this holiday.

Caring Practices During Illness

- Most Jewish residents appreciate a visit from a rabbi (a Jewish religious leader).
- Many Jewish men wear a yarmulke or kippah (skull cap) for prayer, some may wear it at all times. Residents may also wear prayer shawls and use phylacteries, which are two small boxes that contain verses from scripture and are worn on the forehead and forearm during prayer.
- Residents may ask for a minyan (a group of at least ten people) for prayer.
- Some Jewish residents follow a strict set of religious guidelines that prohibits work on the Sabbath or on religious holidays. This includes using certain tools, writing, adjusting a motorized bed, pushing buttons to call a nurse, or operating a patient controlled analgesia (PCA) pump. These restrictions are generally associated with Orthodox Judaism, but may also be important for any Jewish resident.
- Only life-saving medical procedures should be scheduled during the Sabbath or on religious holidays.
- Jewish religious laws include a complex set of restrictions that can affect medical decisions. Exceptions are made to religious laws when it is a matter of saving a life. In Judaism “saving a life” is of the highest value. Some Jewish residents may require a Kosher diet.

This includes the special preparation of some food (such as beef), as well as the prohibition of some foods (such as pork and gelatin) and food combinations (such as beef served with dairy products).

End of Life Practices

- Death cannot be accelerated, but extraordinary measures to prolong life may be refused.
- Withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining therapy is strongly debated within Judaism. Most Jewish families will wish to talk with a rabbi about the specific circumstances and decisions regarding end-of-life care.
- Jewish people believe that a “good” death is one where the dying person has lived a long life, is surrounded by loved ones, and is at home.
- A dying person should not be left alone. During the last minutes of life no one in the presence of the resident should leave except in an emergency. Watching over a person as he or she passes from this world to the next is considered a sign of great respect.
- As death draws near, the first line of the Shema may be recited: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Also, Psalm 23 and the entire Shema may be read.
- A person may confess his or her sins to God directly and invoke God’s forgiveness.

- Judaism teaches that the moment of yetziat neshamah (departure of the soul) is one of the most sacred moments in a person’s life, and is also one with great potential. The dying person, or those present, affirms God’s unity by saying the Shema, and performs Teshuva, an act of repentance. According to Judaism, people may repair, enhance, or resolve any aspect of their lives for as long as they live.³
- After death, the resident’s eyes and mouth are closed, preferably by a close relative, and a sheet is drawn over the face. The body should not be touched except to show honour, for example straightening the body if it is in an awkward position.
- If possible the windows should be opened.
- A candle should be placed near the head of the deceased as a symbol of the human soul, and of God’s eternal presence. If death occurs on the Sabbath, this is not done.
- Some Jewish groups do not permit the body to be moved on the Sabbath.
- Judaism teaches that the soul does not completely leave this world until the body is buried, so the time between death and burial is a time of disorientation for the departed. The presence of others who show their care through respect and prayer is very comforting to the departed, and to the family.

- Usually a family member or representative will accompany the body at all times until the burial occurs.
- Care of the body is important, and some communities have a Chevra kaddisha, or a group of people dedicated to the holy work of caring for the body.
- Friends and neighbours may sit shiva with the family for seven days after the funeral, mourning with them and caring for their needs.
- It is not appropriate to send flowers, but food is appreciated.
- Jewish tradition prefers burial within 24 hours of death.⁴
- When hearing about a death, or other sad news, many Jews say “Baruch dayan emet” (Blessed is the true Judge). It acknowledges that this is beyond human understanding.

Readings and Prayers

Mi Sheberakh: May the One Who Blessed (Traditional Prayer for the Sick)

May the One who blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and our foremothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael, and Leah, bless and heal [Name] the son/daughter of [Name]. May the Holy One blessed by G-d, be merciful and strengthen and heal him/her. Grant [Name] a complete and speedy recovery—healing of body and healing of soul, along with all the ill. And let us say Amen.

The following Psalms may be appreciated:

For the elderly:	Psalms 22, 38, 41, 71
Psalms of Hope:	Psalms 23, 41, 71
Psalms of Lament:	Psalms 22, 38, 88

Shema: (This is a prominent and familiar prayer in Judaism and is often recited morning and evening.)

Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.

You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for a reminder between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

And it will be, if you will diligently obey My commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, to love the L-rd your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give rain for your land at the proper time, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be sated. Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods

and bow down to them. For then the L-rd's wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land which the L-rd gives you. Therefore, place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for a reminder between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates - so that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged on the land which the L-rd swore to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth.

The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of blue on the fringe of each corner. They shall be to you as tzizit, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the L-rd and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you go astray - so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your G-d. I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d; I, the L-rd, am your G-d. True.

Viduy: When death is near an individual may be encouraged to say a set of prayers called Viduy (confession). These are prayers that invoke G-d's mercy. It is important to know that saying Viduy does not mean that death is imminent, in fact it is best if the prayers can be recited with a clear mind. If the person is unable to pray, others may pray Viduy on the resident's behalf.

“Upon you, O Lord my G-d and G-d of my ancestors, I acknowledge that my life and recovery depend upon you. May it be Your will to heal me. Yet, if You have decreed that I shall die of this affliction, may my death atone for all sins and transgressions which I have committed before you. Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings, grant me a share in the world-to-come. Protector of orphans and Guardian of widows, protect my beloved family, with whose soul my own soul is bound. Into Your hand I commit my soul. You have redeemed me, O Lord G-d of truth. Hear O Israel: The Lord our G-d. The Lord is One.

Malei Rachamin (The traditional prayer for a funeral or memorial service). G-d, full of compassion, Who dwells on high, grant perfect rest beneath the shadow of thy divine presence in the exalted places among the holy and pure, who shine like the glow of the firmament for the soul of [Name],

who went on to his/her eternal home. In the merit that we remember them and recall all their good deeds, may You, O G-d of mercy, shelter [Name] forever under the wings of Your divine presence. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life eternal, and grant that his/her memories ever inspire us to a noble and consecrated living. Amen.

The Kaddish, a prayer of praise of God is also said in memory of the dead, as a way of affirming the goodness of the universe in the face of death.

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Sikhism

Beliefs and Values

Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak Dev, was born in 1469 in Punjab, India. Nine Gurus or divine teachers followed him. Sikhs believe there is only One, Universal, Formless, Timeless God of all people, who created the universe and all that is in it. "Sikh" means learner, and Sikhism is a disciplined path of meditating about God, earning an honest living, sharing with those less fortunate, and selfless service to humanity. ¹

Although Sikhism grew out of Hinduism, and still has some similarities (such as the belief in reincarnation), Sikhism is a separate religion. The equality of all humanity is very important in Sikhism. An initiated Sikh (one who has completed the ceremony of initiation) is known as a member of the Khalsa order. ²

Sacred Texts

Sikh Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, is considered a living Guru, and is at the heart of Sikh worship. The presence of the text, when placed on the altar in Gurudwara (Sikh temple), sanctifies the temple. The text is cared for as if it were a holy elder. Guru Granth Sahib contains devotional compositions and hymns.

Holy Days, Holidays, and Ritual Observances

The agricultural cycle and natural seasons strongly influence Sikh art, song, dance, and celebrations. These include: ³

- **Gupurab (Celebrating the guru):** At the beginning of January, congregations at Gurudwaras (Sikh temple) celebrate Guru Gobind Singh's birthday.
- **Vaisakhi (or Baisakhi):** This is one of the most important holidays for Sikhs and celebrates the creation of the Khalsa order in 1699. It occurs in mid-April, and is also a cultural festival celebrated with fairs, music, song, dance and food.
- In June, Sikhs commemorate the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev.
- In October, Sikhs celebrate an enthronement day for Guru Granth Sahib (the Holy Scripture).
- **Diwali:** Diwali is the Sikh festival of lights and it also occurs in October. It commemorates the end of the year, and the sixth guru's return from captivity. Sikhs exchange gifts and sweets.
- At the end of November, Sikhs commemorate the martyrdom of the ninth Sikh Guru, Teg Bahadur.

- The end of November also commemorates the Sikh founder Guru Nanak Dev's birthday.*
*For more information about Sikh holidays, please visit: <http://worldsikh.ca/book/sikhism/sikh-holidays>

Caring Practices During Illness

- All initiated Sikhs wear the five Ks of Khalsa (listed below). The majority of Sikhs are not initiated, but many still wear some or most of the five Ks. When caring for a Sikh resident it is important to keep the following five Ks and their practices in mind: ⁴
 - **Keshh:** uncut hair, often worn in a bun, and often covered with a turban. After removing their headcovering, many Sikh residents may wish to cover their head with another small covering (for example, a surgical cap). A head covering should never be placed near shoes. Always ask a resident before removing any hair on the head or body. ⁵
 - **Kangha:** a small comb that keeps the bun in place. If it must be removed for a medical reason, it should stay close to the resident's body.
 - **Kara:** a steel wrist bangle or bracelet. It was originally used to protect the arm from cuts from a bowstring, but it is now worn as a symbol of the unity of God. During surgery it should be covered but not removed. If it must be removed, it should remain close to the resident's body.

- **Kirpan:** a short dagger or knife that symbolizes Sikhs are prepared to fight injustice and protect the oppressed. Sikhs who wear kirpans wear them at all times, and removing it from a resident will cause distress. If it must be removed, the reasons should be clearly explained to the resident and family, and the kirpan must stay where the resident can see it.
- **Kaccha:** white underpants or shorts that symbolize modesty and morality. When changing kacchas, one leg must stay in the old pair of kaccha until the other leg is inside the clean pair. This is important to remember when giving a resident a bath, or helping to change clothes.
- Modesty and privacy are very important to Sikhs. Caregivers should first knock and announce their arrival before entering the room. A resident's personal space should also be respected, and they should only be touched when it is necessary.
- In Indian culture, family members prefer to hear about medical news before the resident. It is better to share information in a subtle or delicate way than to directly tell the truth. ⁶
- If a resident is praying, do not interrupt them for routine care.

- While Sikhism permits receiving care from someone of a different gender, having a health care practitioner that is the same gender is preferred.
- Cleanliness is an important part of Sikh tradition. Caregivers should provide daily bathing and personal hygiene care, unless it is not possible for medical reasons. Hair, including male facial hair, should be combed at least once a day, and washed frequently.
- It is a cultural and religious practice for Sikhs to visit the sick. Caregivers should try to accommodate visitors as much as possible. The extended family is as important to Sikhs as their immediate family.⁷
- Some Sikhs are vegetarian, but many Sikhs will eat Jhatka meat which means the animal was killed quickly and without suffering. Sikhism allows each person to decide their diet so it is important to ask the resident or family about their practices.⁸
- Sikh residents find it comforting to hear hymns or passages from the Guru Grant Sahab, and visits from a Sikh Granthi (a designated ceremonial reader of the Sikh holy text).

End of Life Practices

- Cremation is usually performed quickly after a person dies. However, it can be delayed if the family is waiting for a close relative to arrive.
- When someone is dying, it is important to sing Sikh hymns or read from the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Family members will encourage the dying person to focus on the divine, and often recite the word Waheguru which means “Wondrous Enlightener”. At the time of death Waheguru is often recited three times.
- Grieving is expressed with deep emotions, but crying at the end of life is not permitted in Sikhism.⁹
- After death the body is washed and dressed in clean clothes, including, for the initiated Sikh, the five K’s of Khalsa.
- The Sikh funeral is called Antaam Sanskaar or “Celebration of the Completion of Life.”
- Funeral arrangements include Sadharan Paat which means a complete reading of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Prayers and Readings

Sorath Mehalaa

He dispels the pains of countless incarnations, lending support to the dry and shriveled mind.

Beholding His blessed vision one is enraptured, when contemplating the Lord's Name.

My physician is the Guru (Enlightener), the Universal Lord.

Putting the medicine of the Name into my mouth, he cuts away the noose of Death.

The all-powerful, perfect Architect of Destiny, the Lord Himself is the Doer of deeds.

The Lord Himself saves His servant; Nanak takes the Support of the Name.

--Sorath, Fifth Guru

Dukh Santap Na Lagi

All things are received if the One is obtained.

The precious gift of this human life becomes fruitful when one recites the True Word.

Through the Enlightener, one who has such destiny written on his forehead enters the Mansion of the Lord's Presence.

O my mind, on the One focus your consciousness.

Without the One, all else is worthless entanglements, emotional attachment to illusory Maya is completely false.

Hundreds of thousands of princely pleasures are enjoyed, if

the True Enlightener bestows Grace of His Glance.

If He bestows the Lord's Name for even a moment, my mind and body become cool.

Those who are preordained with such destiny hold tightly to the True Enlightener's Feet.

Fruitful is that moment, and fruitful is that time, when one embraces love for the True Lord.

Suffering and sorrow do not touch those who have the Lord's support.

Grasping their arm, the Guru lifts them up and out, and carries them across to the other side. Embellished and immaculate is that place where the Saints congregate.

Only that one finds shelter, who has met with the Perfect Guru. Nanak constructs his home upon that site where there is no death, birth, or old age.

--Fifth Guru Arjun Dev Ji

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Acknowledgments & Additional Resources

Acknowledgements

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Bina Mehta, MA, Global Studies Department, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON.

Bob Chodos, MA, Former President of Temple Shalom, Waterloo, ON, and author.

Dalinda Reese, MD, MTS, Integrative Medicine Practitioner, Ann Arbor, MI.

Deborah Birkett, MA, Freelance writer and publisher, Waterloo, ON.

Doris Jakobsch, PhD, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Hisako, PhD (cand) in Religious Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Jane Ferguson Ballantyne, MA, Waterloo, ON.

Jeff Wilson, PhD, Associate Professor of East Asian Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Jim Pankratz, PhD, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Kenneth Hull, PhD, Associate Professor of Music, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Noha Abdul Ghaffar, MSW, Marriage and Family Therapist, Dhahran, Saudia Arabia.

Reem Al-Halimi, PhD, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Yasmin Munro, PhD(cand.) in Religious Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Enhancing Life

Additional Resources

Coaching

Coaches are available to help retirement and long-term care homes create spiritual programming that addresses the diverse needs of residents. For more information about coaching services, please contact Jane Kuepfer, Schlegel Specialist in Spirituality and Aging at 519-885-0220 x24232 or jane.kuepfer@uwaterloo.ca.

Online Resources

BBC: Religion & Ethics. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion>

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (formerly the Canadian Jewish Congress). <http://www.cija.ca>

Hindu Federation. <http://www.hindufederation.ca>

India Canada Association. <http://www.indiacanada.org>

International Buddhist Society. <http://www.buddhisttemple.ca>

Islamic Society of North America: Canada. <http://www.isna.ca>

Muslim Canadian Congress.

<http://www.muslimcanadiancongress.org>

National Council of Jewish Women in Canada.

<http://www.ncjwc.org>

Patheos: Hosting the Conversation on Faith.

<http://www.patheos.com>

Religion Dispatches. <http://www.religiondispatches.org>

World Sikh Organization of Canada. <http://www.worldsikh.ca>

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Phone: 519-904-0660 E-mail: info@the-ria.ca
250 Laurelwood Drive, Waterloo, Ontario N2J 0E2

WWW.THE-RIA.CA



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Conrad Grebel
University College