Spiritual Communication at End of Life for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims

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Spiritual Communication at End-of-Life for Hindus
Dying for the Hindu is like “changing clothes” (Bhagavad-Gita 2:22-23)

As a person abandoning worn out garments acquires other new one, so the embodied, abandoning worn-out bodies, enter new ones
Sacred Water Ritual

On the tray is a small bottle of water from the Ganges, infused with dried leaves of the holy Tulsi(basil) plant. In the midst of the family, the priest bends over the dying person and, with a handful of densely smoking sticks of incense, inscribes the sound OM in the air while reciting a mantra....Next, a little sacred Ganges water is spooned up and poured into the mouth of the dying person, and a second mantra is recited.
Significance of one’s mental state at the time of death (Bhagavad Gita 8:6)

Whatever state of being one remembers upon giving up the body at the end of life, to that very state one always goes
Prayer to Lord Shiva for Immortality

May Shiva liberate us from death like a ripe fruit separating effortlessly from the vine
A good death for Hindus:

- Chanted prayer (Vishnu, Shiva, Durga)
- Altar or sacred space
- Sacred “last rites”
- “Religious effort is never futile or without results” (Bagavad Gita 2:40)
- Good rebirth (moksa)
Communicating with Buddhists at End-of-Life
Dying well in Buddhism means....

- An opportunity

- Approaching end-of-life with a calm and virtuous mind

- A peaceful atmosphere with family and friends

- Meditation leading, at the moment of death, to liberation and rebirth (nirvana)
My friend, you are dying, you are feeling heavy...Look, the chair and the table are dissolving as is your body...Your mind is losing its hold, your blood is slowing, you feel faint. No more internal or external sounds...all is quiet. You have no more saliva, no more sweat, everything is drying.
Key elements of a good death (from the Buddha’s teaching on *nirvana*)

- A peaceful and clear mind
- Pain relief
- Surrounded by friends and family
- Recognizing the continuity of living, dying and future rebirth
Communicating with Muslims at End-of-Life
Muslim understandings of death derived from:

- The Qur’an
- Sharia law
- Islamic culture
Muslim beliefs about death:

• God determines both the time and cause of death

• The afterlife is a result of deeds in this life and is more important than this life

• Dying should be natural and without the intrusion of medical care

• Observance of rituals to prepare for death is crucial
Terminal illness as a “spiritual test”

- God addresses spiritual matters through death
- Suffering should be borne with fortitude and as a learning experience
- Islamic traditional medicine: spiritual pain is the result of religious violation
- If the violation is dealt with correctly, the pain will dissipate and a peaceful death follows
Ritual Requirements

• Five-times daily prayer, with ritual washing, even if confined to bed

• Special food requirements (*halal*)

• Special modesty observances for women and men

• The body is turned to Mecca at the moment of death

• Correct preparation for funeral within one day
Communicating with Christians at End-of-Life
Christian core beliefs about death

• God cares for each person individually

• Illness and disability are not a punishment for sin, but part of a disordered world that awaits salvation

• One sees Christ in each person in need (St. Francis; Mother Theresa)

• Continuation of life after death as part of the idea of resurrection
Each one in the image of God

- Respect and attention to each individual, no matter who, believer or not, is the key Christian teaching for hospice palliative care professionals

*God has no hands or feet but ours*
Clinical practise in a Christian good death

- Death is a part of life, not the end of life

- A good death is a peaceful death; peace with one’s family, friends and self

- Clarity of mind – may forego pain relief

- Visit from priest or minister and “service of anointing”

- Prayers, blessings and anointing with holy oil give healing, strengthening for the passage to death.
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