

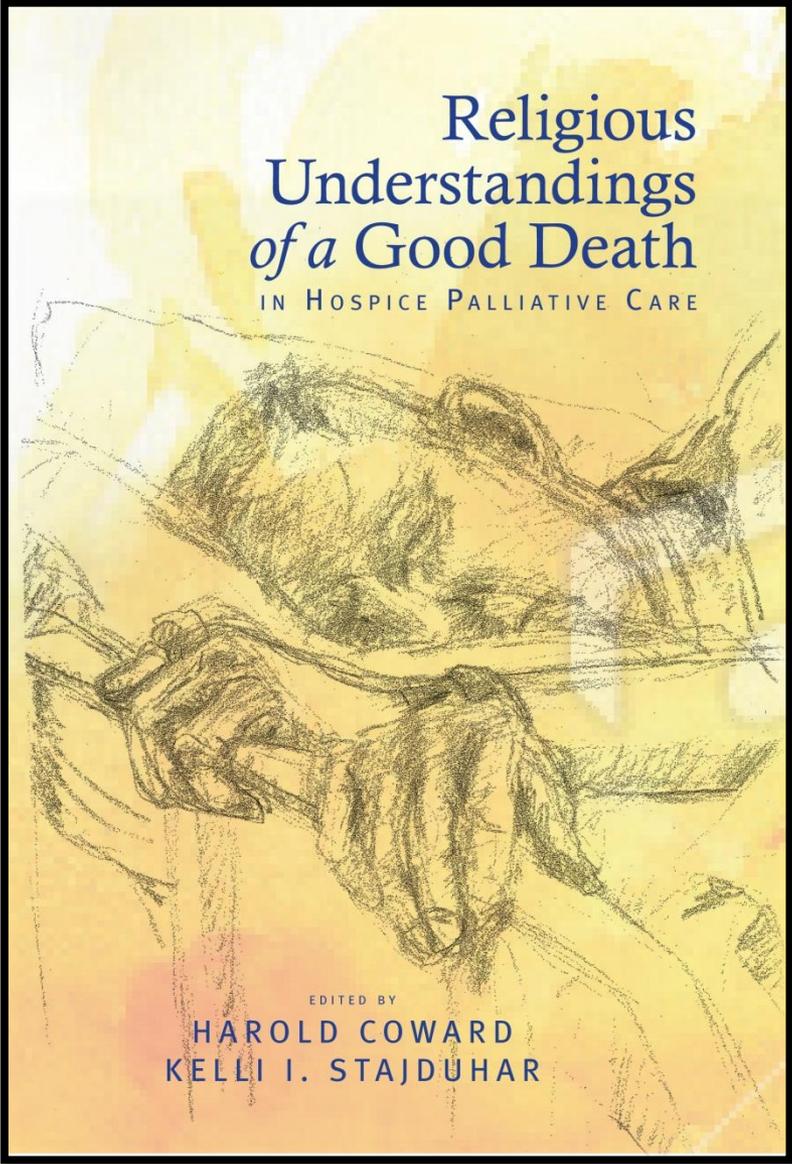
Spiritual Communication at End of Life for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims

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Religious
Understandings
of a Good Death

IN HOSPICE PALLIATIVE CARE

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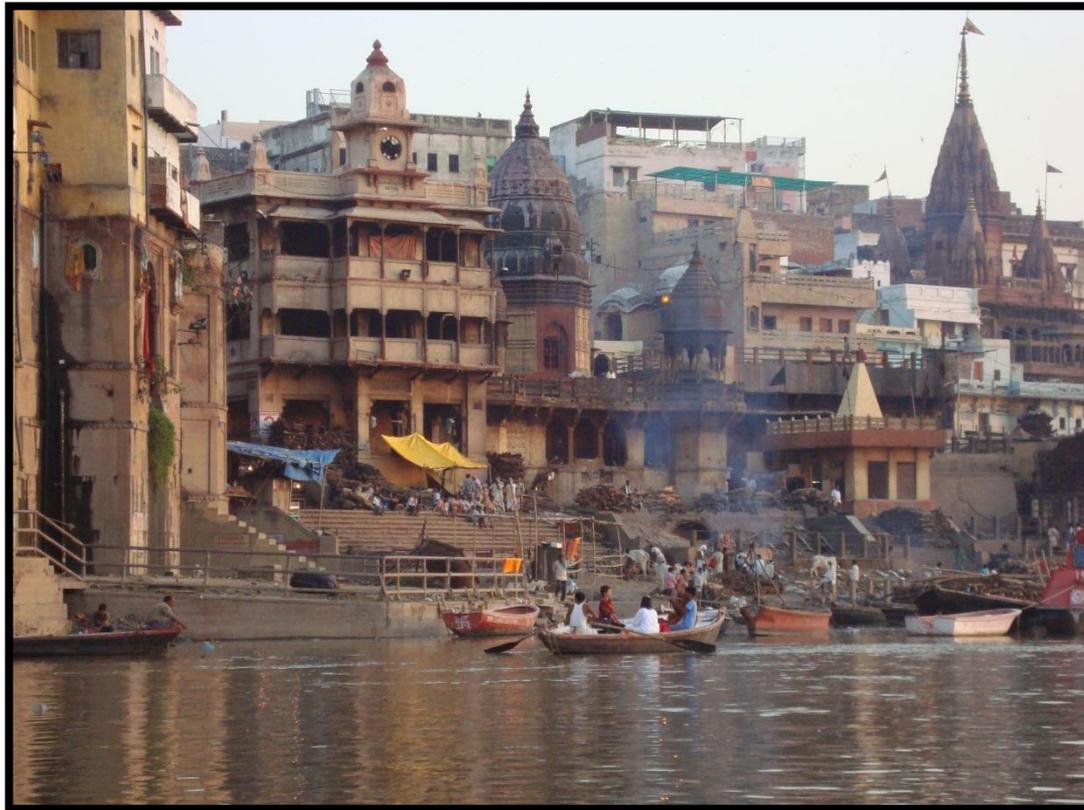
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Spiritual Communication at End-of-Life for Hindus



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*

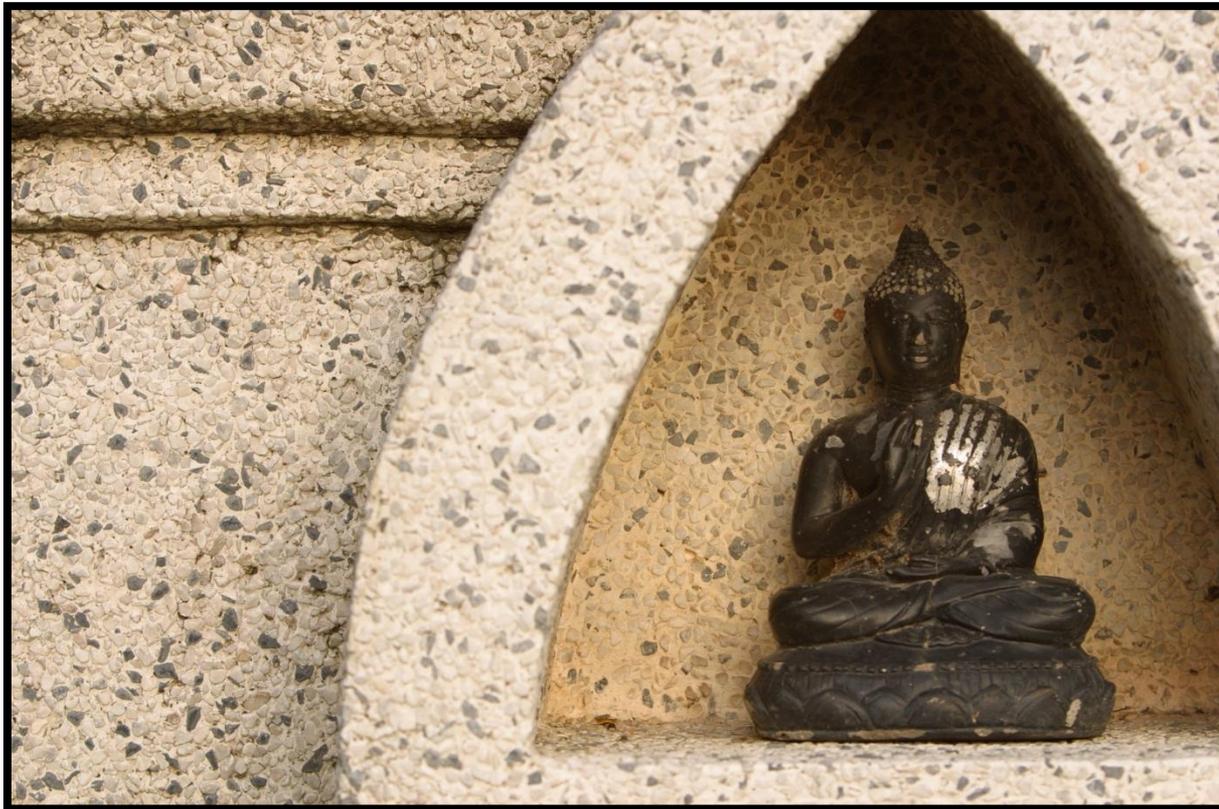
Prayer to Lord Shiva for Immortality

*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)*

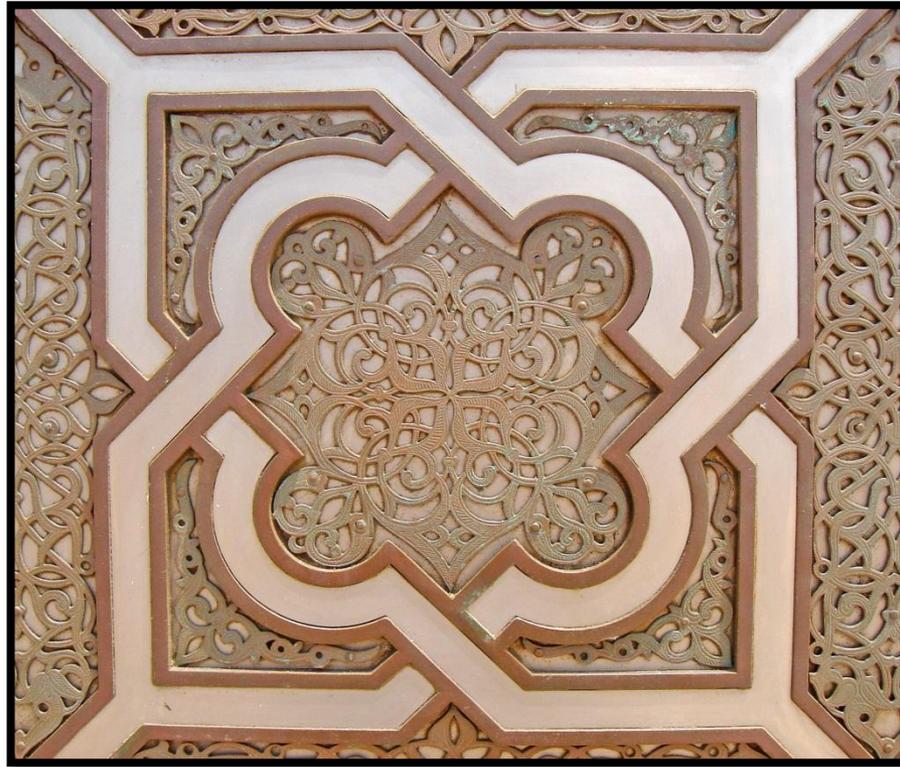
Bardo Thotrol (Tibetan Book of the Dead)

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.

Thanks to

Dr. Anant Rambachan, St. Olaf's College, USA

Dr. Anne Bruce, University of Victoria

Dr. Pinit Ratanakul, Mahidol University, Thailand

Dr. Earle Waugh, University of Alberta

Dr. Janet Soskice, Cambridge University, UK

Dr. Kelli Stajduhar, University of Victoria

CIHR for funding our research project

Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, UVic, for hosting
our research project

SUNY press for publishing our research