

# India - Buddhism

## Practices

Buddhism has no ultimate being or god. It is therefore more of a philosophy than a religion. However major sects of Buddhism believe that praying to people who have attained enlightenment will help in their own path to enlightenment.

Some pagans adopt Buddhist practices and ideas into their own path. Thus it may be fitting to honor Buddhist funeral practices for the deceased.

Family members clean and dress the body of the deceased. The clothes should be kept simple as the body is considered to be just an empty vessel. The body is then placed in a coffin and surrounded with wreaths, candles and sticks of incense. In modern times the coffin is decorated with colored lights. A small altar can be set up with a photo of the deceased, a picture of the Buddha and offerings such as flowers, fruits, candles and incense.

Funeral practices should not be over elaborate. Instead it is encouraged that monies be donated to worthy causes. The choice of burial or cremation is left as a purely personal choice for the family.

Also weeping is discouraged as it is seen as neither helping the mourners nor the deceased. Instead a somber and meditative attitude is considered appropriate.

Monks are often invited to perform the funerary rite and provide chanting. Food called Matakabhatta (one who is dead) is offered to the monks. The formula for the presentation of the food is as follows:

"Reverend Sirs, we humbly beg to present this mataka food and these various gifts to the Sangha. May the Sangha receive this food and these gifts of ours in order that benefits and happiness may come to us to the end of time."

Pamsukula robe(s) or white cloth are often presented to the officiates. Another custom often seen in Thailand is a broad ribbon that is tied to the coffin and held by the monks.

At the end of the service the "Transferring of Merits/ Thanksgiving" is recited (see Sample Readings). Then water of dedication is poured on the ground by a lay leader.

Donations to good works are given in order to transfer the merits of these acts to the deceased.

## Deities and Important Concepts

- Buddha  
Individual whose teachings formed the basis of Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings concern the quest for liberation from suffering.<sup>1</sup> Buddha is also a title that means awakened. It is given to one who has discovered the way to Nirvana.
- Green Tara "mother of liberation"  
She was a princess who wished to remain in the world until every single being is fully liberated. Mother Tara is associated with the qualities of action and protection (as a mother who is willing to give her life to protect her children), kindness and caring, and a strong connection to the earth. She also clearly rejected the idea that one had to be male to achieve enlightenment.
- Kwan Yin (Guanyin)  
Bodhisattva, usually shown as a female. She is associated with compassion and forgiveness.

One tale of Kwan Yin tells of her incarnation as young women who becomes a nun rather than marry an uncaring man. She is killed by her father. In one version of this legend, when Guanyin was executed, a

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<sup>1</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Buddha <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buddha/>

supernatural tiger took her to one of the more hell-like realms of the dead. However, instead of being punished like the other spirits of the dead, Guanyin played music, and flowers blossomed around her. This completely surprised the hell guardian. The story says that Guanyin, by merely being in that Naraka (hell), turned it into a paradise. Also after seeing the suffering of souls she vows to be reincarnated until all souls are freed.

- **Amitabha Buddha**  
He resides over the Western Pure Land according to some schools of Mahayana Buddhism. Devotees call upon his name for entrance to this heavenly realm, where once there enlightenment will be easier to attain.
- **Jizo-bosatsu**  
One of the most beloved Japanese deities. He works to ease the suffering and shorten the sentence of those serving time in hell and to deliver the faithful into Amida's western paradise. This deity is often also worship by Taoist and the followers of Shintoism.<sup>2</sup>

### **Modern Adaptations**

- Sprinkle water on the coffin to help the deceased go pure to the next lifetime.
- Donate the flowers from the funeral. For example give them to a hospital and dedicate them to the deceased obtaining a Precious Human Rebirth.<sup>3</sup>
- Each person can blesses flowers/leaves and place them in a hole with a new tree planted on top (ie. Representing Rebirth.)<sup>4</sup>
- Pour water in a vessel until it overflows. Talk about how the water is a blessing for the happiness and release of the deceased.

### **Sample Readings**

#### ***On the impermanence of life***

Lord Buddha Said:

This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds  
To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance.  
A lifetime is like a flash of lightening in the sky,  
Rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain.  
What is born will die;  
What has been gathered will be dispersed;  
What has been accumulated will be exhausted;  
What has been built up will collapse  
And what has been high will be brought low.

#### ***Thoughts about death***<sup>5</sup>

Aciram vat āyam kāyo pathavim adhisessati  
Chuddo apetavinn āno niratt ham va kalingaram  
Annicā vata sankh ārā, uppādavayadhammino  
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesam vupassamo sukho.

Before long, alas! This body will be laid on the earth, discarded, devoid of consciousness, and useless like a log of wood.  
Transient, alas! are all component things, subject are they to birth and decay; having gained birth to death the life flux swings — bliss truly dawns when unrest dies away.

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<sup>2</sup> "Jizo Bodhisattva (Bosatsu)." Jizo Bodhisattva (Bosatsu). N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

<http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/jizo1.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Western Buddhist Funerals [http://hayagriva.org.au/?page\\_id=118](http://hayagriva.org.au/?page_id=118)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A Guide to Proper Buddhist Funeral, pg 10. [http://hayagriva.org.au/?page\\_id=118](http://hayagriva.org.au/?page_id=118)

## ***The Buddha, Anguttara Nikaya***<sup>6</sup>

Short, alas, is the life of man, limited and fleeting,  
full of pain and torment. One should wisely  
understand this, do good deeds and lead a holy  
life, for no mortals ever escape death.  
Just as the dewdrop, at the point of the grassblade  
at sunrise, very soon vanishes and does  
not remain for long: just so is the dew drop-like  
life of men very short and fleeting.  
Just as at the pouring down of a mighty rain,  
the bubbles on the water very soon vanish and  
do not remain for long: just so is the bubble-like  
life of men very short and fleeting.  
Just as a furrow drawn with a stick in the water  
very soon vanishes and does not remain for  
long: just so is the furrow-like life of men very  
short and fleeting.  
Just as the cattle for slaughter, whatever their  
footing, stand on the brink of death, just so is  
the life of men very short and fleeting.  
One should wisely understand this, do good  
deeds and lead a holy life, for no mortal ever  
escapes death.

### ***Transferring of Merits/ Thanksgiving***

#### ***Mourners***

Idam me nātinam hotu, sukhita honu nātayo.  
Idam me nātinam hotu, sukhitā honu nātayo.  
Idam me nātinam hotu, sukhita honu natayo

#### ***Monks***

Yatha vārivah ā purā paripurenti sāgaram. Evameva  
ito dinnam petānam upakappati. Icchitam patt hitam  
tumham khippameva sam? jhatu. Sabbe purentu  
sankapp ā cando pannaraso yath ā mani jotiraso  
yath ā.

Just as the full flowing rivers fill the ocean,  
even so what is given from here accrues to the  
departed. Whatever you wished or wanted may  
it quickly be. May all your wishes be fulfilled  
as the moon upon the fifteenth day, or as the  
wish-fulfilling gem.

### ***Dedication of Merit***<sup>7</sup>

May quickly attain a new rebirth  
And may all living beings without exception,  
Be led to a state of happiness.  
May they be happy, May they be free of suffering, may they live in harmony with one another and may they  
find a spiritual path in this lifetime and follow it until they come to enlightenment.  
May the desire to help others be developed  
In all who are here and may it never fade away but increase more and more.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pg 15.

<sup>7</sup> Western Buddhist Funerals [http://hayagriva.org.au/?page\\_id=118](http://hayagriva.org.au/?page_id=118)

## Resources

- A Guide to Proper Buddhist Funeral  
[http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/buddhist\\_funeral.pdf](http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/buddhist_funeral.pdf)
- Buddhist Funeral Rites in Thailand & other South East Asian Countries  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/bfuneral.htm>
- Western Buddhist Funerals by Shyla Bauer, January 2003  
[http://hayagriva.org.au/?page\\_id=118](http://hayagriva.org.au/?page_id=118)
- Who's Who of Buddhism  
[http://www.thedhamma.com/whos\\_who.htm](http://www.thedhamma.com/whos_who.htm)