

Death and Dying Practices for Japanese Buddhists

At the time of death, a family member might make an offering of tea and rice on an altar and burn incense to help the spirit of the deceased. **A special Buddhist prayer may be recited (Namo Amida Butsu).**

In Japan, symbolic rituals may include placing a knife on the body or sprinkling salt to ward off bad spirits. Other traditional rituals include washing of the body and dressing the individual in white kimono-style clothing. However, these traditions by and large have not been carried on in North America.

After death, the family may wish to contact a religious leader to perform a bedside service. Many Japanese refrain from expressing their emotions publicly, this is usually done privately with family and friends. The family might want some time alone to grieve.

Funeral services may be held at a church/temple or at a funeral home. The Japanese tradition of giving *koden* (a monetary gift to offset expenses) to the family is commonly practiced. The body is either cremated or buried, at the family's discretion.

The duration of mourning will vary, although it typically lasts 49 days for Buddhists and ends with a small memorial service at the temple or home for family and close friends. Bereavement visits from caregivers during the mourning period are generally welcomed. Anniversaries of the death are commonly observed.

Some Japanese congregations engage in annual cemetery visits and have an Obon service to honour and remember all the lives which were lost over the past years.