

Funeral

The Majority of Cambodians are Buddhists who do not view death as the end of one's life but rather as the end of a life cycle. It is a passage from one stage of the cycle to the next. In Buddhism, there is the belief that all life/being evolves in a successive cycle of birth, sickness, old age, death and rebirth/reincarnation.

The monk is at the bedside of the dying person in order to prepare them for the next life. It is very important, if it is at all possible, that a monk be at the place of death because that is where the soul exits the body but still remains present. It is believed that the soul is in a state of confusion and fright after exiting the body. The monk is needed to calm the soul.

In Cambodia, when a person dies, the care of the body is undertaken by their family. The body would be brought home, washed, dressed, and placed into a coffin.

Traditionally, the body is kept in the house for seven days or longer before cremation. Today, it is common that the body is kept for only three days. Monks come to the home and recite sermon every evening by the body.

On the third or the seventh day, a funeral procession is organized to carry the body to the temple for cremation. The crematorium is usually on or near the temple grounds.

A funeral procession consisting of an achar (priest), Buddhist monks, members of the family, and other mourners accompany the coffin to the temple. The spouse and the children mourn their loved ones by shaving their heads and by wearing white clothing. White is the traditional color of mourning for the death, as opposed to black as is common to Westerners.

After cremation, the Buddhist ritual requires a funeral/remembrance ceremony to be held on the seventh or one-hundredth days after death. It can be held at the temple or the home, but usually is held at the temple.

It is believed that cremation allows the soul to part away from the body and goes to hell or heaven in order to wait for reincarnation. After cremation, ashes are collected, cleaned and usually kept in a *stupa* in the temple compound. There it is believed that the deceased is close to the Buddha and the monks in whom the soul would be able to be reborn sooner.

In Australia, Cambodians families often keep the body between two and seven days. How long the body is kept may depend on factors like the family's financial circumstances (the longer the body is kept, the more expensive it can be) or the lack of family living in the area where the death happens (when there are few or no family members around, the funeral practices may happen sooner; or, on the other hand, more time may be given for the arrival of family traveling from elsewhere). It is a long-held traditional practice and belief that the body not be dissected, nor that any parts be removed. Many ritual practices are held at the temple. Monks would always be invited to recite sermon right before the body is moved to the crematorium or burial site.