

Japanese death rituals



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Death and Rituals of the Name of the Concerned Professor

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Death and Rituals

1. Unusual Aspects of Japanese Death Rituals

One unusual aspect of the Japanese death rituals is that death in Japan is considered to be a contaminating aspect of life. Several Japanese death rituals like preparing the food for the bereaved household at some neighbor's house and the extensive use of salt and white cloth for purification amply testify to this fact. This peculiar aspect of the Japanese death rituals is quiet confusing. While on the one side, the Japanese exhibit a ceremoniously discernable respect for a deceased individual; on the other side they consider the death to be some sort of an infectious occurrence that has the potential to pollute the family members and close ones of a dead person. Japanese abhorrence for cats in their death rituals and their fascination with directions is really typical. The practice of digging a woman's grave deeper than that of a man's though unusual is perhaps indicative of the subaltern status of the women in the Japanese society.

2. Universal Aspects of the Japanese Death Rituals

One universal aspect of the Japanese beliefs about death is that a funeral in Japan is considered to be a predominantly community event where the members of a community or a neighborhood do everything possible to help a bereaved family perform the necessary funeral rituals and extend the possible material and emotional support to the family members of a deceased person, so as to help them come to terms with their grief. Also, the close affiliation of death and funerals in Japan with religious beliefs, ceremonies and rituals is something that is common to a majority of the

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world cultures and societies. The special reverence shown by the Japanese for a dead person by lighting incense and candles and such other rituals are also universal in their approach.

3. Comparison between Mourning Rituals in Japan and in my Own Culture

Though the social perception of death in my culture has slightly depressing associations, yet death in my culture is not considered to be an outright contaminating influence as in Japan. Hence, in my culture there exist no specifically purifying rituals like the sprinkling of salt. Certainly death in my culture does enjoy the status of a solemn ceremony; still the funerals here are not as prolonged and elaborate as in Japan. Infact the death rituals in my culture seem to be more in tune with the contemporary trends in Japan, where all the rituals and ceremonies are left to the paid professionals.

The religious rituals associated with death in my culture are less influenced by superstitions and though, death in a family does attract the sympathy and support of friends and community, the people in my culture do not seem to be so inclined to commit themselves beyond a certain limit to the aid and support of the family members of a dead person. In that context the Japanese social approach towards death though slightly superstitious is more generous and magnanimous.

As in Japan, the dead in my culture are shown respect by laying flowers and wreaths. It is a known fact that the people in my culture are to some extent apprehensive of the spirits of the dead, but such ideas are considered to be more of the elements of the folklore and do not enjoy any open theological or social relevance or backing as in Japan. In addition there exists no aversion or preference for any animals or directions in the death rituals of my culture. Total Words: - 600

References

Irish, Jeffrey S., Mourning in Rural Japan, (Oct-Dec 2000). Japan Quarterly.
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