

Sikh funeral customs essay examples

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Introduction

Sikhism funeral ceremony is called “ Antam Sanskaar”, which simply means celebration of a completed life. Contrary to the Christian funerals where people lament of the loss of an individual, Sikhism accepts a death call and looks at it as the will of the creator. Sikhism teachings assert that death is a natural process that gives the deceased an opportunity of reuniting with the creator. In their belief, the soul changes the same way a person changes clothes. Sikh funeral customs follow a given procedure that must be adhered to by any member. The funeral customs carried out by Sikhs differ from other religions since the death must be burned and the ashes deposited in the river. Preparation of the deceased which should include the five articles of faith (karkars)

A dead body is of considerable value according to Sikh’s customs. After death, the body remains in the death position with no light placed near until prayers are said to acknowledge God’s will has taken place. On the burial day, the body of the deceased Sikh is bathed and dressed in clean attire. The colors of cloth dressed by the deceased are determined by age, marital status, or rank in the society. For instance, married women are dressed in a pink sari and decorated with jewelers. A turban or a traditional scarf that was frequently worn by the deceased covers the hair (UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group, n. d). During the body preparation, five articles of Sikh faith (Kachha, Kanga, Kara, Kes, and Kirpan) remain with the body in death. The five symbols of faith represent the following.

Kes - uncut hair, Kanga - comb, Kara - steel bangle, Kachs - short, and Kipran - short sword.

Kes represents the uncut hair growing from the scalp. During preparation for the funeral, Kes must be kept intact since Sikhs do not cut, remove, or alter any hair growing on the head, face, or body. This article of faith assumes that an individual honors God's creation. The Kipran is the name given to a religious sword signifying Sikh's courage and preparedness for defense. In addition, Kipran signifies dignity and self-reliance, and the capacity to defend the weak and poor at all times. Kipran must be worn by all initiated Sikhs at all times, even during burial (UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group, n. d).

Kara is the third symbol of faith representing a bracelet made of steel. Kara is a mandatory sign of faith that should be worn all the times. Sikh customs require the deceased be cremated while putting on the Kara. Sikhs carry with them a small comb referred to Kanga. It is worn at all times in the hair as a sign of cleanliness. Kachha is a symbol of faith in Sikh custom represented by a short. It links an individual to high moral character reminding a Sikh on the need for self discipline (UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group, n. d).

Funeral services/ cremation

On the way to the crematorium the deceased passes through the gurdwara where a 'rumalla' is placed on top of the shroud. Funeral services may occur during the day or at night, depending on the availability of the family members. Funeral services act as a way of promoting resignation to the God's will. At the funeral service, the final prayer of the day must be recited, and offerings made. The prayer is called 'Kirtan Sohila'. In addition, hymns are sung during the service to offer solace to the people left. The hymns also

reunite the departed soul with the creator. Sikhs customs requires all bodies be disposed using cremation irrespective of age of the deceased (Lasting post, 2013).

During cremation, a member of the family lights the funeral pyre.

Traditionally, this occurred using a naked flame though presently the person just pushes a button to start crematorium process. The body is wrapped in a pure white piece of cloth and placed on top. Family members set the fire as a sign of respect for the death, and also show that the deceased is free to go back to the creator. Women wear pale colored headscarves during the funeral ceremony as a sign of mourning (The Sikh Collation, 2012).

Disposal of ashes

After cremation, ashes are collected for disposal. In most instances, ashes are scattered in running water, or thrown on the sea since the custom does not hold any river or sea as holy. On the other hand, family members are allowed to preserve ashes at their homestead for remembrance.

Prayers after cremation; scriptures from " guru granth sahib"

Prayers in Sikh custom are taken extremely seriously especially prayers for the departed souls. During Sikh funeral prayers are said three times a day, in the morning, in the evening, and at night before retiring to bed. These prayers are a mandatory whether said in private or as a congregation. From the time a person dies, adult relatives take part in reading of the Guru Granth Sahid, which is the Sikh holy book. In the absence of adult relatives, gurwara perform the readings at the home of the deceased. The readings continue for a period of ten days and close family members including

children must be present throughout. After the readings are over, a passage about beliefs and practices of death is read, and songs in praise of God follow. The funeral ceremony is held at the convenient time when in the presence of Guru Sahib. Hymns from the scripture of Guru Granth are sung. Prayers 'Ardas', are then said, and the sharing of 'karah parshad' (blessed sweet pudding) takes place and finally, the eating of 'langar' (a communal meal). In case the deceased was the family head, the oldest son receives the turban symbolizing the taking up of responsibilities.

The first five and final verses of the Sikhism's Morning Prayer must be read around to begin the Sidharaan path. In addition, a random verse is recited from the Guru Granth before prayers are offered. Some of the most common songs sang during funeral talk of the person in life and death, and peace must reside with those who follow the teachings of the Guru (Lasting Post., 2013).

What is sadharan path? Why is it performed?

The Sadharan Path represents the completion of normal intermittent reading of Guru Granth Sahib. The sadharan path is performed in order to send the departed soul back to the creator and also show the creator that the left souls are clean. Every Sikh must maintain a separate and special place in his home for the installation of Guru Granth Sahib. In addition, the Sadharan path requires every Sikh irrespective of gender and age to be in a position to read the Guru Granth Sahib. On the other hand, the Sadharan path requires every Sikh to take the Hukam (command), of the Guru Granth Sahib in the early morning hours before taking any meal. Moreover, the path requires every Sikh to complete a full reading of the Guru in not more than two

months. During the time of reading, the person must recite the Anand Sahib, which represents the first five and the last five stanzas. The Sadharan path is performed in order to equip Sikh people with the teaching of the holy book and bring them closer to God (SGPC. net, 2013).

How does cremation in the United States differ from India?

Many Sikhs originate from Punjabi backgrounds that are divided into India and Pakistan. Today Sikhs live in almost every part of the world. Over 500,000 Sikhs live in United States of America, where they have lived for over 100 years. Whereas cremation in India occurs at open air, in USA cremation facilities involve a closed incinerator. The cremation process in USA is automated whereby the coffin containing the deceased is guided into the crematorium by a steel track. In India, the deceased is placed on an open air crematorium and burned in full view of loved ones. The United States government did away with open air cremation since it affects the atmosphere and is also a form of health hazard (Clay, 2011).

Conclusion

The Sikh's funeral customs clearly indicate how respect for death is highly appreciated. Sikhs look at death as part of Sikhism cycle whereby they believe every living soul must go back to the creator. From the discussion above, Sikh people do not bury their death but burn them as their customs. In addition, Sikhs form one of the unique groups of people who follow the holy teachings from God by ensuring everyone understands the Guru Granth Sahib. On the other hand, Sikhs have an unusually strong belief of reincarnation. Sikhs believe that all animals and humans have a soul that

goes through different life forms until the creator takes it to eternal life. The response above plays a significant role in teaching people about customs Sikh in respect for the dead.

References

Clay, M. (2011). “ Ashes to Ashes”, Business Journal Serving Fresno & the Central San Joaquin

Valley. Retrieved from:

<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/69855718/ashes-ashes>

Lasting Post. (2013). Etiquette for a Sikh Funeral. Retrieved from:

http://www.lastingpost.com/pdf/etiquette/lp_etiquette_sikh.pdf

SGPC. net. (2013). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Punjab. Retrieved

http://www.sgpc.net/rehat_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html

The Sikh Coalition. (2012). Common Questions about Sikhism. Retrieved from:

<http://www.khalsakids.org/Popular%20Q&A%20about%20Sikhism.pdf>

UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group. (n. d). Guidance note on issues surrounding death in a

Sikh family. Retrieved from:

[http://www.sikhchaplaincy.org.](http://www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk/~sikhchap/images/publications/guidance_note_on_issues_surrounding_death_in_a_sikh_family.pdf)

[uk/~sikhchap/images/publications/guidance_note_on_issues_surrounding_death_in_a_sikh_family.pdf](http://www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk/~sikhchap/images/publications/guidance_note_on_issues_surrounding_death_in_a_sikh_family.pdf)