Summary Article: rites of passage
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Ceremonies marking important events in the life of a Buddhist.

**Naming** A monk visits the home, chants the paritta (29 sutras of Pali scripture), sprinkles water over the baby, and blesses it. Wax from a candle is dripped into a bowl of water, symbolizing the joining of the four elements (solid, liquid, heat, and movement), in turn symbolizing the hope that the child will achieve a harmonious life and enlightenment.

**Marriage** The marriage ceremony is not necessarily a religious occasion, as in some Buddhist communities becoming a monk is thought of very highly. Buddhist marriage is regarded as an opportunity for the couple to support each other in following the Five Moral Precepts. One of the Buddha's sermons on right conduct encompassed the responsibilities of husband and wife, these being to treat each other and the extended family with respect, courtesy, and hospitality; to be faithful; to manage their household with care; and to discuss and share responsibilities. At the beginning of the ceremony, monks may visit the bride's house to recite the paritta for the couple, but may not stay for the whole ceremony. One Theravāda Buddhist custom is to join the participants with a cotton thread. In Mahāyāna Buddhist countries, water is used as a symbol of purity to sprinkle around the home, before a puja (act of worship) is performed by the couple.

**Funeral** As Buddhism spans so many countries and a diversity of traditions, there are a variety of funeral practices. In the Mahayana tradition, friends, relatives, and monks gather round a dying person to recite the paritta and gain merit towards a better rebirth for themselves and for the dying. After death the body is washed, placed in a coffin, and adorned with flowers, incense, and candles. A shrine may have a photograph of the deceased. Ceremonies are held to commemorate the death at seven days, three months, and annually; alms and gifts are given to the poor and the monks to help the deceased progress towards better rebirth and eventual nirvana. The deceased is thought to pass through three *bardos*, or realms, before being reborn.

Some Theravādan Buddhists believe that the body should not be disturbed for three days following death, while the deceased travels between death and rebirth through the realms of either gods, animals, hungry ghosts, humans, or hell. A vigil of prayer and meditation may be kept by the monks.

Several monks accompany the body to the cremation grounds, reciting scriptures on the way. In some traditions a band will play loudly to help people put aside sorrow and fear of spirits. The body will be cremated, and if the person was thought to have reached enlightenment, the ashes will be kept and buried in a stupa. Buddhists emphasize that nothing in the world is permanent and death is part of that fact. The appropriate Buddhist attitude to death is therefore one of calm acceptance.

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