

Buddhism

Overview of Health/Illness: The goal of Buddhist practice is to develop the mind to its fullest potential which involves the perfection of compassion and wisdom. Spiritual well-being involves developing a compassionate mind and working with the suffering of illness and death in a maximally optimal way. Buddhist clergy, as well as lay practitioners are available to assist those who are interested in these practices.

Birth: Buddhists believe in reincarnation. In accordance with this belief, human birth is viewed as the beginning of a highly precious opportunity. Human birth is unique in that it is a rare opportunity for the complete development of the mind and practice of compassion.

Abortion and Birth Control: Buddhists believe that conception occurs when consciousness enters a fertilized egg. This is considered the beginning of life and it is regarded as killing if the life of the future person is aborted after that point. Birth control that prevents conception is acceptable.

Death: The time of death is extremely important to a Buddhist since this is a transition point to the next life. Buddhists devote considerable religious practice to preparing for death. It is very important for everything possible to be done to provide as much peace and quiet for the dying person, as possible. For the Buddhist, death is a series of stages involving disintegration of physical elements into more and more subtle elements until finally the consciousness leaves the body. The more composed and calm the mind is at death, the greater the opportunity for a better rebirth. Prayers are said for the person who is dying and sometimes a special text is read to the dying person.

After Death: Once all of the stages of death have occurred, Buddhists believe the consciousness enters a "Bardo" or intermediary spirit body, which is the precursor to the next life. The consciousness may remain in this intermediary form for a very brief time or up to 49 days before the new life is begun.

Immediately following signs of physical death, Buddhists believe that it is best to keep the body in a peaceful state. Traditionally, the body is taken to the home and for a period of 3 days or so, the body is not touched and extensive prayers are said. This facilitates the process of the person's consciousness letting go of its prior body and life and all of its attachments and more easily moving to the next.

Bereavement: At the time of and following the death of a loved one (particularly the first 49 days), prayers are said for the person to achieve the most auspicious rebirth possible. Buddhists also meditate on the truth of impermanence - a key Buddhist teaching - as a precious loved one leaves this life.

Dietary Regulations: Within various branches of Buddhism, there are vegetarians, as well as non-vegetarians. Some branches have strict dietary regulations, while others have few.

Personal Devotions: Buddhist devotions involve verbal prayers, mantra repetition, analytical meditations, as well as a variety of other meditation practices.

Religious Objects: Common religious objects involve prayers beads and images of Sakyamuni Buddha as well as other Buddhist deities. Other religious objects are utilized for specific meditation practices.

Special Care of Women: While men and women are viewed as equals in Buddhist philosophy, mothers are regarded as even more important than fathers due to their more primary role in bringing children into

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the world and traditionally taking care of them. Thus, when a mother is sick, special kindness is shown towards her.

Holiday Observance: The major Buddhist holy day of the year is Saga Dawa (or Vesak) which is the observance of Sakyamuni Buddha's birth, enlightenment and parinirvana. This holiday falls during the months of May or June. It varies from year to year as it is determined by a lunar calendar. In observance, some Buddhists fast for part of or all of this day.

Bioethical Decision-Making: While Buddhists believe that it is good to continue living as long as possible, it is not believed that this should be done under all circumstances. For example, life support machines are not believed to be helpful if the person's mind is no longer alert. Having an alert mind and not being in excessive pain are the two primary factors that affect a Buddhist decision regarding the appropriate time of death. Once the conditions are quite difficult, it is believed that it is better to die. Allowing the person to die in a natural, peaceful manner is considered more essential.

Privacy/Space: A quiet and peaceful atmosphere is most beneficial when one is sick or dying. This allows for the sick person to rest better, as well as to practice meditation and prayer .

Visitors/Connecting With Community: Maintaining a calm and peaceful atmosphere for the sick person is again the essential aspect.

Ethnic (Language) and Cultural Sensitivity: Maintaining a positive, caring attitude when interacting with the patient is the traditional cultural norm.