

Where Do People Go ?



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I've assumed they're either Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Evangelist.

I think they meant well and they hope people could go to heaven like they would eventually go.

Even so, sometimes we have to draw a line between wanting the best for others and thinking that our beliefs hold the truth.

*Hi, do you want to know
about what happens after
people die ?*

** Surprise * oh, usually
young people are curious*



No, sorry.

*Yea, no... I don't want to know.
Thank you. * close door **

*I was lying obviously. Who doesn't want
to know the unknowable if they could.*

Do you have loved ones who passed on?

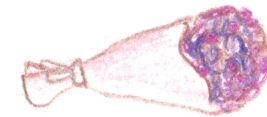
I think when they do, you start to wonder if they are still living in another realm.

For me, it comes from the hope that they're living a better life than before, wherever they are right now.

There's a lot of hope in believing the existence of an afterlife.

My paternal Aunt and maternal Grandpa have both passed on.

Aunt



Grandpa

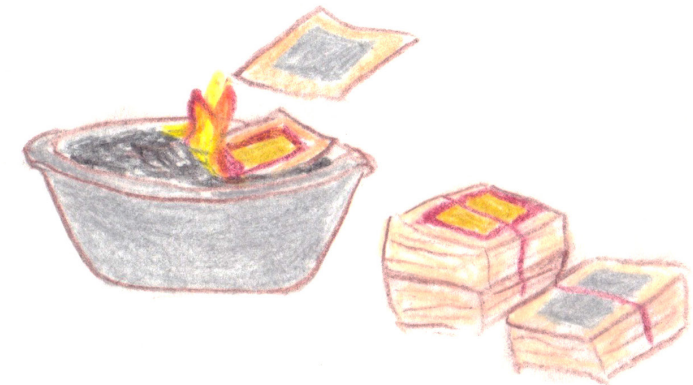


When my grandpa passed on, it was a little hard to decide whether to go for a Buddhist ceremony or a Taoist one, since he did not follow a specific religion. We ended up getting a bit of both, we have the Buddhist monk to recite prayers and we also followed the practice of Taoist to burn Joss papers.

One of the funeral ritual is to burn piece by piece of joss papers continuously throughout the entire wake. We thought it wasn't an important ritual to follow, and that it's okay to not burn the joss papers all the time, but we were wrong.

At one of the night, our clairvoyant relative passed us a message from my grandpa, saying that the joss paper received was insufficient. It was said that my grandpa went to look for her because she can hear him. She was not at the funeral and would not have known about us not following the ritual, in case you're wondering. She also, does not own any business related to the joss papers.

Basically, these joss papers are to help my grandpa have a smoother journey to the afterlife realm. This worked us up quite a bit. We want the best for our Grandpa, it's the least we could do, and it's really not that hard. I think also because even though my family do follow religious rituals daily, I don't think they wholeheartedly believe that joss papers really matter this much in the afterlife. There's some sort of half-faith.

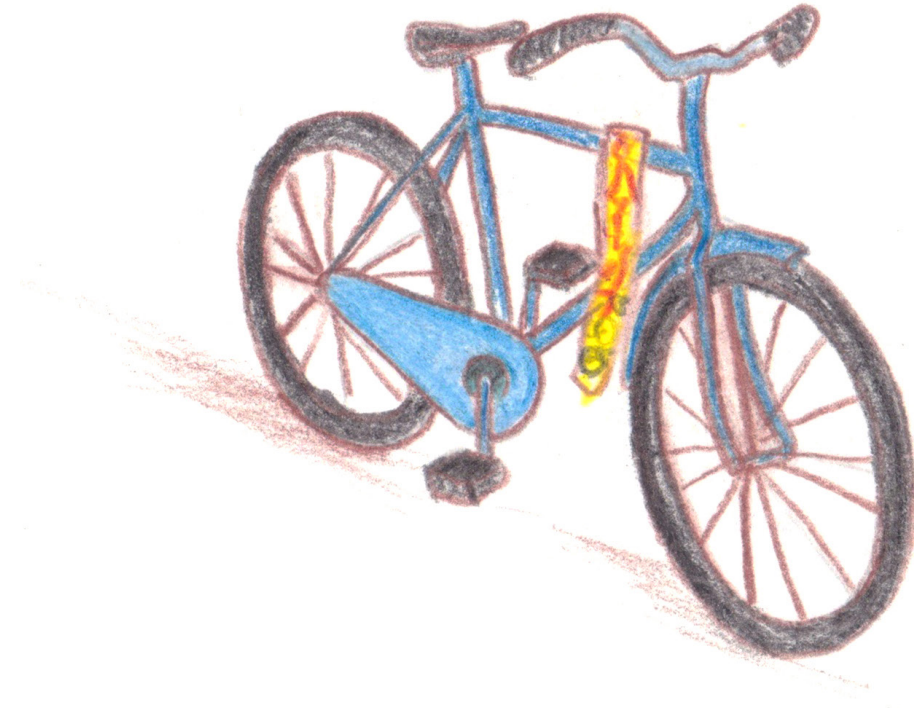


So this incident changed our perspective on the burning of joss papers. ‘Oh... so they really do receive them?’ It added a whole new level and meaning to the rituals.

Some time later (after the funeral), my grandpa requested for a bicycle. He had a stroke when he was alive, and it caused him to be disabled for about 5 years before he passed on. It’s quite a relieve for us, to learn that in the afterlife, he could cycle. Which means the souls don’t carry on the condition of the physical body of people when they were alive? He likes to cycle before he had a stroke, so it just makes a lot of sense to us. It makes me happy that we could do something for him. It only cost \$200, really not that much considering the craftsmanship. It was a very beautiful paper bicycle.

We also wrote his name and input our signature, ‘a circle with a dot’ to make sure it’s delivered to my grandpa. I’m really not sure how this circle with a dot became a representation of a signature of the living on the joss paper, but that’s just some of the interesting Taoist practices.

Unfortunately, it was said that it’s delivered to another spirit with the same name as my grandpa. Everything boggles my mind, on how revealing this is of the afterlife.

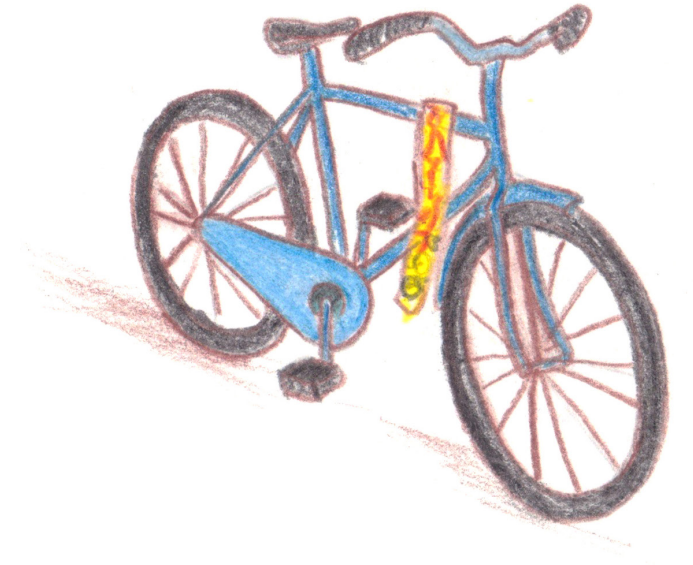
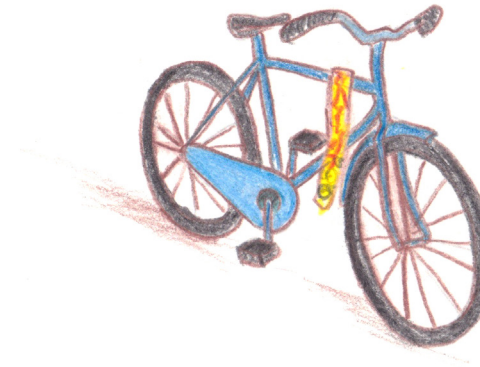


So, is there like some kind of mail system? There'll be spirits who took on the task as a "delivery person"? or some automated delivery? But I'm sure there's more than one person with the same name as my grandpa?

In any case, it means we have to get another paper bicycle. This time round, we got a smaller size one because we couldn't get the life size paper bike.

I was quite concerned about this, would the bike expand to an actual size bike when it gets to him? How does it work? But it doesn't make sense for me to be worried about the size when we didn't exactly burn a life-sized paper house, or life-size clothing (it's sometimes a paper that drew clothing and fabrics as representation of the actual item). Plus, the bicycle mechanics doesn't work the same on a paper bike, I don't think that means he can't use it then. Sometime later, it was said that the spirit who took his bike has returned him, so now he has two bikes! What a story from another dimension.

My grandpa later also asked for writing materials and fabric for clothing, so he could give others. He was a charitable person when he was alive, so it makes a lot of sense that he would do that. And writing material? Maybe he has some work to do in that realm? I wonder what they would be doing.



My Aunt was a Canadian and passed on because she was hit by a truck there. This happens in 2019, so it is not long from the time I'm writing this in 2021.

It wasn't a natural death and it left my family in extreme bereavement. Especially for my grandparents to have their child go before them. I feel so sorry for the loss they are experiencing.

I feel extremely pressured as well due to this accident, because I wonder how hard it would be for my parents if I were to leave earlier, like my Aunt. It isn't exactly a genuine worry about how my parents feel, but more about myself struggling with the fact I couldn't live an adventurous life because I don't want my parents to suffer the same way my grandparents do. Especially because I'm an only child, and also the only grandchildren. (I could possibly make them suffer twice) I'm not saying adventurous life as in sky diving or bungee jumping. I consider living in Canada, or in any other country an adventurous thing to do.

I just simply want to live my life; And living your life means being true to your own interests, judgments, and beliefs. I don't want to be trapped in bunch of what ifs. I think it is important to treasure this life you have right now, whether there's reincarnation, a life in heaven or whatever. Live your live.

I'm trying to remind myself, to have more courage, to do what I want in life, not of what others tell me I should or should not.

I'm happy for my Aunt that she had great experiences when she was alive and she took charge of her own life. Though, my dad would disagree. He didn't think she was being wise and responsible for whatever that has happened. I think he comes from the fact that he believes she could have been well protected if she's in Singapore. It was filled with disgruntlement and he couldn't accept the loss of his sister. Most of all, he couldn't bear to think about how much this has hurt my grandparents in their old age.

The disappointment comes also from having to take legal actions against her ex-boyfriend due to Canada's nonsensical 'common law spouse'. The man my aunt was with has been going after her assets, and it was extremely distasteful. Would you be quick to claim death certificate when your loved ones passed on? And claim every insurance you could? It was very unfortunate that my Aunt has not written a will, and he managed to get the 'common law spouse' status because he claimed the death certificate first.

At the end, we managed to settle the dispute outside court with the help of the lawyers. We managed to claim a part of the assets, but we really wondered how much of the assets this man looted. Please write your will ! Unless you have zero assets like me...

Just 3-4 days after my Aunt's death, my dad and second Aunt flew over to Canada to hold a funeral for her. Before that, we had to discuss what we should do with the ashes.

I thought it would be great if she could still stay at Canada, the place she liked, and suggested to scatter her ashes at the sea. On the other hand, I also thought it wouldn't matter so much for Christians, because they believe they will be with God after their death. Why would it then matter where the ashes will be? It isn't like the Taoist practices where visiting and giving offerings matters on how they live their lives in another realm.

My grandpa agreed on leaving the ashes in Canada, and saw it as fulfilling her wishes to be free. Since he had never once agreed on my Aunt staying in Canada, I think of it as him letting her be where she is most happy, and him finally giving his blessing.

Sometimes wanting the best for the people you care, doesn't align with what they really want. I think it's very often like that. What happened after was that my maternal grandpa met my aunt and brought her to our clairvoyant relative so she could tell us her wishes. She told us she wants her ashes to be brought back to Singapore. It was also through the clairvoyant that we heard her boyfriend was up to no good, but honestly it's quite obvious from his actions, so we already knew.

It's a relieve for me, that I didn't unintentionally enabled going against my aunt wishes. The idea of leaving the ashes in Canada was technically from me.

Another wish is to place her ashes close to my grandparents' in the future. How can placing ashes close together, get them to be reunited? If it's an idea coming out of the living, it makes sense because it's symbolic for us, it signifies our hope of people reuniting in the afterlife. But to believe it was my aunt wishes, with the assumption that the deceased finally understood everything of the afterlife, it was hard to make sense of it all.

Just as it is hard to understand anything about death, because who exactly knows what's happening in the afterlife? The clairvoyant wouldn't know—feeling, seeing and hearing the spirits doesn't mean they know—neither do sorcerers, priest, pastors, monks and anyone claiming to have a spiritual status. It's all based on personal faith. Miracles and the supernatural doesn't explain the immortality of souls, nor the existence of heaven, hell, reincarnation and purgatory realm.

It could be an illusion created from the creator or just simply how the universe works in creating deceptions, hiding the fact that there's really... nothing after all...

Anyway, it is for the best we brought her ashes back and placed them at a Christian columbarium. I think it would be better for my grandparents to have a chance for a proper grieving and a sense that their daughter has returned to them than to leave her in Canada. It felt like we abandoned her if we do that, so it all makes sense now

Apart from her wishes, she told us through the clairvoyant, that her grandma (my great grandma who died about 40 years ago) was crying so badly when my aunt met her at the scene of her passing. She doesn't seem to be too bothered by her own passing as compared to my great grandma. I really don't understand what there is to be sad about for the dead if it means they are reunited, and if it means there's an afterlife? I can only think she's upset for her unnatural death. Or we really shouldn't assume she's upset, it was only said that she's crying. Don't you think? It would ideally be quite an overwhelming experience for them after all.

Lastly, my Aunt said she will soon have to climb the stairs. So does that mean she is going to heaven? I really hope so.



Diversity is beautiful, as it offers us many perspectives to look at and think about our world. Life would be colourless, and uninspiring otherwise. I believe learning about death rituals from different cultures helps us form a better picture of the world's diverse beliefs on the afterlife.

Do types of coffin matter?

Does it matter if we're buried or cremated?

Or if we're neither buried nor cremated?

What are the ways people remember the dead?

Before we dive into the 12 rituals introduced in this book, the text on the right is quoted from the book 'From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death' by Caitlin Doughty, an American mortician.

Read these 12 words 12 times before moving on. (Just kidding)

we consider
death rituals
savage only
when they
don't match
our own.

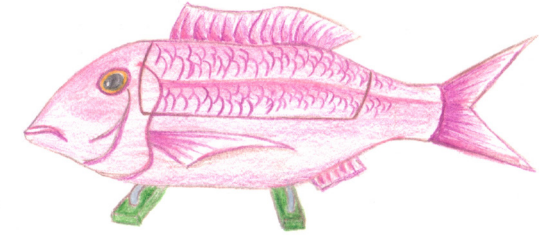
Fantasy Coffin

For Ghanaians, a funeral ceremony is an important community event, because they believe that death is not the end and life continues in the spirit world. The ancestors are believed to be the most immediate link with the spiritual world, hence the veneration of departed ancestors is a major characteristic of all the different tribes within Ghana.

This is also why some Ghanaians also take great pride in making coffins that reflect the life, dreams, passions, and status of the dead. It was said that these coffins were adapted from the figurative palanquins the district chiefs were carried in, and it began in the late 1950s.

The coffins are commonly known as fantasy coffins and are only seen on the day of the burial when they are buried with the deceased. These coffins are also called *okadi adekai* in the Ga language, and it means 'proverbial coffins' because many of the coffin shapes evoke proverbs interpreted in different ways by the Ghanaians.

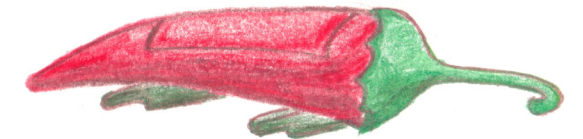
*Fish coffins are famous
because fishing industry
is huge in Ghana*



*belongs to a grandma
who dreams about
flying on an airplane*



*for the hot tempered
chilli pepper farmer*



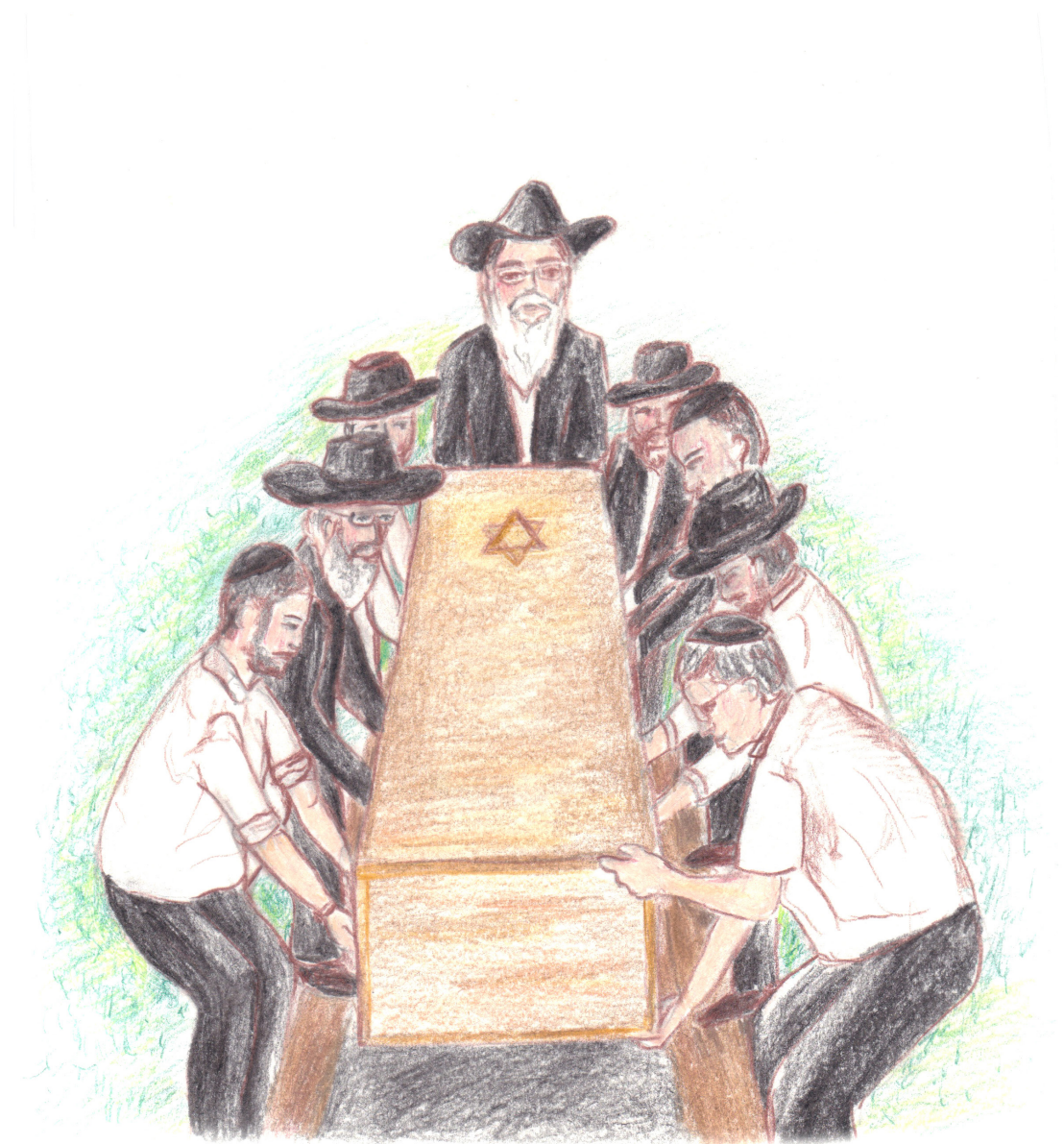
Jewish Aron

The Jewish believe that their God communicates through the prophets, and good deeds will be rewarded while evil will be punished.

Death is the great equalizer for the Jewish. The rabbis were quite concerned that the rituals and objects of Jewish burial indicate the fact that every human being is created equal and every human being is equal in death.

Unlike the Ghanaians elaborated coffins, the Jewish casket, which is called *aron* is plain and simple. In the beginning, it was not equal. The rich held lavish funerals while the poor could not and felt ashamed. The cost of the burial was so hard to bear which led to some poor Jewish fleeing to escape the expenses.

Funeral practices are made equal in the early first century of CE, when Rabban Gamaliel, a rabbi insisted that he wanted to be buried in a plain linen shroud instead of costly garments. Since then, the Jewish follow the principle of burial in a simple manner.

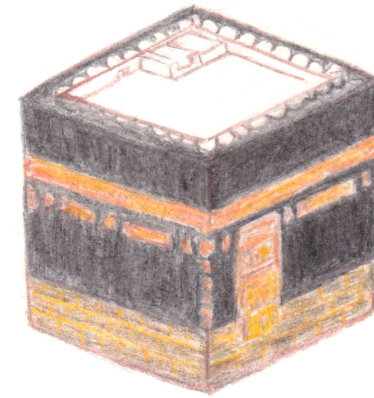


Islam

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity is a monotheistic religion, which means worshipping one God while denying the existence of other gods.

Cremation is considered *haram* (forbidden) to the Islam. The *Quran* (Religious text of Islam) teaches that the body slowly disintegrates, except for the tailbone. It is believed that at the time of resurrection, *Allah* (The God) resurrects the body from the tailbone. Cremation is thought to prevent resurrection by destroying the tailbone along with the rest of the body.

Another reason is because Muslims believe that, only Allah knows what is good or bad for people and the body should be treated with the utmost respect in life and in death. Prophet Mohammed also state that breaking the bone of the deceased's body is like breaking it in life. Burning the dead is therefore considered a form of mutilation, forbidden by Allah.



grave perpendicular to Mecca
for the deceased to face Mecca
while waiting for resurrection.



Hinduism

Hinduism is commonly viewed as a henotheistic religion which means they worship one god without denying the existence of other gods. The one Supreme Being they worship is also known as *Brahman*.

Unlike the Muslims, cremation is an extremely important ritual for the Hindus. Fire is the chosen method to dispose of the dead because of its association with purity and its power to scare away harmful ghosts, demons and spirits. Hindus believe it releases an individual's spiritual essence from its transitory physical body so it can be reborn.

The Hindus believe that if a deceased's ashes are laid in the Ganges at Varanasi, their soul will be transported to heaven and escape the cycle of rebirth. As a culture that believes in reincarnation, to attain *moksha* is profound. Moksha means freedom from *samsara* (cycle of death and rebirth). They believe the holier the place means having a better chance in achieving moksha and avoid returning to Earth as a cow or a cricket in their next life. Since many believe Varanasi has been inhabited for 5,000 years—which would make it one of the world's oldest cities—it is considered to be the most sacred cities.

*Kapal Kriya is performed
for the skull to be broken;
and the soul to be freed.*



Natural Burial

Sky Burial

Like Hinduism, Tibet Buddhism believes that people live many lives. An individual's *namshes* (consciousness) is thought to continue through a cycle of death and rebirth until they achieve enlightenment.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that the corpse is nothing but a discarded shell. While the body may lie still upon the deathbed, the spirit of the deceased has already moved on through death and towards a new incarnation. So for Buddhists in Tibet, offering their bodies to vultures or birds is the last great and honourable thing to do in this lifetime.

With *Jhator* (giving alms to the birds), widely known as sky burial, there is no need to disturb the land to bury the body. This expresses a value for environmental protection in the sky burial tradition.

While family members do not witness the breaking of the body, Tibetan Buddhists are encouraged to observe *Jhator* in order to confront the realities of physical death without fear.



Mepasah

The death ritual of the Bali Aga Tribe in the Truyan village is one that places the deceased aboveground at the foot of a tree, to simply let the corpses decompose in the open air.

They believe that their ancestors descended from the sky.

The name Trunyan refers to the tree that grows in the village area, called *Taru* (literally meaning tree) *Menyan* (meaning fragrant), that many believed was a magic tree that spread its fragrant scent around it.

The dead bodies are placed aboveground to neutralise the tree's organic perfume. Each of the 11 corpses are placed in a triangular-shaped woven bamboo cage to avoid animal attacks. The maximum number of corpses allowed under the Taru Menyan tree is 11. So when the 12th corpse comes in, the oldest of the 11 is removed and placed on a pile. Only when a body is completely skeletonised is the skull removed to place on the stone steps of the altar. This unique tradition is called *mepasah* (break down).



Burial Scaffold

In northern Australia, the Aboriginal tribes will place the body of the departed on a scaffold. Along with their possessions, the dead body will be covered with native plants and let to decompose as opposed to a tomb or coffin.

After several months, when all of the flesh had been depleted, the bones were retrieved and painted with red ochre. Then they could be carried around by the deceased's relatives, or placed in a cave until they degraded into dust, or stashed inside a hollow log, or just plain abandoned.

For a period of time after the death, speaking the deceased's name was forbidden. These particular tribes believed that the human soul has two sections, and that one of them—the ego—is what returns as a ghost to haunt the tribe. So by destroying the deceased's property and not acknowledging the person's name, they would basically cold-shoulder the ghost out of town.

They also believe in the rebirth of the soul; therefore, driving the spirit onward to its next life is crucial.



Ways of Remembering

Ma'Nene

The Torajans are an ethnic group indigenous to a mountainous region of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Torajans hold onto the belief that their earliest ancestors were heavenly beings who descended to Earth using a divine stairway. They believe that people are not really dead when they die and that a profound human connection lasts well past death.

When a family member dies, he or she is still cared for until a funeral can be given—when a suitable amount of money has been raised—often for weeks or even years after death. During this time, the deceased isn't believed to be dead but referred to as *Makula* (a sick person). They are given food and water regularly and are still very much a part of their family's daily life.

In the ritual called *Ma'Nene*, that takes place every one to three years in August, families who may have been dead for well over a decade are removed from their tombs, to be cleaned and dressed in new clothes. The Torajans spend time with them, chatting and lighting cigarettes for them. The mummified corpses are usually re-entered with gifts in their colourful coffins. And in the modern era, the Torajans use their smartphones to take pictures with their dead families.



Día de las Ñatitas

In Bolivia, the second largest indigenous group is the Aymara. On 8th November, indigenous Aymara from all walks of life take part in the annual ritual known as *Día de las Ñatitas* (Day of the Ñatitas). Ñatitas is a sweet diminutive for these revered skulls, literally meaning 'pug-nosed ones'.

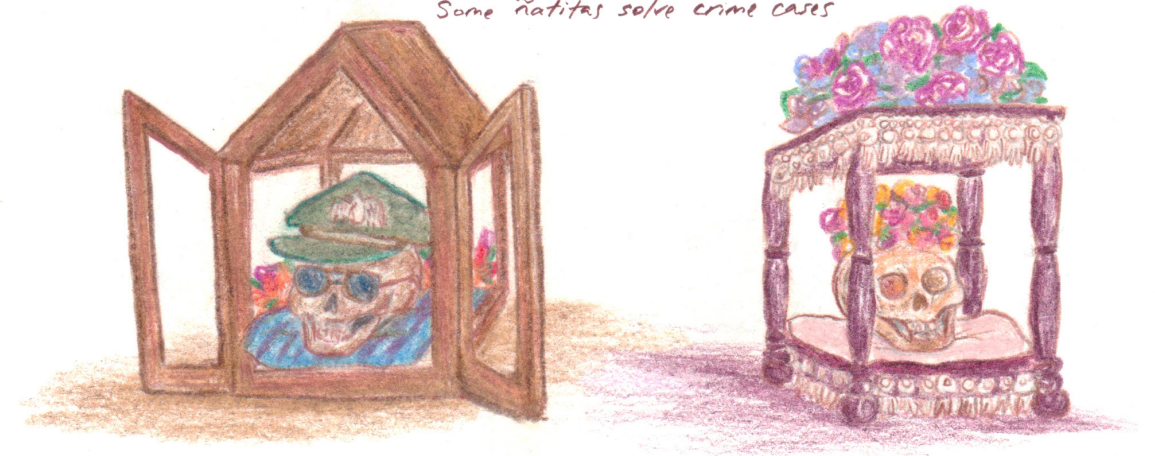
The Aymara have believed that humans possess seven souls. Upon death and burial beneath the ground, six of these are thought to go to heaven while the seventh remains trapped in the skull. After spending some time to rest underground, the skulls are dug up and cared for in order to appease the spirits that remain. But this is not a purely altruistic ritual, as happy spirits are thought to grant a variety of blessings in return.

Ideally, the skulls should belong to a relative or someone dear to the family. In reality, however, not everyone has access to a loved one's remains, so many skulls are sourced from archaeological sites or student medical facilities.

The Ñatitas are usually stored in shrines within the family home until the day of the festival when they are dressed up and decorated before being brought to the lavish ceremony.



*Some ñatitas found lost pet
Some ñatitas solve crime cases*



Día de los Muertos

Día de los Muertos (Day of the dead) is not, as is commonly thought, a Mexican version of Halloween, though the two holidays do share some traditions, including costumes and parades.

While October 31 is Halloween, November 1 is el Día de los Inocentes, or the day of the children, and All Saints Day. November 2 is All Souls Day or the Día de los Muertos. According to tradition, the gates of heaven are opened at midnight on October 31 and the spirits of children can rejoin their families for 24 hours. The spirits of adults can do the same on November 2.

On Día de los Muertos, it is believed that the border between the spirit world and the real world dissolve. During this brief period, the souls of the dead awaken and return to the living world to feast, drink, dance and play music with their loved ones. In turn, the living family members treat the deceased as honored guests in their celebrations, and leave the deceased's favorite foods and other offerings at gravesites or on the *ofrendas* (makeshift altars) built in their homes.



Famadihana

Every few years in the highlands of Madagascar, families reunite during a festival known as *Famadihana*, which means ‘turning of the bones’. The Malagasy people believe their ancestors serve as intermediaries between the living and God and therefore have the power to intervene in events on earth.

The Malagasy people believe that no dwelling for the living should be as substantial and costly as the tombs which house the dead, and the money spent on keeping the ancestors happy is more than any family member would dream of spending on themselves. Death is not a sad occasion for many Malagasy, but a time for celebrating.

Similar to the Torajans, the Malagasy people visit the tomb to remove the bodies of their dead families. They place their dead families on reed mats and wrap the bodies with new shrouds. At this point people can place something the person liked when he or she was alive in with the new sheets.

After the bodies are freshly wrapped, the direct relatives dance with the bodies and present them to the newcomers in the family. The celebration ends before nightfall as they fear the negative energy and evil power the night brings



Qing Ming

Qing Ming falls on the first day of the fifth solar term of the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. It is a chance for the living to honour the dead by burning incense, offering gifts of food, burning joss paper, also known as ghost money and paper replicas of material goods such as cars, homes, phones and paper servants. In Chinese culture, it is believed that people still need them in the afterlife.

At the grave, it is customary that offerings are first made to *Tu Di Gong* (God of the Soil), an important deity worshipped by the Taoists. Offerings are also made to appease wandering spirits who have no one to offer sacrifices to them. This appeasement is made to discourage these spirits from touching the offerings laid out for the family's ancestors.

The food offerings are gathered up after the ancestral spirits are deemed to have had sufficient time to eat their fill. The food is then brought home and consumed by the family. Qing Ming, therefore, provides an opportunity for the extended family to meet up and have a meal together.



Although they don't belong
to the same community,
they meet up for a meal
once in awhile.



grandpa found himself a friend,
the son with the same name
as grandpa.



