

## End-of-Life/Funeral Customs

End-of-life practices are very important and vary according to the different schools. What is essential is to create an atmosphere of **meditation, peace, quiet, and presence** around the patient. Ask the family if they are affiliated with a particular temple, and have them contact the temple in order to send an appropriate monk, nun, or clergy member to offer chanting and prayers. For a list of various Buddhist temples/centers in the USA and other countries go to [www.dharmamet.org](http://www.dharmamet.org)

At death, the mind/spirit gradually leaves the body. This may take a few hours. During this time, chants and prayers are recited to help this transition. *It is important to remember that many Buddhists will not want the body of the deceased touched or moved for a few hours after death.* Cremation is the accepted practice, as the Buddha himself was cremated at his passing. A monastic may be called to offer special chanting for the dead.

Reincarnation is a widely held belief, and the spirit of the deceased will undergo a rebirth 49 days after death. On this day a special ceremony is performed.



## How to minister to your patient

A Buddhist is probably not expecting a chaplain's visit; some may be atheist in bent, others more religious; some may not even be listed on the census as Buddhist. If possible, find out what tradition they are from, ask if they are affiliated with a local temple, and/or inquire if their monk/nun or teacher knows of their illness and could come to visit.

Buddhists appreciate altars. If they don't have one in their room you can help set one up for them. A picture or statue of Buddha, a flower, or perhaps an electric candle is all you need! Your patient may welcome a prayer of healing or a short chant, or may want to meditate for a few minutes. Ask them what they would like to do. You will find that most are very open and accepting.

Here is a list of some short chants:

**Theravada:** Buddham Saranam Gacchami  
Dhammam Saranam Gacchami  
Sangham Saranam Gacchami

**Tibetan:** Om Mani Padme Hum

**Pure Land:**  
Japanese Namu Amida Butsu  
Chinese Namo Ami Tuo Fo  
Nichiren Nam Myo Ho Renge Kyo

**Zen:**  
Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.  
Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to extinguish them.  
The Dharmas are boundless; I vow to master them.  
The Buddha way is unattainable; I vow to attain it.

## CARING FOR YOUR BUDDHIST PATIENT



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# WHICH SCHOOL IS MY PATIENT?

You may ask the patient, or find their native country: this will give you a good clue. Western Buddhists may come from any school.



*Buddha is the great teacher and venerable one. No matter what school your patient comes from they would most likely appreciate an image or small statue of Buddha in their room. You can assist them by cutting out the picture of the Buddha on the face of this brochure and delivering it to them.*

**Buddhism** is a religion/philosophy that encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs, and practices based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as Shakyamuni, the Buddha (Awakened One).

The Buddha lived and taught in India around the 6th century BCE.

During his life he shared his insights to help sentient beings end suffering (dukkha) through practicing a disciplined meditative life, eliminating ignorance, craving and hatred. Spiritual liberation is attained by way of self-understanding and seeing our True Nature—which is the highest happiness, Nirvana.

## THERAVADA / VIPASSANA

Theravada Buddhism literally means “Teaching of the elders.” This branch is the only surviving school of traditional Buddhism. It is characterized by emphases on liberation of the self through practicing The Eightfold Path, one’s own meditation, observation of the precepts and giving alms to monastics.

Countries predominately Theravada: **Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Cambodia, Indonesia, & the West.**



*Saffron-colored robes characterize the monks and nuns.*



*Following The Eightfold Path means living a balanced life avoiding all extremes.*

## TIBETAN / VAJRAYANA

This branch developed in the Himalayas around the 1st century. The use of ritual is very important whether through purification (bowing), mandala (visualization), or mantra (chanting). Having a personal teacher is essential. This school is a fusion of monastic and esoteric Buddhism. There are four distinct sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Countries: **Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, parts of India, China, Russia, & the West.**



*Famous for its ritual and color, Tibetan Buddhism is rich and vibrant.*



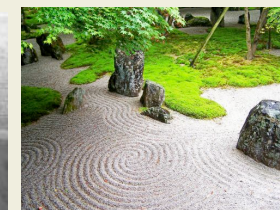
*His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is a spiritual advisor.*

## ZEN / CH-AN

Emphasizes the personal experience of enlightenment/insight through meditation (Zazen). It was brought from India to China and developed in China in the 6th & 7th centuries. Unorthodox in its approach, Zen is a special transmission outside the scriptures, beyond words, directly pointing to the human heart, realizing one’s inherent Buddha Nature. Two schools exist today: Soto and Rinzai. Zen spread to **Japan, Korea, & Vietnam** and from these countries was brought to **the West.**



*Meditation, or Zazen, is the quintessential practice in this school. Chanting and bowing are also important.*



*Japanese culture in particular is saturated with Zen—its gardens, tea ceremony, art, music, and archery all have been influenced.*

## PURE LAND/ JODO/ NICHIREN

A number of devotional schools emphasizing the practice of faith in the saving power of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Through chanting his name and or parts of “The Lotus Sutra” one will be reborn in the Pure Land, a Buddha paradise. At present this is the largest school of Buddhism in **China, Japan, & the West.**

