

Katharina von der Gathen & Anke Kuhl: Pushing Up the Daisies (OT: Radiesschen von unten)

Sample Translation
By Linda L. Gaus

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A word before we start...

This is a book about dying and death. Is dying bad? Can it also be good? Why do people have to die? What happens next? And what happens if the people I'm closest to die? Wouldn't it be much better to be immortal? Nobody in the world has definitive answers to these questions. People hundreds and thousands of years ago confronted the same questions that we do today. Thinking about this topic, alone or with other people, can bring a bit of light into the darkness. It can also make you sad sometimes. But it can also be interesting; in some cases, it can even be fun!

We experienced a lot while writing and illustrating this book. We talked to many different people about death and the life that proceeds it, we visited cemeteries and crematoriums, we were in the presence of the dead, and we thought about the end of our own lives. We giggled, sometimes we cried, and other times we were left speechless with amazement. The more we learned, the more curious we became. With our book, we would like to carefully open the door to a secret room. The world behind this door is special and unsettling. By contrast, for the many people in this book who tell us about their various professions, death and dying are normal and happen every day.

It was exciting to see that due to our own personal histories, our views of death were sometimes quite similar and at other times completely different. That's why there's an encounter, a mixture, and a combination of these two different points of view in the text and pictures of this book.

Of course, there were also times when we noticed that we didn't want to think about all this anymore. We needed a break, preferably in nature or in the company of other people. Perhaps sometimes you'll think: OK, that's enough! Perhaps your beloved pet or a close relative has just died. Right now, the memories are still too painful for you. Or maybe you're just living your life and you don't want to be disturbed. Then you can simply shut the book! You can always read more later. And it's best if you have a person that you love nearby with whom you can talk about your thoughts and feelings.

This isn't just a book about dying and death, it's a book about life!

Katharina von der Gathen and Anke Kuhl

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The beginning and end

The start of life is at least as sensational as its end: with a first breath and a first cry, each

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person begins a big adventure. Midwives say that you can see from the very beginning how different people are: while one baby is irritated and yells at everyone, another lies on its mother’s belly, relaxed, and examines everything around it.

Sometime, much later, this little person will take his or her last breath and exhale for the very last time. This moment is also completely unique and can’t be compared to anything else. In nature, one thing often has two sides. They seem to contradict each other, yet they are inseparable from one another: there’s no day without night, no summer without winter, no sleeping without waking. And the reverse is also true. Being born and dying are also inseparable. Perhaps the life in between is so unique and special precisely because it is bounded by death.

In the middle of life, the end seems very far away. Most people hardly think about the fact that they will die someday. Otherwise, they would probably live in constant fear for themselves and their loved ones. And they would probably not be able to feel so free and happy.

When you look closely, you can see death every day. It’s hiding in our language and where we live, it’s on the floor, or it celebrates with us. Frequently we see it just for a second, like a pesky fly that you shoo away from the cake plate.

There are a few examples on the next two pages:



Signs: Cemetery / Public swimming pool

HAHAHA, I’m laughing myself to death!

Only over my dead body!

I’m mortally offended!

BANG – you’re dead!

If you could look at the earth from far away, with all its people, animals, and plants; with its seas, deserts, and forests; with its weather; with days and nights; across a timeline of millions of years, you would see that earth is all about death and renewal.

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If no one died and nothing went away, people probably wouldn't exist anymore. The planet would simply have gotten too full at some point. People and things that die make space for new people and things. So, the trees that lose their old leaves in the fall make room for the fresh, green leaves in the spring.

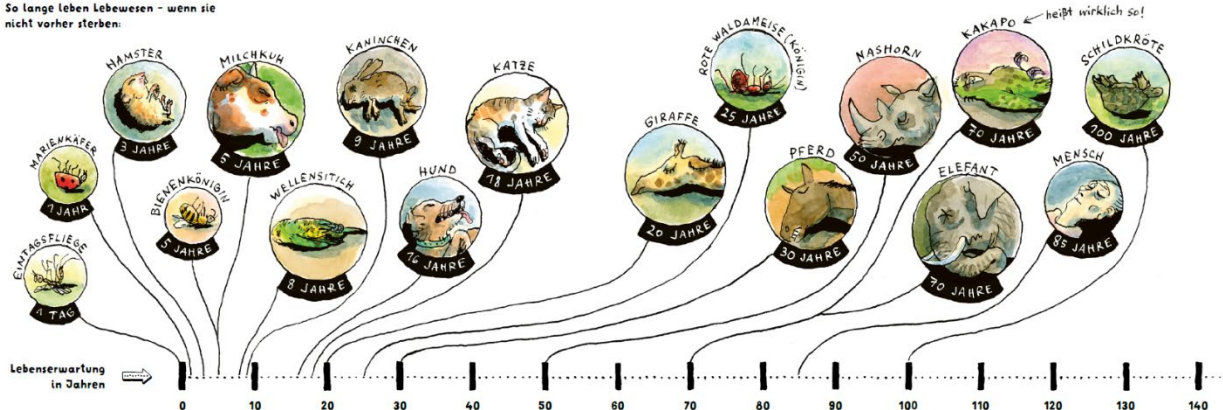
Sometimes this is hard and sad. However, it can also provide some consolation, for you know that life goes on. The next generation will carry some part of the previous generation inside itself. Therefore, it's good and right that people die.

Each life spans a different amount of time. It can be ninety years, nine years, nine days, or maybe just nine hours. For the individual person, it's nevertheless a whole life lived.

Here's how long different creatures live – if they don't die first:

Life expectancy in years →

So lange leben Lebewesen - wenn sie nicht vorher sterben.



Mayfly – 1 day Ladybug – 1 year Hamster – 3 years Queen bee – 5 years
 Dairy cow – 5 years Parakeet – 8 years Bunny rabbit – 9 years Dog – 16 years
 Cat – 18 years Giraffe – 20 years Red ant queen – 25 years Horse – 30 years
 Rhino – 50 years Kakapo (owl parrot) – 70 years Elephant – 70 years
 Human being – 85 years Tortoise – 100 years

[...]

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Tobi tells it like it is

Tobi is a nurse who works as director of a nursing home. A nursing home is a place where old people live and are cared for. Some of them have apartments there; they don't need Tobi and his team very often. Others can no longer take care of themselves; they need help getting dressed and eating. And still others are so weak that they can't get out of bed, so the staff tends to them there. Dying is part of life in a nursing home.

How many people die where you work, Tobi?

Fifty to sixty each year. On average, about one person a week.

That's a lot! Is there a time of year when more people die?

Some people say, "of course more people die in October!" But I say: "that's never the case!"

No, no, I won't say anything about that. People are always dying.

What's special about your profession?

We’re always dealing with people. That’s interesting and sometimes difficult too. In a nursing home, we’re “on” all the time. We don’t take vacations when everyone goes home. For thirty years, we’ve been taking care of people around the clock.

Can you tell when someone is about to die?

That depends. For some people, death comes very suddenly, overnight or during the day. Then there’s no advance warning. Other people are taken to the hospital because they’re getting sicker. Then they’re not with us and they die there. And then there are actually some where you think: now something’s changed. He will probably die soon. You can see that’s about to happen. So, this is a little like parents at the outdoor swimming pool thinking “it’s time for my child to get out of the pool.” People who are dying get weaker and they don’t have any more strength, they don’t move around like they did before, they aren’t hungry or thirsty. The nurses, doctors, and the patient’s family members notice this.

What do you do next?

The first important question is: “could and should we do anything? Does this person really have to go to the hospital? If the patient stays with us, we think about which medications we should continue to give him or her. What’s important is that the patient feels as little pain as possible. And we tell the family members that they can be there around the clock.

Do you talk to the residents of your nursing home about death and dying a lot?

No, we don’t. I don’t know how they would feel about that, whether they’d want that. Many of them would probably say: “no, stop, I don’t want to think about that.” Because they’re still doing well. Perhaps family members would also ask us: “what are you doing? My mother is supposed to be enjoying herself. She’s supposed to be in a good mood and not think gloomy thoughts!”

Do you think about your own death or your own funeral sometimes?

I’m not afraid of dying. I just think I’d rather not die too young. It will happen to me some time, but I’m not going to worry about it.

My aunt’s funeral was very nice. She died about a year ago and we buried her in a forest cemetery on a beautiful sunny day. There was a short speech, one or two poems and songs, and then a little music. I thought to myself: “look how beautiful it is here in the forest. Why don’t you do it here? I could also imagine doing that for myself. – But that’s enough about death!

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Being there

Anyone who is there when someone dies will probably remember this for the rest of his or her life. It’s a very special moment.

Once I sat with an old woman who really impressed me. When she was already very, very sick, she learned that her daughter was pregnant. I thought to myself: “she’s so sick, surely she won’t live until that child is born.” It was seven or eight months until the birth. But this woman actually waited until the day when her grandchild was born. Only once she had heard on the telephone that her daughter and the baby were doing well did she die, quietly and peacefully.

The last impressive death that I experienced was Elsa – a truly headstrong woman. She lay in her bed and spoke to me about her death: “I know that I must die. I can feel it. I’d like to die.” Then she fell asleep. Again and again, she woke up. She opened her eyes wide, and she said: “What? I’m not dead yet?” And then I said: “No, Elsa, lay down again. Everything’s OK.” And then she lay back against her pillow and fell asleep again. She woke up a few more times and asked: “What? I’m still not dead?” And I said “Elsa, go to sleep. I’m with you.” Then at some point she just slipped away peacefully.

I knew a family where the husband died. His wife and two daughters sat at his bedside around the clock and were always with him. At some point during the night, the mother and one of the daughters had gone into the kitchen to get a cup of tea. The other daughter fell asleep by his bedside since she was so exhausted. And it’s precisely in that moment that the husband chose to die – alone.

When my mother died, she waited until we were all there: her children, grandchildren, and her brothers and sisters who had to come from far away. We were all standing and sitting around the bed. She hugged each one of us goodbye one last time, then she lay down with her eyes closed. Her breath rattled. Suddenly, she became restless and insisted with surprising energy that she had to get up out of bed. My father took her in his arms and said: “your body is too weak. But you can go now.” With that, he had given her permission to die. That calmed her and helped her. She drew her last breath a few minutes later.

For two days, her body lay in her bed. Again and again, her children and grandchildren came to be with her. Elsewhere in the house, life went on: people were cooking, making telephone calls, crying, drinking coffee, and telling stories. Her two five-year-old granddaughters had the following discussion in the kitchen: “should we paint now or play circus? No! Come on, let’s go see Grandma again first!” And then they went to visit their dead grandmother. Somehow it all seemed normal and beautiful that we were all together even though we were all so sad. Whenever someone is dying, unbelievable things happen that we can’t explain. My favorite hospice story is about an old woman who was very afraid of dying. Like so many people, she was in a very special state in the final days of her life. Sometimes, it’s hard to tell whether a person is already very far away and almost dead or whether they’ll wake up again. This woman suddenly opened her eyes and said “I was already on the other side. I was on the threshold, and it is beautiful there! But then I remembered something important, and I turned around. I must send someone money.” She then sent her grandchildren money, and she died peacefully three hours later.



I'll spray a little champagne into your mouth, OK? ... I'm coming over, Henry!
[...]

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Saying goodbye

When someone is dying, you have to say goodbye. That's true for the person who's dying and also for those who are left behind and will go on living.

From many different situations in life, you know how difficult saying goodbye can be – if your friend is moving to another city or if your parents divorce.

When someone is dying, that's something else. Then everyone knows that it's forever. You'll never be with this person again, laugh, or even fight with them. This takes time to understand. Maybe it's some consolation to know that saying goodbye to a person is painful because your love for this person is so great. Perhaps the different ways to say goodbye are like scenes from a train station:

Some people like saying goodbye to their friends on the platform. Everyone hugs again and you remember the time you've spent together. When the person who's leaving boards the train, everyone is sad and thankful all at the same time.

Other people would rather go to the platform by themselves; they prefer saying a short goodbye. For them, it's good not to have to turn back around and they want to be entirely by themselves as they depart.

Still others can hardly stand to part. The train is at the platform ready to depart, the conductor's whistle indicates that the doors are closing. It's incredibly difficult for everyone to believe that it's actually time to go.

It can also happen that the train is late and that nobody can stand to wait on the platform for so long. Nobody knows what to talk about because everything has already been said.

Sometimes the traveler simply leaves without saying a proper goodbye. That's often hard for those who are left behind. What happens if the train leaves and the beloved person just isn't there anymore?

Then people are standing on the platform watching the train for a long time. They feel sad, and it's difficult to go back home and go on without a loved one.

Others may go directly to work and keep dates with friends. For them, it's important to have something to do and not to be alone. Sometimes, they only notice much later in particular situations that they are suddenly very sad. [...]

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One funeral – many decisions

Every funeral is different because each person was unique in his or her life.

Sometimes, people think about funerals before they die. Maybe they write down their most important requests or talk to someone they trust about this. In most cases, the people who are left behind think about what the dead person would have wanted, but also what they think is best. For them, saying goodbye should feel good and right, for whatever happens is probably no longer so important to the person who's died.

A funeral is also very expensive. While some people have saved for their funerals while they're still alive, other people would like to spend as little as possible.

Cartoon: Grandpa, I've been thinking about your funeral...

How would you decide?

- Coffin (burial in the ground) or urn (cremation)?
- What kind of coffin? What kind of urn?
- What clothing should the dead person wear in the coffin? A favorite outfit? Uniform? Shroud? Sports jersey? Evening dress?
- Should he or she be made up or have a particular hairstyle or wear special jewelry?
- Should friends and family be given an opportunity to say goodbye to the dead person? Should he or she lie in state?
- Who will be informed? Should there be a notice in the newspaper or on the Internet?
- Should there be a funeral? Where? At the cemetery? At home? At the funeral home? As a picnic in the park? And when?
- Who will be invited to the funeral? Only close friends and family? Neighbors? Old school friends?
- Should cards be printed? What should be on the cards: a nice saying? Photos? A picture someone has painted or drawn? Memories?
- Should everyone who comes dress in some special way? In black? In bright colors? For a party? Casual clothing? Motorcycle gear?
- What decorations should there be? What flowers? Flower petals? Wreaths? Candles? Pictures? Balloons? Streamers? Tablecloths? What color?
- Should everyone who comes share memories?
- Will a photo of the dead person be displayed? If so, which one?
- Will photos of the person's life be displayed?
- What music should be played? Did the person have favorite songs? Would someone like to play something? Should people sing a song together?
- Who should say something? Friends? Relatives? A eulogist (a person whose job it is to make speeches at funerals)? A pastor? Should someone read a favorite poem or story?
- Where will people meet after the funeral? At home? In a café? In a restaurant? In the park? Not at all?
- Should there be something to eat or drink there? If so, what? Coffee and cake? Potluck? Pork roast and noodles? Cola and chips?

Your head may be spinning with all these decisions. Funeral home directors can help you say goodbye the right way. And it's also good if the person who died made clear what he or she wanted.

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Grief

Grief is a lot more than just feeling sad. Grief is like love, it's a big feeling that's very difficult

to describe.

Actually, grief consists of many individual feelings that come and go. They are stronger and weaker at different times. And grief is different for everyone.

Grief includes crying, wailing, and sobbing. Sometimes, the despair is so great that you can't even imagine how your life could ever be nice again. Sometimes you have to cry because everyone around you is so distressed. Crying is contagious. Sometimes it can do you a lot of good.

Grief can cripple and silence a person. Then you don't want to talk to anyone, and you have no words for what you're feeling.

Frequently, you suddenly have the miserable feeling that somebody just left you alone.

Without advance warning, this can make you really angry and vexed.

If someone is grieving, they may also open up and make stupid jokes. Sometimes this seems very strange because that person is supposed to be sad.

Fear is also part of grieving. Many people suddenly fear that other members of their family or friends might die.

Grief can cause physical symptoms. Some people have stomachaches or other pains.

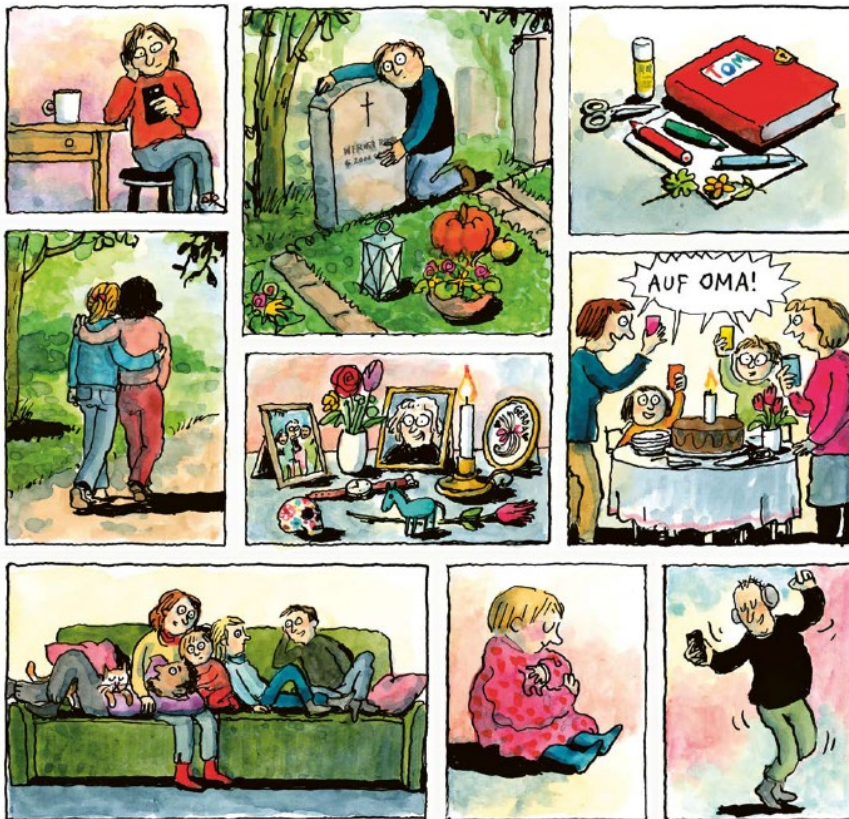
Sometimes, grief brings relief. The time of worry and fear about a person was bad. With death, it's finally all over.

And if the dead person was a mean person, it can happen that you finally feel freer after they're dead.

Grief is exhausting, it can make you weak and tired.

Some people don't feel any of all this. Maybe they think that they should be feeling more, but they're grieving, nonetheless.

These many feelings arise because a person who was important and special is no longer there. All of this is right, even if it is sometimes bad and difficult to feel it.



What can help?

- Having keepsakes: clothing that still smells like the dead person, the watch that he or she always wore, the picture that hung over his or her desk
- Visiting places: the park bench, playground, grave, workshop in the basement, a spot on the river
- Listening to music: favorite songs, songs with consoling words, party hits that you used to dance to
- Setting or hanging up photos: reminders of shared experiences, vacation photos, a last nice meeting
- Decorating a small table or the windowsill with keepsakes and a candle
- Looking at photos or videos of the person’s life with other people or listening to voice messages again
- Cooking the dead person’s favorite food
- Collecting small keepsakes in a treasure chest
- Having a memorial evening with friends and/or family
- Taking time for yourself
- Baking a cake on the dead person’s birthday and making a toast to him or her
- Painting pictures
- Telling your friends when you’re feeling sad
- Flowers: putting them on the grave, sewing some secret flower seeds or picking some flowers

- Writing in a special book: memories, adventures you had, “I learned this from you”
 - “Memory moments”: blowing bubbles, lighting sparklers
 - Keeping a lock of hair
 - Sending a message in a bottle
 - Lighting a candle in a church or on the Internet
 - Sharing your grief with friends on social networks
 - Making a book from old Whats-App chats
 - Attending a bereavement group – these are groups that meet regularly. Everyone there has lost someone they loved
 - Doing fun things
 - Writing a letter to the person who died
 - Making something new out of something old: sewing or having someone sew a pretty pillow or stuffed animal from a blouse or shirt. Sometimes, it will smell like the person who died for a long time
 - Very important: friends who won’t leave you alone, who just drop by, who always ask how you’re doing, with whom you can eat pizza and watch movies, who tell good jokes, with whom you can be silent and just spend time, who take you along and who also keep showing up
- [...]

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What happens after death?

Nobody can know what really happens after death. Similarly, no one can imagine how or where or who they were before they were born. Perhaps the “before” and “after” is like a good deep sleep. In between is waking, colorful life.

Many people hope that there’s more than the time that they’re on earth. For example, they believe that the dead and their souls live on or that they are reborn in another body. Some people believe that God or Allah will bring them to life once again someday. For others, there’s a kind of heaven where everything is good. And still other people are quite sure that there’s nothing after death: life is over and done with.

Some people think that they see signs from dead people in their daily lives: a little bird, that comes right up to them; a sudden gust of wind, or a ray of sunlight that breaks through the dark clouds. Many people also talk to their departed loved ones as if they were still around. Such ideas help us live with death. Perhaps they’re not so bad after all.

There are also people who have already come quite close to death. For example, they were rescued from a life-threatening situation and brought back to life. Many of them report that they have felt and seen beautiful things people can’t even imagine in these dramatic moments. They have the feeling that they stepped outside of their bodies, so they could see themselves from above. All at once, they felt no pain. They felt light and they floated, heard wonderful sounds, met people they loved who have died, or saw a warm, bright light at the end of a dark tunnel. All seemed to be good and peaceful there. Some people didn’t even

want to come back to life.

Many researchers say that such miraculous impressions arise in the brain because the body is in a life-threatening situation. Other people believe such near-death experiences are a sign of a possible afterlife.

The varying ideas about what happens after death can be very confusing! Many people, especially children, can't stop thinking about this; some of them are very afraid.

The riddle of death is a puzzle that simply can't be solved. Ever since there have been people, they've been thinking about it. This riddle is simply part of life.

Over the course of life, people's ideas about death may change, depending on who they talk to or what they've experienced.

Nearly everyone can, when they're older, regard death as less of an enemy. Perhaps they get a little more tired each year they live. For them, it starts to feel right that their time is limited and that they'll find peace at some point.

And perhaps they'll be happy when they can just go to sleep after a very long day with a lot of great experiences. Whether they dream and what their dreams are remain a surprise.



Black speech bubble: I don't want to DIE at all and none of my favorite people may die I want to have them all around me where am I anyway when I'm DEAD and where are all of my thoughts and feelings is everything dark, black, the big NOTHING I am afraid of going away but the idea of living FOREVER is also horrible somehow is there anything like heaven where the dead and the living meet can I play with Great-grandma is time endless then I don't understand what INFINITY means totally creepy and what happens after infinity and what happens if I'm born into another body if every life is like a movie and when it's over a new one begins my head is going to explode, can someone please HUG me!

[...]

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Religions, Eras, and Cultures

Everywhere in the world, people handled and handle their dead and death differently. There are many different ideas and hopes for how things might work after death. Over time, traditions and religious rituals developed from these. The people left behind really care about their dead.

Religions

Judaism is one of the oldest religions in the world. For Jews, one thing is clear: all the dead will arise again someday – precisely when the messiah comes to create a peaceful world at last. Jews live and die in this hope. That's why a Jewish grave must exist forever.

There are many old traditions surrounding death. When someone dies, people say special prayers. The dead body is washed, wrapped in a shroud, and put in a simple wood coffin.

Relatives and friends keep watch over the dead and remain with their dead loved one. And the relatives and friends are not left alone either; in the first seven days, even after the burial, they stay at home, and friends and neighbors bring them food and drink. In this time, they can be sad together, remember, and tell stories about the many special experiences they had with this unique person. Jews don't plant flowers on their graves. If someone visits a grave, they place a stone on it. This is a sign that doesn't wilt; it tells someone "I haven't forgotten you and I will not forget you."

Christians also believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believe that one day they will be with God, and then everything will be heavenly and good. Thanks to belief in God and his son Jesus, who according to the Bible died and was resurrected, amends will be made for anything bad that people did. Among Christians, there are sometimes still old ideas about a torturous hell that awaits those who were "evil" in their lives.

While Jews and Muslims bury their dead the day after they die (if possible), Christians often observe a tradition of taking a few days to bid the dead person goodbye. A Christian funeral is usually held in a chapel at the cemetery by a priest or pastor. In addition to the personal leave-taking, consoling words from the Bible and prayers are read aloud. With the words "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," dirt is thrown on the coffin or urn three times. This refers to the story from the Bible where God created the first people from dirt or dust and clay.

In Islam, life on Earth is preparation for the paradise that comes after death. That's why all observant Muslims should seek to live good, honest, helpful lives and believe in God, whom they call Allah. Hell may await people who do not believe "truly." When a Muslim dies, family members wash the body of the dead person according to specific rules. After that, it is wrapped in white cloths while prayers are recited, and it is buried the same day. The body is placed directly in the ground. Before the burial, a family member climbs into the prepared grave. Using a shovel, he arranges the soil so that the dead person can lie on his or her right side – facing in the direction of Mecca, the holy city. Then family and friends fill the grave with dirt.

In Buddhism, there is no God, no heaven, and no hell, for Buddhists, like Hindus, believe in rebirth: the soul lives forever, only the outer form changes. Life has no beginning and no end; it goes on and on. The big goal for Buddhists is to free oneself from this cycle someday and experience complete freedom and happiness in Nirvana.

When a person dies, people wish him or her well for rebirth. The dead person's soul should be able to separate itself peacefully from the body. That's why Buddhists don't believe in crying or mourning too much, for that would only delay the soul's journey.

In India, Hinduism is the most widespread religion. Many people believe that upon death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in another body. Whether one is reborn as a king, a mouse, or a rock depends on how well one lived his or her previous life.

When a Hindu dies, the body is cremated. Especially popular is cremation on the Ganges, the holy river. On its banks, there are many public cremation stations. Wrapped in a cloth, bodies

are cremated there on a wood fire on the day they die so that their souls can be free. The family members then scatter the ashes and bones on the water together with flowers and garlands.

Eras and Cultures

In Mexico, each year people gather to celebrate the “Day of the Dead.” In the weeks before this day, there are brightly colored paper mâché skeletons everywhere; some of them are wearing funny clothing. There are skulls made of sugar decorated with flowers and many other spooky-beautiful bones and death masks. As at Halloween or Mardi Gras, many people dress up. They parade through the streets as skeletons or dead people in colorful party processions. On the Day of the Dead, people believe that the living visit the dead to celebrate with them. Everyone goes to the cemetery together; there are lanterns and torches that create the right mood. While happy music plays, people set up folding tables and chairs on the graves. People have great feasts, beer and liquor are passed around, and children play tag and hide-and-seek among the graves. People also bring presents for the dead. On this day, death is welcomed in life.

People have a very special way of handling their dead in the mountainous regions of the Indonesian island Sulawesi. Every few years, people take the dead out of their coffins, clean them, dress them again, stand them up, hug them, and talk to them. Here it doesn’t matter if they are already a bit decayed and don’t look or smell as they did when they were alive. Sometimes, the dead even “live” with families for years. This is because the traditional burial, where a water buffalo is butchered and many people are invited, costs a lot of money. The dead remain at home until the family has saved up enough money. The relatives live and eat with them; in the evening, they are put back in bed. Nobody thinks this is unusual.

On rare occasions, there are “sky burials” in the mountains of Tibet. A priest cuts up the dead bodies and leaves the pieces out for birds of prey. This way, the dead serve the birds as food and return to the natural circle of life. This ancient tradition probably also exists in this region because the ground is too hard for burials and there is not enough wood in the area for cremations.

In Ancient Egypt, life after death was just as important as life before death. The dead were supposed to reach the other side as unspoiled as possible. Therefore, people preserved the bodies so that they couldn’t decay. They were slit open carefully, the intestines removed, and these were placed in special vessels. Egyptian priests embalmed the bodies with special liquids and wrapped them carefully in special cotton cloths. Animals that were regarded as sacred were also mummified this way. The more powerful a king or pharaoh was, the more jewelry and clothing, food and drink were buried with him (or her!). Servants and pets were also put in the grave. Equipped this way, the dead could start their journey to the realm of the dead. A life with eternal health and youth awaited them there.

Thousands of years later, many such mummies were found when graves were excavated. In

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the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, it was even chic to take a body wrapped this way home with you as a souvenir. Rich people sometimes had “mummy parties,” where the mummies they had brought home were unwrapped in their guests’ presence.

Just 100 years ago, it was possible to buy actual ground-up mummies as a remedy in apothecary shops. The powder “Mumia vera aegyptiaca” was supposed to help against coughs, headaches, dizziness, and lameness.

[...]