



Topic: Why do people believe different things about life after death?

I need to know:

- Why do people believe different things about life after death?
- What do Christians believe about life after death and how does it affect their lives?
- What do Muslims believe about life after death and how does it affect their lives?
- What do Buddhists believe about life after death and how does it affect their lives?
- What do Sikhs believe about life after death and how does it affect their lives?
- What do non-religious people including Humanists believe about life after death and how does it affect their lives?

Key Words and Definitions

- **Akhirah:** The Islamic term for the afterlife.
- **Barzakh:** A Muslim term for a place of waiting until the Day of Judgement.
- **Gurmukh:** God-centred.
- **Hadith:** The books of the teachings of Muhammad.
- **Jahannam:** The Islamic term for Hell. A state of torment and suffering.
- **Jannah:** The Islamic term for Heaven/ Paradise. A state of joy, happiness and peace.
- **Karma:** Actions have consequences.
- **Manmukh:** Self-centred.
- **Mukti:** Liberation from reincarnation. Being with God.
- **Niyah:** An Islamic term meaning the honest intention to worship God.
- **Reincarnation:** To be reborn after death.
- **Resurrection:** Coming back to life from the dead.
- **Samsara:** The cycle of life and death.
- **Qur'an:** Means 'reading' or 'recitation'. The Muslim holy book.
- **Soul:** The spiritual aspect of a person connecting to God.
- **Yawm ad-Din:** The Islamic term for the Day of Judgement.

Data from the 2019 Understanding Unbelief Report

54% of people in the UK believe in some kind of life after death, including 18% atheists and 22% of agnostics.

In the USA, the figures are 68% of the general population, 13% atheists and 17% agnostics.

In China, the figures are 59% of the general population, 22% atheists and 31% agnostics.

Christianity and life after death

Heaven and Hell: Traditionally heaven and hell were thought of as real places. Some contemporary beliefs see heaven as a place where God is and hell as a place that God is not. Both heaven and hell are connected by an idea of reward and punishment.

Purgatory: Catholics also believe in purgatory which is a place people go before they go to heaven. In purgatory they are purified and cleansed of their sins. It is a bit like a waiting room for heaven. They believe that on Judgement Day all those who are in purgatory will go to heaven.

Day of Judgement: Many Christians believe there will be a Judgement Day when people will be judged by God for the quality of their lives. Some believe that that day will be when Jesus returns to earth in the 'second coming'.

Bodily Resurrection: Many Christians believe that when they die, their soul (the spiritual part of them) will leave on in heaven. Many believe that there will also be a physical/ bodily resurrection. This means that people will be brought back to life with a physical body, just like Jesus was.

Stages of grief

There are different stages of grief recognised by psychologists. This are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father.

Christian funerals

Christian funerals aim to comfort the bereaved. Funeral rites include:

- A priest may be called to do the last rites. Prayers are often said for the dying person and they can ask for forgiveness. In the Catholic Church the Priest gives Holy Communion.
- The minister may read the words: **'I am the resurrection and the life.'** John 11:25
- Candles may used to represent that Jesus is the **'light of the world'**.
- Psalm 23 **'The Lord is my shepherd'** is often read.

Arrow Tasks You could enhance your learning by visiting one of the suggested websites such as: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zx4ky4j/revision/1> (Christianity), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zg67jty/revision/1> (Non-religious views), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zk3f3k7/revision/4> (Sikhism) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z6mhgk7/revision/3#:~:text=Islam%20teaches%20that%20there%20is,din%20%2C%20the%20Day%20of%20Judgement%20>. (Islam) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zfts4wx/revision/3> (Buddhism)

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Islam and life after death

'The trumpet will be sounded, when all that are in heaven and on earth will swoon, except such as it will please Allah to exempt. Then will a second one be sounded, when, behold, they will be standing and looking on! And the earth will shine with the glory of its Lord. The Record of deeds will be placed open; the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward; and just decisions pronounced between them; and they will not be wronged in the least. And to every soul will be paid in full (the fruit) of its deeds; and Allah knows best all that they do.' Qur'an 39:68-70.

A Muslim line of prayer: *'O thou Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou my protector in this world (dunya) and in the hereafter (akhirah).* Qur'an 12.101.

Islam recognises we are mostly ignorant of the afterlife. Muslims believe in heaven/ paradise (**Jannah**) which is a reward for those who live in submission to Allah. Their beliefs, actions and intentions (**niyya**) in this life are important for going to paradise. Many also believe in hell (**Jahannam**) which is for those who reject Allah's path and guidance. Many believe there will be a Day of Judgement (Yawm ad-Din).

Buddhism and life after death

The **Noble Eightfold Path** is about wisdom, good conduct and mental discipline.

Buddhists believe in **karma**, which means everything you do has a consequence. Our intention is the most important thing. One of the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Intention. There are three types of Right Intention:

- The intention of renunciation.
- The intention of good will.
- The intention of harmlessness.

For Buddhists the way of defining and acting upon our intentions are tied up with beliefs about rebirth: After this my body dies, my return to earth will be better if these intentions have been practised.'

The cycle of life and death is called **Samsara**. Good intentions can lead to a favourable rebirth (reincarnation).

Many Buddhists use the **Metta Sutta**, a chapter about loving kindness from the scriptures. to help them focus their lives and intention.

Humanism

Humanists are materialists which means they don't believe we have a soul. They believe in a scientific description of human life and they reject beliefs about our spiritual existence. We are physical beings who when we die, we no longer live on.

In a Humanistic funeral they may have non-religious music, readings of poetry, an **eulogy** (a description of why they person who died was special), lighting candles and moments of quiet reflection. They will not suggest they are going to a better place. They will celebrate the life of the dead person.

Sikhism and life after death

At different stages of life, remembering God and serving others are important in different ways for Sikhs, and the religion teaches that all of life challenges people to move from being self-centred (**manmukh**) to being God-centred (**gurmukh**). There are many obstacles to living the best, purest life, but chanting the scriptures can be learned any time and practised all the time: it overcomes the obstacles of selfishness, bad actions and harm to others.

Human life is a gift from God, Waheguru. The path of life from birth to death gives humans a chance overcome the ego (**haumai**) through living according to the will of God (**hukam**). In such a state, a person can escape the cycle of life, death and rebirth (samsara) and achieve liberation (**mukti**). Mukti means eventually that the God-centred person (**gurmukh**) merges with God. Achieving mukti is the result of living a life tuned to the Will of God, remembering the Creator (Nam Simran) and performing **seva**, selfless service to others.

Sikhs believe in **reincarnation**.