



Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic, African American, & Jewish Traditions

3 CE Hours

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Final Exam - PREVIEW

Course Name: Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic, African American, & Jewish Traditions
(3 CE Hours)

HISPANIC MODULE

1. Currently, Hispanics are the largest minority in the United States: _____ of the total United States population in the 2013 census.
 - a. 38.7%
 - b. 29.4%
 - c. 21.6%
 - d. 17.1%

2. The body of the deceased plays an active role in the Hispanic tradition, from the wake and rosary to the funeral mass and burial, and is a central “actor” in the religious rituals remembering the dead. _____ is thus fairly common among Hispanics in the United States.
 - a. Green burial
 - b. Embalming
 - c. Closed-casket service
 - d. Cremation

3. Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include _____.
 - a. Immediate family only
 - b. Immediate and extended family only
 - c. Immediate family and close personal friends only
 - d. The entire extended family in addition to friends and colleagues

4. According to E.R. Shapiro, grieving models in the Hispanic tradition emphasize _____.
 - a. A reintegration of the dead in a world without the deceased
 - b. A dismissal of the dead from the world of the living
 - c. Working through stages of detachment from the deceased
 - d. Minimal mourning and remembrance

AFRICAN AMERICAN MODULE

5. Per Deathbed Rituals and Traditions, the extended family and social network is often _____ the last moments.
- Included in
 - Asked to leave during
 - Barred from
 - Made uncomfortable by
6. Burial beliefs and practices common to the African American community include holding burials _____, as a symbol that the gates to the heavens are open and ready to welcome the deceased.
- On weekends
 - On Friday evenings
 - On sunny days
 - At sundown
7. Harkening back to the funerary custom of placing coins in the hands and eyes of the deceased, some people also leave coins _____.
- At the church
 - On graves
 - In the baptismal font
 - At the funeral home

JEWISH MODULE

8. Jewish belief claims that all humans are created in God's image, and thus the body, whether sick, dying, or dead, must be treated with respect. This core belief is called _____.
- Viduy
 - Mitzvah
 - Shomer
 - Kevod ha-met
9. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be _____.
- Made of synthetic materials
 - Highly ornamental
 - The simple pine box
 - Lined and padded

10. During the first meal (or *seudat havra'ah*), among other foods, things that are _____ are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle.

- _____.
- a. Locally-grown
 - b. Round in shape
 - c. Highly spiced
 - d. Freshly-baked

CONTINUING EDUCATION

for Funeral Directors

Grief and Cultural Competence: Hispanic, African American, & Jewish Traditions

3 CE HOURS

Learning Objectives

This course is intended to increase funeral directors' awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural traditions with regard to grief and mourning. By the end of the course, learners should be familiar with:

<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Jewish</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ General demographics, language, and religious beliefs pertaining to Hispanic culture❑ Hispanic attitudes towards sickness, dying, and the deceased❑ Deathbed rituals and traditions in Hispanic culture❑ Hispanic interment traditions❑ Common Hispanic beliefs regarding the afterlife❑ Hispanic mourning and remembrance rituals, including All Souls' Day and Dia de los Muertos❑ Additional points of cultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ General demographics, language, and religious beliefs pertaining to the African American diaspora❑ African American attitudes towards sickness, dying, and the deceased❑ Deathbed rituals and traditions in African American culture❑ African American interment traditions❑ Common African American beliefs regarding the afterlife❑ African American mourning and remembrance rituals, including the origin of Memorial Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ General demographics, language, and religious beliefs pertaining to Jewish culture❑ Jewish attitudes towards sickness, dying, and the deceased❑ Deathbed rituals and traditions in Jewish culture❑ Jewish interment traditions❑ Common Jewish beliefs regarding the afterlife, or the lack thereof❑ Jewish mourning and remembrance rituals, including <i>Shiva</i>, <i>Kaddish</i>, <i>Yahrzeit</i>, and <i>Yizkor</i>❑ Additional points of cultural sensitivity

PLEASE NOTE:

The facts laid out in this module are presented as a general guideline to dominant cultural characteristics: they are not, and are not intended to be, applicable to all people of Hispanic origin. This module in no way diminishes the diversity of the many different Hispanic populations in the United States.

The integration of cultural characteristics into funeral practices is in part dependent on levels of acculturation, or the assimilation of Hispanic communities into local culture. Funeral directors need be sensitive to the difference in Hispanic acculturation, with first generation Hispanics usually more traditional and more closely aligned with the cultural practices of their country of origin, while second, third and fourth generation Hispanic Americans may more closely reflect Anglo-American practices.¹ Additionally, generally Hispanic and Latino are terms that are used interchangeably, but Latino refers to those from Latin American, which includes Portuguese speaking Brazil, and the creole populations of Haiti and the Caribbean. This module addresses only the Spanish speaking population of Latin America.

You will want to ascertain the extent to which Hispanic patrons wish to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices, just as you would with any patron.

GRIEF AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE: HISPANIC TRADITIONS

Introduction: Demographics, Language, Religious Beliefs

The United States census states that Hispanics are those of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American descent regardless of ethnicity. However, Brazilians, who speak Portuguese, are not always classified as Hispanic, as Hispanic connotes one who is Spanish speaking. The Spanish used in various Hispanic countries can vary widely: the Spanish used in Mexico sounds very different from that used in Argentina or Cuba, with different terms for common items.

Currently, Hispanics are the largest minority in the United States: 17.1% of the total United States population in the 2013 census. This number is expected to grow; by 2060, it is estimated that Hispanics will make up 31% of the total population. California is the state with the highest number of Hispanics, at 14.7 million Spanish-speaking inhabitants; New Mexico has the largest percentage by population with 47.3 % of its total population of Hispanic origin. More than one-third of the total Hispanic population in the United States resides in states that border Mexico, including Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas.² Outside of the American Southwest, substantial Hispanic populations are found in the Northeast – in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut – and also in Illinois and Florida. Florida is expanding in growth because of its proximity to Latin America, while the other states are growing largely due to their urban centers and job availability.³

Generally, Hispanics practice Roman Catholicism; the specific version is usually influenced by local indigenous cultures, resulting in Catholic folk practices that may seem very different from traditional European and American Catholicism. The Hispanic Catholic tradition embraces a rich plethora of saints and martyrs, although specifics can vary by location. Each country in Latin America, for example, tends to favor particular saints, martyrs, and icons depending on cultural values: in Mexico, for example, Saint Death – or Santa Muerte – is growing more popular, though she enjoys little to no recognition in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. With an estimated ten to twelve million followers, Saint Death ties together some traditional indigenous beliefs with Catholic thought, becoming known as the patron saint of healing, protection, and safe passage to the afterlife. Particularly favored by people on the margins of society, she is most notorious for being the preferred saint of drug cartel members, but is also popular with undocumented migrants, those of trans-gender, and others who perceive themselves as on the fringes. Despite – or perhaps because of – her steadily increasing following, Santa Muerte has been officially denounced by the Catholic Church because she is not a recognized saint from the Catholic canon.

Other saints popular with the Hispanic community include St.

exam question...

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1 Whitaker et al, "Perinatal Grief in Latino Parents," <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3648338/> last accessed June 11, 2015.

2 <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/20/us/hispanics-in-the-u-s-/> last accessed May 8, 2015.

3 For individual state demographics see "State and County Databases, Latinos as Percent of Population, By State, 2011," <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/> last accessed May 25, 2015.

Peregrine, patron saint of cancer; St. Joseph, saint of the dying; Our Lady of Lourdes, the saint most often prayed to for various bodily ills; and Saint Juliana Falconieri, the saint of chronic illness. These are in addition to the popular figures of Sacred Heart Jesus (representing the heart that suffers, yet lives love more purely) and the Virgin Mary (who represents purity and suffering. Each country has its own particular favorite version of the Virgin that is popular; for example, in Mexico, the most popular Virgin Mary is the Virgin of Guadalupe, while in Argentina, the Virgin Mary of Lujan is the most revered). These saints and local variations of Jesus and Mary are important markers of cultural and ethnic identity, so it is important that they be acknowledged if one is to be sensitive to the specific Hispanic tradition. Statues and prayer cards with the pictures of these saints are often placed in the sickroom, along with candles (preferably electric, which can constantly “burn”), so that the saints may intercede on the behalf of the ill.

Though the majority of Hispanics are Catholic, Protestantism is growing in Latin America. Among Protestant Hispanics, Pentecostalism is the dominant branch practiced, with literal and evangelical interpretations of the Bible, and a rejection of Roman Catholicism. Additionally, some countries in Latin America (such as Argentina or Chile) are culturally or nationally Catholic, but have significant populations who are in fact non-observant, or non-practicing. However, many continue to adopt culturally Catholic traditions (the rejection of cremation in favor of burial, for instance), so important aspects of Hispanic Catholic traditions have been emphasized here.

Attitudes towards Sickness, Dying, and the Deceased

In the Hispanic tradition, the dead continue to play a role in the world of the living, and are generally remembered with fondness and love (this is in stark contrast to European and American Protestant views that generally fear or avoid the dead). Dying is considered to be part of the cycle of life, and is accepted, though perhaps with some fatalism that is not found in contemporary American culture.

Hispanics, particularly in Latin America, often believe that illness is an emotional and/or social issue: one can become sick and die from being out of balance –

either with oneself or with one’s environment – and from the curses of others. For example, it is strongly believed that if a Hispanic woman does not satisfy her pregnancy cravings she will do damage to the baby, leading to injury, or even to the death of the infant. Nervousness is often attributed to an excess of bile in the bloodstream. In *susto*, or soul loss (which is associated with a wide variety of illnesses), it is generally thought that severe fright or worry causes one to disassociate with one’s soul, leading to chronic or severe illness and possibly death; the “cure” is returning to the place of separation from one’s soul and restoring unity with body and spirit. Belief in the “evil eye” (*mal de ojo*) is pervasive in Hispanic culture, and is often used to explain mysterious or sudden death. *Mal de ojo* is attributed to a person looking at another person with admiration or envy, causing a curse leading to sickness and/or death. Many people believe that infants, especially, are susceptible to evil eye, and thus it is not encouraged to overly admire a child, as it could lead to their early death or illness.

Because of these folk beliefs, Hispanics tend to be somewhat fatalistic in regards to illness and death – believing that there is nothing that one can personally do to prevent them – which can sometimes lead to a strong reliance on God and religious tradition in coping with both.

According to the CDC, leading causes of death in the Hispanic community are cancer, heart disease, unintentional injuries, stroke, diabetes, and chronic liver disease.⁴ Though death itself is not a taboo topic in the Hispanic community, it has been noted that discussions regarding end of life care and the death process are frequently avoided; in sickness, many prefer to learn the “bad news” from a family member, rather than a doctor.⁵

Organ donation in the Hispanic community is viewed with a degree of skepticism, and generally Hispanics are far less likely to donate organs posthumously than their Caucasian counterparts (15% Hispanic donors vs. 63.8% Caucasian donors of all organs donated in 2015).⁶ It is generally believed that these low numbers are a result of both religious beliefs and a (correctly) perceived inequity of organ recipients: although Hispanics tend to be more in need of organ transplants than other ethnicities, Caucasian Americans top the list of organ recipients. Additionally, autopsy is generally frowned upon, and in fact, pre-planning funeral directors should be aware that many Hispanics believe that discussing events such as autopsy prior to

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hispanic or Latino Populations, <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/hispanic.html>, last accessed May 13, 2015.

5 “Reluctant Realism,” by Margaret R. McLean and Margaret A. Graham, <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v14n1/ellipse.html> last accessed May 13, 2015.

6 Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network [OPTN], Deceased Donors Recovered in the U.S. by Ethnicity, Last accessed May 14, 2015. <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/converge/latestData/rptData.asp> last accessed May 15, 2015

7 See “End of Life Care: The Latino Culture” <https://depts.washington.edu/pfes/PDFs/End%20of%20Life%20Care-Latino.pdf> last accessed May 25, 2015

death is believed to hasten death.⁷

Deathbed Rituals and Traditions

As mentioned earlier, in the Hispanic tradition it is generally considered to be bad luck and in poor taste to talk of death in front of the sick – many believe this will hasten the death.

Some folk practices note that the spirits of those who die in hospitals can become confused or lost and have a difficult time finding their way in the afterlife; thus the dying patient is most often cared for in the home, if possible. (A general mistrust of the medical system, coupled with the high percentage of Hispanics who lack sufficient healthcare coverage (the CDC put the number in the United States at 29.1% in 2012, though these numbers will change under the Affordable Healthcare Act), have also contributed to the number of Hispanics who receive care at home rather than in the hospital.

Tending the sick or dying is generally regarded as the responsibility of female relatives (with the exception of pregnant women, who are not supposed to be around the dying as it is considered bad luck for the new baby and expectant mother). Additionally, both sickness and death are viewed as social events, and it is common for extended families to gather on these occasions.

Strong folk practices, mixed with Catholic saint reverence and a reliance on material relics (charms, candle lighting, amulets, etc.), generally characterize Hispanic practices surrounding sickness and dying. Depending on the illness and preference, small statues and charms of a favored saint will generally be placed near the dying person's bed, along with rosary beads, prayer cards, and candles, to offer comfort in the awareness of God's presence in the room with the afflicted. Prayer cards usually have a picture with a short prayer and blessing. Votive candles function much like prayer cards, in that they also display an image of a favored saint and a prayer to that saint; when the candle is lit, many believe the patron saint is being called to offer protection and blessings on the room and the people in it.

Because the majority of Hispanics are Catholic,

exam question...

2. The body of the deceased plays an active role in the Hispanic tradition, from the wake and rosary to the funeral mass and burial, and is a central “actor” in the religious rituals remembering the dead. _____ is thus fairly common among Hispanics in the United States.
- Green burial
 - Embalming
 - Closed-casket service
 - Cremation

sickness and death are often viewed as tests of one's faith, and both anointing of the sick and last rites will be performed. These are two of Catholicism's seven sacraments, so their importance cannot be understated. Previous to Vatican II, anointing of the sick was almost exclusively considered the domain of near death and was given in conjunction with last rites; now it is more common to give these at two different times. Currently, anointing of the sick usually occurs when the sick person has been informed they are ill: the sick person's family and friends are invited to participate in a mass in which the sick person is blessed and a general prayer is made asking for God's blessing and healing on him or her. The last rites (or Extreme Unction), usually made at one's deathbed, consists of a blessing and a final confession if the person is still conscious; if not, then the person is forgiven assuming that they would have made the confession if they had been able.

After death, some families may wish to care for and tend the body of their deceased loved one, seeing this as an opportunity to offer love and respect one last time.

Interment Traditions

The body of the deceased plays an active role in the Hispanic tradition, from the wake and rosary to the funeral mass and burial, and is a central “actor” in the religious rituals remembering the dead. Embalming is thus fairly common among Hispanics in the United States (it is not as common in Latin America, where frequently it is too great a financial burden). Though cremation is permitted, most Hispanics are buried, according to traditional Catholic beliefs that the body should be buried so that it may return to dust and be resurrected for its afterlife.

In Hispanic culture, it is common to hold a large wake or visitation with the extended family, children, and friends in attendance. Flowers and candles will be placed near the body where the visitation occurs. Usually food is brought to the wake: traditions vary dependent on culture and country, but often the foods serve to reinforce ethnic ties and identity. Sometimes there are even card games and tables for dominoes as the older members of the family sit, eat, play, and exchange stories about the deceased. The wake is not typically a quiet affair, and can often be a loud and emotional one: women in particular are generally allowed and expected to be expressive in their emotions, while men are stoic, but this is not always the case.

Often, if permitted, Hispanic families like to hold extended visitations, sometimes all night and during the hours leading to the funeral mass. Family and friends will also bring small gifts and tokens to place in the casket with the deceased, and thus many Hispanic families prefer to purchase caskets that come

with memory drawers to hold photos, jewelry, and keepsakes, in addition to choosing cap panel inserts that allow for the insertion of photos, pictures and letters to the deceased.

Following a death, Catholics pray the rosary as a way to request the intercession of God on behalf of the deceased's soul: in other words, the rosary is intended to help the soul of the deceased secure their place in heaven. Rosaries are usually recited in the presence of the deceased the first and /or second night, and then continue to be recited for nine nights following the funeral at the home of the family of the deceased. This is generally followed by a rosary that is said once a month for a year following a death, and annually repeated after that. Reciting the rosary generally takes half an hour, though this depends on the speed of the prayers and the amount of time given to pause and reflect in between the prayers.

The term "rosary" refers to both a form of devotion and the string of beads used for keeping count during the devotion.

The rosary (i.e. the string of beads) consists of a crucifix and five beads, attached to a string of fifty small beads, grouped into five groups of ten beads separated by five additional large beads. One prays various prayers while holding to each bead and moving through the beads in succession.

At each of the beads and at the crucifix, the petitioner prays a particular prayer, including the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer (Our Father), the Hail Mary prayer, and the Glory Be prayer, meditating on particular events that occurred in the Bible (for specifics, see "How to Pray the Rosary" by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops).

The rosary (i.e. this set of prayers) is intended to help focus the petitioner's mind on particular events in the Bible, while utilizing prayer as a way to come closer to God.

Following the wake and the rosary, there will also be a funeral mass, or requiem mass, to which the larger community of the deceased is invited and expected to attend (the obituary is often utilized in the Hispanic community to let family and friends know about the timing of this mass). The purpose of the funeral mass is not only the remembrance of the deceased; it is also considered a rite of worship. For this reason, funeral masses may only be performed by priests; however, the Rite of Committal (discussed below) may be performed by either Catholic deacons or chaplains since the Eucharist is not involved. Funeral masses consist of four parts – the receiving of the body, the liturgy, the Eucharist, and the final committal – and differ from traditional Catholic services in that they have no exchange of the peace.

Funeral masses may not conflict with other church holidays, and are not celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, Sundays during the Advent season (the preceding four Sundays prior

to Christmas), Sundays during Lent (the forty days preceding Easter), and Sundays during Easter season (the fifty days following Easter). When a funeral mass must be celebrated on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent), this is permitted, but ashes will then not be distributed. When a mass cannot be celebrated, a Catholic funeral liturgy is offered for the deceased, consisting of readings, prayers and music. In general, only confirmed Catholics may read the readings or the prayers during a mass or liturgy.

Unlike wakes, which may be casual occasions, masses and funeral liturgies are much more formal and solemn affairs – they are religious services, after all, and usually take place in the church itself. The function of the funeral mass is to bring the deceased into the presence of God.

Eulogies generally occur during the wake before the funeral mass. Though some churches are now allowing family members to briefly remember the deceased following the Eucharist and before the final committal, opinions vary on this practice. Most traditional Hispanic Catholics still prefer not to allow families and friends to eulogize the deceased during the mass, as many believe it takes the focus away from the worship of God and praying for the intercession on behalf of the dead. (In contrast, Protestant Hispanics allow for the reflection and remembrance of the dead within the funeral service, and generally encourage the family and friends to share their thoughts on the deceased as a way to honor the dead. This is an important distinction between the Catholic and Protestant faiths, so funeral directors should be sensitive to this difference.)

If the deceased IS cremated rather than buried, s/he is generally cremated following the funeral mass – so that the body itself is present during the service – but prior to interment. (Again, this is in contrast to the Protestant tradition, which allows for cremation directly following the wake and prior to the funeral service itself; funeral directors should be aware of, and prepared to accommodate, both practices.)

Following the mass or service, the young men closest to the deceased (usually either family relations or close friends) will be asked to help carry the casket from the church to the hearse, and once again from the hearse to the burial site.

At the site of burial, if the family is Catholic, the Rite of Committal is performed, which consists mainly of a blessing of the interment site with a spoken prayer, the sprinkling of holy water, and a final blessing over the deceased. If the family is Protestant, a final prayer is recited, and a short text is sometimes read. Hispanic families generally accompany the deceased to his/her final resting spot; the extended community often will also participate in this aspect of disposal.

It is common practice to pass out prayer cards in

remembrance of the dead at the funeral mass, to assist attendees in their prayers for the deceased. Often these contain a picture of the deceased, with their birth and death dates on one side and a prayer of intercession for their soul on the other.

In total, funeral services generally last three to four days, followed by nine days of rosary prayers and regular commemorative masses for the dead.

Frequently the funeral home must work in close connection with the deceased's family's parish priest to arrange the wake, rosary, funeral mass, and blessing of the burial. Depending on the resources of the local church and the community, the church may host the majority of the events; in other cases events will be split, with the wake at the funeral home, followed by the rosary and/or mass at the church.

Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include the entire extended family network (including aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) in addition to friends and colleagues. Sickness and death in the Hispanic communities are viewed as social events, not merely private ones. Thus, wakes are seen as social occasions, and are usually viewed as opportunities to reassert the social structure without the deceased, while funeral services will likely be opportunities to stress one's social and blood relationship with the dead.

Beliefs Regarding the Afterlife

The foundational views of the afterlife in the Hispanic worldview are informed by the Christian tradition; most often, that of the Roman Catholic Church.

As discussed briefly in the introduction, the majority of Hispanics are Catholic – if not in practice, then in culture – though there is also a rising Protestant population, particularly among Hispanic families that have resided in the United States for several generations.⁸ In Latin America, the most influential Protestant denomination has been Pentecostalism; likewise, in the United States, the Hispanic Pentecostal population is growing. Many Pentecostals define themselves in opposition to Catholic practices, preferring a literal interpretation of scripture instead of the traditional practices of the Catholic Church, and rejecting prayers to the Virgin Mary. In addition to

exam question...

3. Funeral directors can expect Hispanic wakes/visitations and services to include _____.
- Immediate family only
 - Immediate and extended family only
 - Immediate family and close personal friends only
 - The entire extended family in addition to friends and colleagues

Catholicism and Protestantism, the Hispanic countries in the Afro-Caribbean region (Cuba, Dominican Republic, some parts of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Colombia, etc.) also incorporate traditional Afro-Caribbean beliefs and practices, sometimes practicing a syncretistic form of indigenous Catholicism.

Syncretism occurs when local indigenous beliefs mix with Catholic beliefs, forming new and often popular belief systems that may be more acceptable to the local tradition, but did not actually originate within the Catholic church. Saints and martyrs have traditionally been one way that the Catholic church has incorporated local and popular figures into the Church history and canon; in this way, the figure is no longer seen as competing for believers, but becomes incorporated into the Catholic church itself.

Both Protestant and Catholic Hispanics believe in a final judgment: when one dies, the soul leaves the body to stand before God for a weighing of one's lifetime's worth of good and bad deeds. Based on this judgment, the soul is then sent to reside in either Heaven or in Hell; in addition, Catholicism provides for the in-between state of Purgatory. This singular belief informs nearly all the practices surrounding the care for and remembrance of the dead among Catholic Hispanics.

Purgatory is a place where one's soul is sent if one's positive deeds do not necessarily outweigh the negatives ones (or, in theological terms, if one's sins are too great to go straight to Heaven). It is from the belief in purgatory that the practices of saying rosaries, celebrating masses for the dead, offering anniversary masses for the deceased, and observing the holidays of All Souls' Day and Dia de los Muertos emerge: all of these practices are meant to help the deceased move from purgatory into heaven, while also allowing the functional purpose of giving the bereaved something to actively do in honor of the dead.

Protestants, on the other hand, assume the resurrection of the dead, though there is some debate over whether this occurs immediately following a death or whether it takes place at the end of time, with the second coming of Jesus Christ; in either case, the dead are not in need of assistance from the living (nor can they offer assistance to the living).

One of the big shifts in perception, particularly in the last hundred years, has been a decrease in the belief of Hell as a possible outcome for the afterlife of the dead, though Protestants tend to believe in Hell more than their Catholic counterparts.⁹ This has led to decreased participation in funerary practices; if the bereaved believe their loved one has moved straight to Heaven,

8 See Pew Research Center's surveys on "Religion in Latin America" for more on this: <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/chapter-3-religious-beliefs/> last accessed June 10, 2015.

9 Ibid.

then there is little need to spend the time and/or money committing to rituals surrounding the dead.

Finally, though not officially sanctioned by the church, there is a popular belief in ghosts and spirits in Hispanic culture, with the deceased often actively invoked in both positive and negative forms. The most common form of ghost seems to be a woman who was spurned in some way in her life, and who comes back to take her revenge on the living: because much of Hispanic culture is a machista society, in which women are expected to observe traditional gender roles, this may be one way in which women are finally able to assert their power.

Mourning and Remembrance

According to E.R. Shapiro, grieving models in the Hispanic tradition emphasize a reintegration of the dead in a world without the deceased, unlike the traditional Western/Anglo model of working through stages of detachment from the deceased.¹⁰ Scholar Tony Walter calls this model a framework of mourning based on “caring for the dead,” rather than “remembering the dead.”¹¹ For this reason, most Hispanic traditions of mourning and remembrance involve the (passive or active) participation of the deceased themselves in addition to the involvement of the extended social family structure.

Death, then, is viewed in social terms; mourning encompasses the negotiation of, and restructuring of, social relations without the physical presence of the deceased. Immediately following the final interment of the body, extended family and friends usually retreat to the house of the immediate family of the deceased, where more food is brought, and remembrance of the deceased occurs. Food, flowers, and gifts of money to help cover the funeral expenses are the most common gifts given to the family at and following the funeral.

Masses for the Dead

As mentioned above, unlike Protestantism – in which the resurrection of the deceased is emphasized – Catholicism encourages regular prayers for the deceased, particularly on significant dates following the death: while one might be morally certain of the deceased’s place in heaven, masses help provide additional assurance through the prayers of the living.

Towards this end, it is common to not only recite rosaries for the deceased, but to petition for masses

10 ER Shapiro. Grief in family and cultural context: Learning from Latino families. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*. 1995;1:159–176. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.1.2.159.

11 Tony Walter. “Communicating with the Dead,” In C. Bryant & D. Peck, eds *Death and the Human Experience*, Sage 2009.

to be dedicated in honor of the deceased. On anniversaries of the dead, or on the birthdays of the dead, some family members will recite rosaries for the dead and/or hold special remembrance masses in honor of the deceased. Thus, if the deceased is Catholic, usually one’s family will honor the dead with masses on the third, seventh, and thirtieth days following a death or a funeral (the count of days begin with the day immediately following the date of death or the day of burial; both days are appropriate starting points), and then annually after that. Small stipends, usually \$5-10, are given to the priest to recite the mass. In addition, a card is often given to the family who has requested the mass for the dead: this card, somewhat like a greeting card, acknowledges that the deceased has had a mass recited in his/her honor. Prayer cards, similar to those passed out at the funeral mass, may also be handed out at anniversary masses.

Individual Remembrances

In between masses for the dead, it is common practice to light a candle (with a small token payment) at the church in honor of the deceased, and to offer prayer in memory of the dead in this way.

Finally, it is common for both Protestant and Catholic Hispanics to place small notices in the local paper on the occasion of important anniversaries of a death (usually one, five, ten, fifteen, etc.), in which the family honors the deceased with a short message to and about him/her. If the family is Catholic, they may also announce the time and place of the anniversary mass. Often the messages are short but illuminating, and like obituaries, tend to privilege immediate family members and their relationship to the deceased.

Interestingly, many traditional Hispanic remembrance practices are increasingly moving online. As access to the Internet becomes universal, families are easily able to sign up for intercessory masses, request that candles be lit for them in prayer at churches (usually for a small donation), and post mass announcements and anniversary remembrances of the dead online. Funeral directors looking to extend their relationship with the family beyond the immediate death of an individual might want to make note of this custom and offer memorial notices as a service.

exam question...

4. According to E.R. Shapiro, grieving models in the Hispanic tradition emphasize _____.
- A reintegration of the dead in a world without the deceased
 - A dismissal of the dead from the world of the living
 - Working through stages of detachment from the deceased
 - Minimal mourning and remembrance

Annual Remembrances

Apart from the annual anniversary of the death of the deceased, November 2, or All Souls' Day, is the most important regular remembrance of the dead, with Hispanic families – both Catholic and Protestant – gathering in homes, at gravesites, and in churches to remember the dead. (While Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is becoming widely known, it must be stressed that this holiday is primarily a Mexican and Mexican American holiday; many Hispanic countries celebrate All Souls' Day, but not Dia de los Muertos. For this reason, these are both discussed here.)

ALL SOULS' DAY

Originating in Catholic beliefs in Purgatory, and the need to intercede on behalf of the dead, the practice of observing All Souls' Day is first credited to St. Cluny, on November 2, 998. The observation of this practice soon spread to the rest of the Cluniac order, then to Southern Europe, and finally, in the fourteenth century, to Rome. Originally one day of intercession for the dead, it was not long before the November 2 observance expanded to encompass the entire month of November, with names of the deceased prayed over in masses for the dead and including October 31, All Saints' Eve, November 1, All Saints' Day, and November 2, All Souls' Day.

When the Spanish colonialists settled in Mexico in 1519, the Roman Catholic tradition was fused with indigenous Aztec tradition remembering the dead through reverence of the goddess Mictecacihuatl, known more contemporaneously as the Lady of the Dead. (The images of the Lady of the Dead are not that different from those of the Grim Reaper popular in Europe in the sixteenth century, with a similar emphasis on the macabre as an everyday occurrence: the reminder in both images is that of death made commonplace.) The indigenous summer holiday was moved to coincide with the later church date, and thus a new and indigenous interpretation of All Souls' Day was begun.

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

The Mexican Day of the Dead ceremony emerged from the popular Catholic practice of memorializing the dead in the Catholic Feast celebrating All Souls' Day. The overall purposes of Dia de los Muertos are to remind those who are alive that life is short, and to connect the living with the stories of the dead, specifying their continuing place in this world through narrative and the fixed location of the tomb. Thus, even those Mexicans and Mexican Americans who are Protestant may still participate in the cultural aspects of the Dia de los Muertos tradition, focusing on the parts of the holiday that emphasize Mexican heritage

and culture.

History suggests that sugar skulls, so iconic to the celebration of the remembrance of the dead in Mexico, emerged from the socio-political landscape at the time. Abundant in sugar, but poor in capital, Mexicans wanted to adorn their churches with decorations similar to those popular with their colonialist conquerors; thus, they made use of sugar's malleable properties to make colorful and edible decorations for the church and home altars.

It is also common to bake Pan de Muerto, or Day of the Dead bread, made with flour, butter, sugar, eggs, orange peel, anise, and yeast. (These Pan de Muerto buns are not unlike the Hot Cross buns found in American Easter observances, down to the candied citron and decorations across the tops of the bread. Perhaps the yeast is symbolic of life's ultimate ability to overcome death; the rising of the bread, a symbolic reenactment of the resurrection of souls in the afterlife.) The bread is kneaded, then shaped into little buns, which are decorated with skull and crossbones laid across their tops. The Pan de Muerto and sugar skulls, along with oranges, are offered at the family altars along with pictures of the deceased and candles.

Marigold flowers often also adorn the graves, altars, and churches in remembrance of the dead: it is believed that the earth-tone colors help to guide the dead safely home.

In Mexico, the graveyards are publicly owned, and it is the community's responsibility to maintain them; because of its proximity to the church, the graveyard is often situated at the center of public space, making its maintenance doubly important. Church members and families come together to pull weeds and tend to the graves. Families bring chairs, tables, food, drink, flowers, candles, and pictures, feasting in the cemetery with extended family both alive and dead, spending the day telling stories about the dead family, saying prayers for the souls of the dead, and leaving offerings of food, drink, and flowers.

In the United States, on the other hand, most graveyards are privately owned, and many set visiting hours. In response, Mexican Americans have trended towards setting up a home altar where the deceased may be honored via picture; the grave as the nexus of the social sphere has been relegated to the more private sphere of the nuclear family home. Thus, while Mexican American graves are still visited and maintained, they have not retained the same function as gravesites in Mexico, where the cemetery is both literally and figuratively the center of the world of the living and the dead.

Additional Points of Cultural Sensitivity

- The family network in Hispanic culture is very important; generally the entire family prefers to be involved in decision-making. Be sure that all prominent family members are present so that problems do not arise regarding individual choices such as coffins, etc.
- Hispanic culture tends towards traditional gender roles and stereotypes: funeral service providers should be aware that this may impact grieving expectations and demonstrations.
- The concept of “Respeto” or respect cannot be understated: deference, particularly in regards to elders, should always be shown
- As covered earlier in this course, some Hispanic cultures believe in the power of the “Evil Eye.” Funeral directors should be wary of overly complimenting children or babies, as their loved ones may fear that will bring misfortune and illness to them.
- Always use “Usted” if you are speaking Spanish to your clients; “Tu” is considered informal and should only be used with close friends and family.

PLEASE NOTE:

The facts laid out in this module are presented as a general guideline to dominant cultural characteristics: they are not, and are not intended to be, applicable to all people in the African American diaspora. This module in no way diminishes the diversity of the many different African American populations in the United States.

African American identity in the United States has been highly politicized, as it is identified with the issues of slavery and the resultant and continuing covert (and overt) oppression of those who are direct descendants of former slaves. Additionally, African American identity has come to be highly racialized; many issues of identity have come to be tied to skin color more than ethnic and diasporic identity. For this reason, some more recent immigrants from Africa do not readily align themselves with the African American diaspora, who have survived many years of difficulty and oppression. One should take care to distinguish between African Americans (many of whom have ancestors that have lived longer on the American continent than most Caucasian Americans), and more recent African immigrants, who may not closely align themselves politically or sympathetically with the African American cause.

You will want to ascertain the extent to which African American patrons wish to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices, just as you would with any patron.

GRIEF AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DIASPORA

Introduction: Demographics, Religious Beliefs

The term African American (sometimes Afro-American or “Black”) is used to describe someone who self-identifies as a descendent of relatives from sub-Saharan Africa or as belonging to the Black race.¹

African Americans make up approximately 14% of the United States population. Traditionally the largest minority group, African Americans have been eclipsed by the Hispanic or Latino population (who currently hold approximately 17%) in the last decade, with African Americans now considered the second-largest minority in the United States. The African American population appears to be slowly growing, increasing in size by half a percentage point every decade; however, this population growth is not as rapid as that of the Hispanic population (who are predicted to reach approximately 30% of the American population by 2060).

Currently 55% of African Americans live in the American South, 18% in the Midwest, 17% in the Northeast, and 10% in the West. States with the largest per capita African American population are New York, Texas, Georgia, Florida, and California.² In contrast, states with the largest

percentage of African Americans in relation to other races are Washington D.C. (while a state, D.C. is significant because over half of its population is African American), Maryland, Mississippi, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, and Virginia. The two urban centers with the highest per capita African American populations are New York and Chicago, and Detroit has the highest density of African Americans, with 84% of its population identifying as African American. Other cities in the United States with a majority African American population are Baltimore, Memphis, New Orleans, and Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama.³ As can be seen, though African Americans reside across the United States, the more densely populated areas are mainly located in the American South; correspondingly, many of the mortality rates, funeral customs, and grieving patterns in the African American community are deeply integrated with Southern culture.

As a group, African Americans are considered very religious, with approximately 87% of all African Americans claiming some sort of religious affiliation.⁴ The Pew Research Center states, “African-Americans stand out as the most religiously committed racial or ethnic group in the nation.” The Pew Foundation has found that “eight in ten African-Americans (79%) say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56% among all U.S. adults.”⁵ More than half of African Americans attend church on a weekly basis, and 88% proclaim the certainty that God exists.⁶ (This is in marked contrast to the general population of Americans,

1 For more information and to view how the 2010 census defines and understands the African American diaspora, see the 2010 census <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>, last accessed July 7, 2015.

2 See the 2010 census <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>, last accessed July 7, 2015.

3 See the 2010 census <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>, last accessed July 7, 2015.

4 Pew Research Center, “A Religious Portrait of African-Americans,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/01/30/a-religious-portrait-of-african-americans/> last accessed July 8, 2015.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

who often claim a belief in God, but do not practice or belong to a church itself.) Of the remaining 13% percent of African Americans, eleven percent claim no particular affiliation or religious belief, while a very small percent claim affiliation with Islam or Jehovah's Witness. These numbers, of course, vary between the American census, the Pew Foundation, and the United States Conference of American Bishops, but the important point of these figures is that the majority of African Americans are in fact actively religious, and among those, the majority are Protestant. Thus, funeral directors should be aware that for the majority of African American funerals it will be essential to involve the family's religious community.

Of the religiously active African-American Protestants, three quarters (and 59% of the overall African American population in general) belong to historically black protestant denominations such as the National Baptist Convention or the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Among Christian African Americans, nearly 40% of all African Americans claim affiliation with the Baptist tradition. Baptist churches are generally independent: though they belong to a convention, in which a general set of beliefs and attitudes are affirmed, individual Baptist churches vary widely in their understanding and interpretation of the Bible and Christian teachings. The universal beliefs held by all Baptists, however, are the affirmation of the two ordinances of baptism and the Eucharist (the Lord's supper). Of the remaining Protestants, African Americans tend to belong to either evangelical Protestant churches (15%) or mainline Protestant denominations (4%).⁷

The remaining 12% (though the United States Conference of American Bishops places this number at 13%) of African American Christians claim affiliation with Roman Catholicism. Like African American Protestantism, 24% belong to parishes that are predominantly African American (these parishes are mostly found in the East and South, in churches east of the Mississippi), while the other 76% belong to more diversely populated parishes (with the majority of these Catholic churches found in the West).⁸

Attitudes towards Sickness, Dying, and the Deceased

Because of a long history of oppression and a basic mistrust of the medical system among the African American community (46% of African Americans express a distrust in doctors⁹), many African Americans have long relied on folk healers and doctors to aid in their care.

Stanford University finds that the African American community generally typologizes its illnesses into three categories: Occult Illness, Physical Illness, and Spiritual Illness.

(1) Occult illness is a result of supernatural, not physical causes. The conjurer uses his or her powers, as well as fetishes to induce and/or ward off illness in specific individuals. (2) While natural causes primarily induce physical illness, conjuration may affect the physical and psychological as well as the spiritual life of the person (Mitchell, 1978). Finally, spiritual illness is a result of a willful violation of sacred beliefs or of sin, such as adultery, theft or murder (Mitchell). Like the occult, spiritual forces can affect all aspects of life, ranging from the physical to the spiritual characteristics of the person (Simpson, 1970; Willer, 1971).¹⁰

This view of sickness, though typologized differently with various medical schools, reveals a persistent attitude that sickness is viewed on a wider level than merely the physical. In a related fourth category, sometimes illnesses are explained as a curse or a hex placed on an individual, which can only be relieved through a supernatural healer. Examples of this are ample in places such as New Orleans, where traditional folk medicine is mixed with examples of witchcraft and supernatural healing practices.

Views of dying are generally holistic, with death seen a natural part of life, and a strong reliance on faith communities and religious beliefs in end of life care. That said, however, some prefer to keep their loved ones on life support for as long as physically possible.¹¹ Per the CDC, leading causes of mortality in the African American population are heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, accidents, kidney disease, respiratory illnesses,

7 Ibid.

8 "Demographics," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/demographics/>, last accessed July 8, 2015.

9 W.J. Minniefield, J. Yang, and P.Muti, "Differences in Attitudes toward Organ Donation among African Americans and whites in the United States," *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 2001 Oct; 93(10): 372-379. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2594069/>, last accessed July 10, 2015.

10 Stanford Ethnogeriatric Module: Health and Healthcare of African American Elders, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/ethnoger/african.html>, last accessed July 9, 2015.

11 Numerous studies have been made documenting the tendency of African Americans to seek more aggressive end of life care. For more on this, see Blackhall LJ, Frank G, Murphy ST, Michel V, Palmer JM, Azen SP. "Ethnicity and attitudes towards life sustaining technology." *Social Science & Medicine*. 1999;48:1779-89; McKinley ED, Garrett JM, Evans AT, Danis M. "Differences in end-of-life decision making among black and white ambulatory cancer patients." *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 1996;11:651-6; Phipps E, True G, Harris D, et al. "Approaching the end of life: attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of African-American and white patients and their family caregivers." *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. 2003;21:549-54.

homicide, septicemia, and Alzheimer's disease.¹² In addition, African Americans have much higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, AIDS, and SIDS than Caucasian Americans, and have a lower life expectancy as well. Sensitivity regarding the effects of systemic poverty must be maintained in regards to mortality rates.¹³

For young African American men ages 15-34, the leading cause of death is homicide – at over 50% – followed by death by accidental injury at around 20% (there is much research that concludes this is actually often death as a result of intentional harm or injury), and then suicide for men between the ages of 15-24, and heart disease for men between 24-34.¹⁴ Nearly 70% of all deaths among young African American men, then, are sudden and often violent. Funeral directors should bear this in mind, as it has repercussions both for the family in terms of grief management, and for the funeral home in terms of possible safety issues surrounding the funeral.

In general, organ donation is not very popular:¹⁵ nearly 40% of all African Americans refuse organ donation, and do not consider it a top priority.¹⁶ In addition to the above-mentioned general distrust of doctors, many African Americans believe that, should they donate their organs, they will not receive proper medical care, or that their organs will not be donated to African Americans in need. This belief (similar to that held by the Hispanic population) is based in fact: African Americans, amongst all ethnic groups in the United States, are the least likely to receive a kidney from a living donor, and the medical centers that have the highest treatment rate of African Americans also have the highest racial disparities of organ donation.¹⁷ That said, the low rate of organ donation in the African American population, and their unusually high need (due to the prevalence of adrenal failure and diabetes), also contributes to the disparity. There are currently

various programs underway to address this issue, and some cities (such as Milwaukee) have already been successful in decreasing organ donation disparities. This is most likely to be an area of change for the future in the African American population.¹⁸

Deathbed Rituals and Traditions

There is a particular emphasis in the African American community on death as liberation from the sufferings of life, which some historians trace to the times of slavery and the continued overt and covert oppression of African Americans in the United States today. Regardless of its origins, many African Americans embrace this attitude, viewing death with a sort of joyful resignation that is not always found in other diasporic communities. In fact, the term most often used to describe death is “homegoing,” which originated in slavery times when it was commonly believed that when one died, one’s soul returned to one’s native home in Africa.¹⁹ Other frequently used phrases in describing death in the African American milieu are “passing over” or “crossing over,” where death is viewed as the soul crossing from one form of existence into another.²⁰ Bolling writes that, for the African American, death is not an end to a life, but rather a transition and a rite of passage for the soul to leave the material world and enter into the spiritual realm. This view of the end of life is radically different from the dominant Caucasian view of death as an event to be feared, and delayed as much as possible. For this reason, though not necessarily a *taboo* per se, it is often uncommon to utilize the term “die” or “dying” when referring to the death process, with many African American preferring instead the phrases “pass on” or “cross over,” as these terms imply a transition from one state to another, rather than an end to the state itself.²¹

12 “Black or African Populations,” Center for Disease Control (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/populations/REMP/black.html> last accessed July 6, 2015.

13 “Culture-Sensitive Health Care: African American,” <http://www.diversityresources.com/health/african.html>, last accessed July 8, 2015.

14 “Leading cause of death by Age Group, Black Males—United States, 2011,” <http://www.cdc.gov/men/lcod/2011/LCODBlackmales2011.pdf>, last accessed July 6, 2015.

15 “Dimensions of Culture: Cross-Culture Communications for Health Care Professionals,” <http://www.dimensionsofculture.com/2011/05/health-care-for-african-american-patientsfamilies/>, last accessed July 10, 2015.

16 Ibid.

17 There are many factors at stake here besides prejudice and racial bias—living kidney donations also require suitable living candidates willing to donate a kidney, who do not already have diabetes, obesity or adrenal failure. However, because of historical treatment disparities and resultant mistrust, the problem has become greatly compounded,

and continues to be an issue, with 2012 being the worst year for available donations. “African Americans Least Likely to Receive a Kidney Donation,” May 30, 2012, https://www.kidney.org/news/newsroom/nr/racial_transplant, last accessed July 10, 2015.

18 See the latest report of the OPTN/UNOS Minority Committee Report for more on this. http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/converge/CommitteeReports/board_main_MinorityAffairsCommittee_6_27_2007_9_5.pdf, last accessed July 10, 2015.

19 “What is a Homegoing,” http://www.pbs.org/pov/homegoings/photo_gallery_background.php?photo=1#gallery-top, last accessed July 16, 2015.

20 John Bolling, “Guinea across the water: The African American approach to death and dying.” *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying and Religion*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishers (1995): 145-9.

21 Sullivan, Martha Adams. “May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying and Spirituality.” *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*. Eds. Joan K. Parry and Angela Shen Ryan. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1995. 160-71, p.162.

Most African American deathbed rituals are quite similar to the larger American population, with some notable distinctions. Community is very important among African Americans: any death is considered not merely to be a loss of an individual, but a disruption in the general social fabric. Thus the extended family and social network is often included in the last moments, caring for the dying in small ways: for example, family members might wash or groom the skin and hair of the sick. This is not only a sign of respect and love, but also a way to embrace the dying as a still-important community member while simultaneously preparing them to become an ancestor. Mary Adams Sullivan writes, “Since the physical self is not merely physical but manifests the spirit, attending to the body is a means of attending to the spirit. Having successfully assisted the spirit in its transition, the family can more easily reincorporate the deceased into the community as an ancestral member.”²²

Prayer and reliance on the scriptures is very important in the last moments of life, as it is believed that a person should be ready both to meet God, and for a final judgment. While Baptist and evangelical Christians have no common book of prayer or formulaic rituals regarding the last moments of life, a few standard practices exist. Often the family will pray together with the pastor over the dying person, and prayers at this time generally shift from prayers asking for healing to prayers asking for God to accept the person into heaven. If the person is still conscious, the pastor may pray alone with her, asking for forgiveness of her sins and addressing any last concerns or worries she may have, allowing her to die at ease. Those African Americans who are Roman Catholic or belong to mainline Protestant denominations may also incorporate the priest or pastor in the dying person’s

last moments, though the rituals themselves may follow more scripted expectations and written prayers. The Catholic last rites (or Extreme Unction), for example, consists of a blessing and a final confession if the person is still conscious; if not, then the person is forgiven assuming that they would have made the confession if they had been able.

A major difference between Catholic and Protestant (particularly Evangelical) worldviews regarding the final judgment, however, must be underscored. For Evangelicals, and many non-Catholic Protestants, death presents a particularly scary dilemma, bringing with it a final judgment, and a determination that one will either go to heaven or to hell (unlike Catholics who have a middle ground in purgatory).

Interment Traditions

As with many other aspects of African American cultural life in the United States, death management and funeral care has been traditionally segregated, with many African Americans choosing an African American funeral home to manage their funeral. This practice has a long history that began during slavery, continued up until segregation, and then has continued, mostly by default, since the abolition of enforced segregation.²³ Death management has only recently begun to shift towards integration;²⁴ Karla Holloway predicts that this century will mark further departures from African American deaths being the exclusive domain of African American funeral homes. This changing landscape may mark changing funerary practices as well.²⁵

As the deceased person’s church and congregation will most likely be highly involved in the interment process, the funeral director is advised to be in close contact with the pastor of the deceased in addition to the family of the deceased while making funeral arrangements.

African American views of the corpse tend to be more accepting than those of Caucasian Americans: far from being viewed with fear and suspicion, it is often incorporated in some fashion, either in a viewing prior to the funeral or the actual funeral itself. Thus, generally embalming is accepted and usually necessary for the wake, while cremation is not preferred (this is slowly changing, however, and cremation rates among African Americans continue to rise – mainly due to the

exam question...

5. Per Deathbed Rituals and Traditions, the extended family and social network is often _____ the last moments.
- a. Included in
 - b. Asked to leave during
 - c. Barred from
 - d. Made uncomfortable by

22 Sullivan, Martha Adams. “May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying and Spirituality.” *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*. Eds. Joan K. Parry and Angela Shen Ryan. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1995. 160-71, p.164.

23 Two great sources for the history and culture of the death management among African Americans in addition to Holloway’s book are the following website and this PBS Special. “Woods Valentine Mortuary,” http://www.woodsvalentinemortuary.com/The_History_of_African-American_Funeral_Service_320351.html, last accessed July 12, 2015, and *Discussions About Death*, <http://www.pbs.org/pov/homegoings/african-american-funeral-director.php#.VaQZikVhpl8>, last accessed July 12, 2015.

24 Holloway, Karla FC. *Passed on: African American mourning stories, a memorial*. Duke University Press, 2002.

25 Holloway, Karla FC. *Passed on: African American mourning stories, a memorial*. Duke University Press, 2002.

low cost of cremation).²⁶ Some contemporary African American funerals have even positioned the corpse as though they were still alive – sitting at a table or on a couch, or clasping a drink or a cigarette, for example – to suggest active participation. Accommodating this practice requires flexibility on the part of the funeral home, particularly the embalmer; while extremely rarely requested, it is likely to be of high importance to those families who do request it.

African Americans tend towards the practice of holding a wake, which may last as many as one to two days. The wake, held in either the church of the deceased, or the funeral home, is often open casket, and includes visitation with the entire extended family, including children, as well as friends. It is customary for African Americans to offer large repasts as condolence gifts; often there will be a funeral potluck held both during the wake and following the burial of the deceased. Likewise, extravagant displays of flowers are common, both on the casket and in the funeral home and/or church; funeral directors may wish to direct families to preferred florists in order to facilitate the delivery of these gifts. Obituaries will usually be requested by the family, with wake and service details included in the obituary.

The funeral service itself is usually held either in the funeral home, or moved to the church of the deceased, and is generally held about one week following the death to allow for funeral arrangements and embalming to occur. African American funerals are distinguished from their Caucasian counterparts by expressive mourning: dramatic displays involving wailing and tears demonstrate that the deceased was beloved, worthy of grieving. (It should be noted that as African American customs become less segregated, the custom of expressive mourning is decreasing.²⁷) When passionate displays of grief are anticipated, nurses or other medically trained persons are sometimes present to offer assistance should mourners be overcome. On the other hand, laughter is frequently expected to play as big a role as wailing in the African American mourning process, with funny stories and jokes about the deceased recalled and recounted.²⁸ For younger deaths, particularly in urban areas and in the border states, it is becoming a popular practice for grieving family and friends to make t-shirts to pass out at the

funeral service and/or to wear at the service itself.²⁹

Usually, the deceased's pastor will give a sermon; many such sermons are participatory, including both the personal testimony of others in the community who knew the deceased and music woven together in a way that encourages congregation participation. Depending on the congregation, the sermon is also often seen as an opportunity for the pastor to also minister to the community about developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Both members of the family and close friends (typically male) may be included in the service as pallbearers; likewise, "flower girls" – the female equivalent of the male pallbearer – may also be included. Generally, flower girls are the cousins, nieces, etc., of the deceased, whose job is to arrange the flowers, then help transport the flowers from the wake to the funeral, and finally to the gravesite. They usually sit opposite the family in the service, and are also seen as comforters for the family.

Music is almost always an expected part of an African American funeral, with a participatory cadence that often includes a congregational choir or a call and response. Music also plays a role following the funeral, and sometimes even during the procession from the church or funeral home to the site of burial. In New Orleans, for example, it is extremely common to accompany the funeral procession with jazz music, following the corpse in a horse drawn carriage or a hearse with a jazz band accompanying the funeral party. In standard African American funeral processions, the family generally rides in a car together following the hearse to the funeral, where the family and friends attend the burial of the body.

Burial beliefs and practices common to the African American community include holding burials on sunny days, as a symbol that the gates to the heavens are open and ready to welcome the deceased; burying the dead facing east, so that their bodies may rise for resurrection and judgment day; and placing coins on the eyes of the deceased to show that they are closed, or in their hands (since the deceased may need to pay for their admittance to heaven). In contrast, it is held that if lightning strikes near the house of the deceased, this is a symbol that the devil has come for their soul.³⁰

26 African Americans and Baptists are the two groups with the lowest cremation rates; thus, this may have something to do with the belief that the body is needed intact for resurrection. These rates are changing in the African American community, however, as burial becomes more costly in comparison to cremation rates. For more on this, see Richard L. Williams, "More Blacks Opting for Cremation Over Traditional Burial Services," <http://blackbusinessink.com/2012/02/29/more-blacks-opting-for-cremation-over-traditional-burial-services/>, last accessed July 29, 2015.

27 "African American Funeral Service Rituals," https://www.funeralwise.com/customs/african_american/, last accessed July 13, 2015.

28 Jen Saunders, "African American Funeral Traditions," <http://classroom.synonym.com/african-american-funeral-traditions-5461.html>, last accessed July 14, 2015. Also see Rosenblatt, Paul C., and Beverly R. Wallace. *African American grief*. Routledge, 2013, pp. 29-43.

29 For more information on this newly emerging tradition, see my book *Virtual Afterlives: Mourning the Dead in the Twenty-first Century*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014.

30 "The History of African American Death: Superstitions, Traditions, and Procedures" <http://northbysouth.kenyon.edu/1998/death/deathhistory.htm>, last accessed July 11, 2015.

African American funeral ceremonies can be compared to Irish funerals, in that they are seen as celebrations of life, and often (particularly in New Orleans funeral culture) loud music and alcohol are involved in the celebration and mourning of the life of the deceased. Almost all funerals will have a large funeral repast following the service, either at the church or the home of the deceased, with copious amounts of food and drink served to those who attended the service. Generally, these meals can also be seen as a reflection of the status of the deceased, as the family of the deceased strives to demonstrate the importance of the deceased to the community through generous servings of food. The types of food served vary depending on geographic location and background.

Beliefs Regarding the Afterlife

Much of African American identity has been formulated in response to or in tension with the majority Caucasian culture, and perceptions of the afterlife are no exception. There are two main strands pertaining to African American understandings of the afterlife: the Protestant Christian standard, and the popular beliefs passed down through the African American community by word of mouth, common stories, and folktales (generally originating in ancestors' African roots). These two strands may seem as though they are at odds with one another (which indeed sometimes they are), but having been passed down and propagated through the years, they've woven themselves together into a common thread, and often work in tandem. It is vitally important for funeral directors not to dismiss the more popular beliefs as superstition: they are also identity-building, and have helped the diaspora of African Americans to create meaning during times of oppression and suppression. It is also important to remember that

exam question...

6. Burial beliefs and practices common to the African American community include holding burials _____, as a symbol that the gates to the heavens are open and ready to welcome the deceased.
- On weekends
 - On Friday evenings
 - On sunny days
 - At sundown

some beliefs may be publicly held, while others are privately embraced.

The dominant Protestant, largely evangelical, Christian view of the afterlife is that when one dies, he will be sent before God to have his life reviewed, and then based on his good and bad deeds throughout his life, he will be sent for the rest of eternity to either heaven or hell. The depictions of these eternal places vary, from heaven as a place where one is simply in the presence of God, to elaborate kingdoms where one will be reunited with one's ancestors and loved ones who have died before, and hell as either simply the eternal metaphysical separation from God, to a depiction of hell as a fiery pit with active and eternal punishment. The timing of the judgment often varies, from a judgment that occurs immediately upon one's death, to one that is delayed until the second coming of Christ, when all the dead will be resurrected and judged. (This idea of resurrection is important, because the belief that one's body is central to the resurrection that informs the corresponding belief that one's body needs to be intact in order to be able to be resurrected. In other words, it is largely because of the belief that both body and soul are necessary to resurrection that cremation and organ donation are viewed as suspect. For various theological reasons, this view is slowly changing; many now believe that the earthly body will be changed for a new heavenly body.³¹)

Cosmological African beliefs regard time as cyclical, and the body, spirit and mind as one. Because of this, there is an emphasis in African religion on the interconnectedness between the ancestors of the past, and the living of today, with a strong belief in the constant communication of the living and the dead. As Martha Adams Sullivan writes, "Day and night, dead and living are viewed as having reciprocal and unifying functions rather than dichotomous ones, which dynamically unite them such that they create a whole, maintaining equilibrium by adjusting each other."³² For this reason, death is not an event to be feared, but rather a completion that one makes, a coming-full-circle so to speak. It is an opportunity to become an ancestor to those who are living, and the chance to return to one's true spiritual home where one's family and ancestors now reside. The influence of this philosophy can be seen in the African American diaspora today: Sullivan goes on to discuss the common belief among African Americans that as one nears death, she will often see and speak to her ancestors, as a sign that she

31 I am grossly generalizing and reducing the metaphysical argument behind the theology for the sake of simplifying the overall concepts here, but it should be noted that this theological shift is also occurring at a time of great medical advances and a more general acceptance of organ transplantation and donation, in addition to genetic testing. It is, of course, a 'chicken and the egg' kind of problem, in that one can trace cultural shifts in attitudes towards death and the afterlife and trace corresponding

theological interpretations to medical and cultural advances.

32 Sullivan, Martha Adams. "May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying and Spirituality." *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*. Eds. Joan K. Parry and Angela Shen Ryan. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1995. 160-71, p.161.

is soon to “return home” and be with her deceased relatives.³³ It is here in this cosmological worldview that one can see the influence of the diasporic African identity – dying is viewed not as merely the end of life, but as a return home to one’s ancestral homeland, one’s ancestors, and one’s true identity.

Death, uniting both the African diasporic understanding and the scriptures of Exodus, becomes a story of redemption and homecoming: the wandering of Moses and his people in exile for forty years (and likewise, the parallel story of the temptations and trials of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days in the New Testament) is utilized by many African American theologians to explain the suffering and pain of the African American people in their own country; when Moses finally leads his people to the promised land and thereafter dies, the parallel ends in a return home.

Mourning and Remembrance

Practically speaking, African American mourning traditions generally resemble other American mourning customs in that the bereavement period is usually dictated by one’s company or place of work; people are frequently expected to return to their routines fairly quickly. Specific African American mourning customs are both diverse and dependent on aspects such as class, geography, religion, and environment; broadly observed practices (described earlier in this module) involve loud and expressive mourning, extensive floral displays, and large repasts following the funeral.

Memorialization in the African American community is extremely important, as it is through the rituals honoring the dead that the living can reassert the identity of the living, and reaffirm the ties that bind the larger diasporic community. Specific memorialization rituals, however, are similar to the rest of the American population, with a few distinct remembrance customs that seem to be directly linked to the African American community.

Individual Remembrances

African Americans tend to visit the graves of the deceased on a much more regular basis than their Caucasian American counterparts, bringing flowers and other material offerings (most often personal effects owned by the deceased while she was living; this may include such personal and trivial items as a toothbrush, cup, or favorite toy) to leave at the grave

marker.³⁴ This tradition may stem back to the fact that under slavery, many African Americans were buried in unmarked and/or mass graves, making the importance of not only marking the grave, but having a place to return to acknowledge the deceased is an important part of contemporary African American grief culture. Harkening back to the funerary custom of placing coins in the hands and eyes of the deceased, some people also leave coins on graves. Multiple explanations exist: some claim that the coins are left for the deceased to “pay” for their entrance into heaven; others, that the coins are a material marker that the griever has visited the grave of the deceased – he has left something to mark that he was *there*. Sometimes, family and friends bring a drink (usually alcohol) to pour directly onto the grave, so that the deceased may once again celebrate with her loved ones. This tradition goes back to older African practices of offering libations at the gravesite of the deceased, and offers a chance for the grieving to somehow “care for the dead” while simultaneously interacting with the dead.

Another common practice in the African American community is setting up informal remembrance “shrines” at the site of death, particularly in the cases of unnatural or unexpected deaths, like homicide victims (especially the young). Material memorials at the site of death include candles, teddy bears, empty alcohol or drink bottles, balloons, or flowers. Though these memorials don’t last long (Shawnee Daniels-Sykes points to the practice of desecration by opposing gang members, or simply sanitation performed by the city to rid itself of the memory of violence), many correlations to these memorials can be found in the practice of small home shrines (usually pictures, flanked by candles, and small favorite personal artifacts), or t-shirts honoring the memory of the deceased.³⁵

Daniels-Sykes makes an interesting critique that these memorials actually are religious memorials that have religious functions. She writes,

exam question...

7. Harkening back to the funerary custom of placing coins in the hands and eyes of the deceased, some people also leave coins

- a. At the church
- b. On graves
- c. In the baptismal font
- d. At the funeral home

33 *ibid.*, p. 163.

34 “Slaves Brought Burial Customs from Africa to the United States,” *African American Registry*, http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/slaves-brought-burial-customs-africa-united-states, last accessed July 15, 2015.

35 Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, “Erecting Death Shrines/ Memorials: Unified Sympathetic Faith Responses, Gunning for Empathy and Compassion in the Second Amendment Debates,” <http://newtheologyreview.org/index.php/ntr/article/viewFile/1034/1578>, last accessed July 16, 2015.

*“The lighted votive candles or the long stemmed candles can point to the Exodus Event where the Israelites are marching through the hardness of the wilderness, as God leads this travelling community “by night in a pillar of fire or light” (Ex 13:21), singing this African American spiritual, This Little Light of Mine.... The multiple numbers of teddy bears and plush stuffed animals are not only toys that comfort children; they can also warn of the need to watch out and care for another that brings Joy, Joy, Joy... that everything will turn out right....”*³⁶

Because of the tendency of Protestantism to emphasize the resurrection of the dead, and therefore, the shift to remembering the dead rather than caring for the dead,³⁷ the rise in popular memorialization reflects a need for the grieving to maintain their bonds with the deceased. By Daniels-Sykes' understanding, these memorials and popular ways of honoring the dead reflect a deeper religious culture, and are ingrained into the very social fabric of the African American community itself.

Annual Remembrances

Memorial Day in the United States actually started with the African American community, when the bodies of African American Union soldiers and prisoners of war – buried in a mass Confederate grave – were repatriated and buried with honors in a tribute to the dead men. As many as ten thousand African Americans gathered to march in honor of the men who sacrificed their lives and won the freedom of African Americans from slavery, and Memorial Day thus was founded. Though the details are much more interesting, and variously contended, the important aspect of this story is that it is the importance of both honoring and remembering the dead in the African American community that led to the founding of Memorial Day in 1865.³⁸

36 Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, “Erecting Death Shrines/ Memorials: Unified Sympathetic Faith Responses, Gunning for Empathy and Compassion in the Second Amendment Debates,” <http://newtheologyreview.org/index.php/ntr/article/viewFile/1034/1578>, last accessed July 16, 2015. This is an interesting and well written.

37 This distinction between remembering and caring for the dead is made by Tony Walter, at the University of Bath.

38 “The First American Memorial Day is Commemorated,” http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/first-american-memorial-day-commemorated, last accessed July 16, 2015. For more details on the various interpretations and more details visit the Snopes website, <http://www.snopes.com/military/memorialday.asp>, last accessed July 16, 2015.

PLEASE NOTE:

The facts laid out in this module are presented as a general guideline to dominant cultural characteristics: they are not, and are not intended to be, applicable to all people of the Jewish culture.

This module in no way diminishes the diversity of the many different Jewish populations in the United States.

Judaism is somewhat difficult to pin down because many Jews today ascribe to the traditions and cultural heritage of their ethnicity, but not to the religious beliefs. For this reason, some prefer to label Jews as religious Jews and secular Jews in order to make the distinction between practicing Jews who are observant in their faith, and those who identify with and celebrate their heritage but are not strictly observant or faithful to particular religious practices and beliefs. While this distinction can be helpful when conducting research on Jewish peoples, it is not altogether accurate in understanding how “secular” Jews will approach death – while they may self-identify more as atheists or agnostic, most “secular” Jews will still tend towards Jewish practices in dying, death, burial, and mourning, because these practices are also an indicator of Jewish identity.

You will want to ascertain the extent to which Jewish patrons wish to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices, just as you would with any patron.

GRIEF AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE: JEWISH TRADITIONS

Introduction: Demographics, Language, Religious Beliefs

Jews in the United States make up approximately two percent of the American population,¹ with the largest majority of Jews residing in the Northeast (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania), California, and Florida.²

There are three major denominations in American Judaism – Reform, Conservative and Orthodox – along with several much smaller branches (such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal) not discussed in this module. Reform Jews are the largest branch of American Jews, with approximately 35% of all American Jews practicing in the Reform branch. This is followed by 30% of American Jews who claim no formal Jewish identity (secular Jews). Conservative Jews make up about 18% of American Jews, Orthodox Jews make up about 10%, and then finally the smaller groups make up the remainder. Because Reform Judaism and secular Jews make the largest percentage of American Jewry today, they have been the most influential on Jewish thought and behavior. The number of secular Jews is growing with each generation: 32% of all Millennials (those born after 1980) identify as secular, or non-practicing, Jews, while

only 19% of the earlier baby boomer generation chose to identify as secular. This will more than likely continue to be a trend among American Jews.³ However, Orthodox Jews remain highly visible – partly because of their distinctive dress and strict dietary laws, and also because they are having the largest families – so Orthodox Judaism will likely also continue to grow in importance and population.⁴

The different denominations originally emerged over debate surrounding several issues: whether scripture is literal or symbolic, whether services and prayers should be recited in Hebrew or in the vernacular language, the roles of women, how strictly dietary and Sabbath laws should be maintained, and how lineage is determined.

As Hebrew is the universal language that unites all Jews, most Jews learn it when they are studying for their bar/bat mitzvah, the coming-of-age ceremony for young boys and girls that marks their presence in the synagogue as full-fledged adult members.

Another unifying element is the observation of the Sabbath, or Shabbat, as the day of rest, dictated as mandatory in the book of Genesis, and observed from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. The Talmud, or rabbinic commentary on the Torah, dictates that observing the Sabbath usually means no utilization of electricity or anything involving electricity (viewed as the contemporary equivalent of making a fire). Interpretation on how strictly this must be observed, however, differs across Jewish schools of thought. The observation of the Sabbath begins at sundown with the Shabbat meal, though

1 This has shrunk—in 1940, Jews comprised nearly 3.7% of the population.

2 “Jewish Population in the United States, by State” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/usjewpop.html>, last accessed June 19, 2015.

3 Pew Research Center, “Infographic: Survey of Jewish Information,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/03/infographic-survey-of-jewish-americans/> last accessed June 20, 2015.

4 Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” October 1, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/> last accessed June, 19, 2015. It should be noted here that while Orthodox Jews have larger families, switching between Jewish denominations is most common from the most tradition to the less traditional; in other words, it is more common for Orthodox Jews to switch to Reform or Conservative, rather than the other way around. This, too, may have some effect on the future denominational population of American Judaism.

some families will wait until a bit later (various factors such as the timing of synagogue services, when sundown occurs, or even the seasons may affect the Shabbat meal – there is no hard and fast rule as long as it occurs following sundown). The meal starts with prayers, blessings, and the lighting of candles, after which children are blessed, challah bread is broken and shared, and the meal is eaten (for a more detailed description, see the link below).⁵

Finally, keeping a kosher diet used to be universally observed by all Jews, but now is only practiced by more stringent followers, and includes both avoidance of certain foods (no eating of pork or shellfish, for example) and a particular preparation of remaining foods, including the separation of dairy products from meat products in both preparation and consumption (this comes from the Leviticus proscription against cooking a lamb in its mother's milk).

Orthodox Jews tend to be the most conservative in belief and strictest in practice, endorsing separation of women and men in worship, a more literal interpretation of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible – namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the nearly exclusive utilization of Hebrew in prayer and synagogue services, strict kosher dietary guidelines, a stringent observance of the Sabbath and the recognition of only children of Jewish mothers as Jewish. Reform Jews are on the other end of the spectrum, with men and women worshipping together, an understanding of the Torah as both literal and symbolic, the utilization of both Hebrew and the local language (in the United States, English), looser guidelines regarding dietary restrictions (many reform Jews also live in areas where it is harder to keep kosher and there is little access to kosher butchers, delis, and restaurants), and more liberal observance of the Sabbath (though many have a Shabbat meal, many also work on the Sabbath, and few will actually refuse to use electricity or ride in a car as their Orthodox brethren might). Reform Judaism has also begun to recognize children as Jews when their father is a Jew, unlike the more traditional Orthodox branch which insists that it must be a mother.⁶ Because Conservative Judaism was a response to the Reform movement – in that Conservative Jews felt that Reform Judaism had gone too far in reforming the Orthodox

branch, and sought to “conserve” some of their original beliefs – Conservative Jews generally fall in the middle between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

Jews are also biologically divided according to ethnic background, with approximately 85%-95% of American Jews descendants from German, Polish, Russian and other Eastern European Jews, commonly known as Ashkenazi Jews. The majority of American Jews today descended from Ashkenazi families who emigrated here during the Russian pogroms and the persecution of Jews in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, and then decided to remain (though some came as early as the 1880s). Two other major groupings, the Edot ha-Mizrach Jews (non-European Jews who originated from the Middle East) , and Sephardi Jews (Jews from Spain, Portugal and North Africa) comprise the other 5-15% of American Jews, but American Jewery is dominated, both culturally and demographically, by the Ashkenazim. Regardless of cultural heritage, most Jews in the United States today are second, third and fourth generation Americans, and well established in American culture. The importance of this will be seen further down, when the morbidity of Jews in the United States is discussed.

Attitudes towards Sickness, Dying, and the Deceased

Jewish custom tends to be very matter-of-fact and down-to-earth in regards to illness and dying. Sickness is perceived as a part of the experience of being God’s creation, and not something an individual can control (in other word, it is not viewed as a result of a person’s choices or actions, as some Protestant Christian denominations tend to believe). While sickness is seen as a natural part of living, medicine is not frowned on: medicine, and doctors in general, are seen as essential to helping God restore healing to his creation, returning humans to their full potential. Similar to sickness, death is viewed as yet another part of life; euthanasia, however, is not permitted nor looked upon in a favorable light: God gave humans life, and it is not their right to take that life away.

Because historically there was little intermarriage with other faiths, Jewish morbidity is higher in diseases that are genetically inherited: more Jews tend to die from metabolic diseases, autoimmune diseases (such as Tay-Sachs disease), certain inheritable cancers (particularly colon, ovarian, and breast cancer), and heart conditions.⁷ They do not tend to have issues with alcoholism, substance abuse, and diabetes, however.

Organ donation is permitted, if it is done to save a life, and many Jews consider the act of donating an organ to be a *mitzvah*, which can be loosely translated as a good deed, or even a commandment.

5 See Sara Shapiro-Plevan’s “Shabbat for Families,” for a more detailed explanation, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-for-families/>, last accessed July 28, 2015.

6 The reason for this is simple—one could always guarantee the identity of the mother—but not always the paternity of the father. By making Jewish identity dependent on the matrilineal line, Judaism has limited Jewish intermarriage, and ensured its own clan identity.

7 See the Jewish Virtual Library for valuable information about Jewish morbidity. “Sickness,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0018_0_18459.html, last accessed June 21, 2015.

Deathbed Rituals, Traditions, and Taboos

Jewish belief claims that all humans are created in God's image, and thus the body, whether sick, dying, or dead, must be treated with respect. This core belief is called *kevod ha-met*, and is the guiding principal for all Jewish customs regarding burial and mourning.⁸

A prayer of confession, the *viduy*, is generally recited before death; it can be said to correlate with the Catholic prayer of extreme unction, in that it is a prayer of contrition, in which the petitioner prays to God to forgive her sins so that she may face death calmly and peacefully. Unlike the Catholic tradition, however, the prayer for forgiveness is recited by the penitent to God directly, unless the dying person is unable to recite it for herself, in which case the family, or even the rabbi, will pray in place of the dying person. Prior to praying the *viduy*, it is advised that Jews first ask forgiveness from those people that they have wronged, addressing earthly matters before turning to heavenly ones; it is also advisable that others – particularly those who are crying – leave the room. Finally, before praying, the petitioner should purify herself, washing her hands three times. (While the *viduy* is a prayer that prepares the petitioner for death, it is noted in Jewish folklore that sometimes a person is healed and lives for many years following the prayer of *viduy*.) Following *viduy*, it is common to also recite the psalms, particularly Psalm 121, 130, and 91.

The final moments of life are considered very important in terms of preparing a person's soul for the afterlife. It is customary that everyone (particularly family and close friends) remain in the room with the dying person, as it is believed this gives them great comfort; no one should leave unless physically ill or overcome with emotion to the point that it is upsetting to the dying. Additionally, like attending the burial, sitting with a dying person is considered a great mitzvah or gift to the dying, and an act of love. (Medical personnel are exempted from this tradition, as are members of the Cohen, or priestly caste: a Jew who is a descendent of the Cohen clan may not come within four cubits of a Jewish corpse or a Jewish grave, as they are said to become defiled and ritually impure if they come into close contact with the dying or the dead. Thus, a Jew who is a Cohen might be outside

exam question...

8. Jewish belief claims that all humans are created in God's image, and thus the body, whether sick, dying, or dead, must be treated with respect. This core belief is called _____.
- Viduy
 - Mitzvah
 - Shomer
 - Kevod ha-met

the room of the dying, or visit the funeral home but not enter the building. There are two exceptions to this rule: if someone has no one to bury them, then a Cohen is expected to defile himself and make burial preparations and arrangements for the deceased; likewise, if a member of a Cohen's immediate family dies, then he may care for him or her.⁹)

There is no universal agreement on the actual definition of death—whether death is defined by cardiovascular death, brain death, or both.

Because a body is viewed as the home for the soul, the corpse is treated with the utmost respect, and is generally never left alone following a death. Friends and family sit with the corpse until it is taken to be prepared for burial; in addition, a person known as the *shomer*, or watcher, sits with the body reading Psalms and reciting prayers on behalf of the dead.¹⁰ Originally instilled to keep watch over the corpse to prevent theft or critters from having access to the body, the *shomer* now functions more ceremoniously, but is so important that some synagogues even formally employ them and dispatch them to stay with the corpse from death until burial.

The most meaningful aspect of both sitting with the body and the purification rituals performed on the deceased (detailed below) is the communal nature of these actions: at no point is the deceased alone; from dying to death to burial, the Jewish community accompanies them on their journey.

Interment Traditions

Jews prefer to bury the deceased immediately, and do not embalm the body or condone its public viewing, considering it to be disrespectful. For this reason, Jewish services for the dead are usually held as soon as possible after the death of a person. (It should be noted that, though there is a movement among some Jews to be cremated, cremation is *not* generally accepted in the Jewish community: the belief that our bodies belong to God, and therefore we are not allowed to do harm to them, applies even after death. Cremated remains have traditionally not been permitted in Jewish cemeteries,

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- 8 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California.
 - 9 When a Cohen is buried, he will generally be buried in the Cohenim section, which is on the outside of a Jewish cemetery, thus allowing the rest of the Cohen clan to be able to attend the funeral and visit the grave without breaking the proscriptions against Cohens attending funerals or visiting cemeteries. "Jewish Funeral Guide," <http://www.jewish-funeral-guide.com/tradition/mourners-cohanim.htm>, last accessed June 26, 2015.
 - 10 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.4.

as they are viewed as a desecration of the dead and a denial of proper burial. The intentional cremation of over six million Jews by Hitler in the Holocaust has increased the Jewish abhorrence for the practice. In general, cremation should not be discussed with Jewish families unless specifically requested.)

Preparation of the dead body proceeds according to Ecclesiastes 5:14, in which it is written, “As he came, so should he go;”¹¹ thus, when a person dies, their body is washed and purified just as they were when they were born. *Taharah*, the act of washing and purifying the body, is generally performed by a person trained in the traditional Jewish purification rituals: men wash and purify men and women wash and purify women. Usually this act includes washing the body with warm water from head to toe, though it is never turned face down. The washing of the body usually occurs at a funeral home, and is performed by the *Chevrá Kedisha*, or the burial officiates of the local synagogue. Generally, there should be three tables – one for the empty casket, one for the materials needed to wash and purify the body, and the third, onto which the body is placed. If possible, the table for the body should be made of wood, and the body of the deceased placed on the table with its toes facing towards the door. Water, buckets, gloves, and at least six white sheets are needed in the preparation of the body, and all jewelry and personal effects should be removed prior to the purification and returned to the family or next of kin. The full list of materials needed for the purification of the deceased can be found at the website listed below; if the funeral home serves the Jewish community, it might be advisable to contact the local Rabbi and see if these materials can be provided as part of the funeral home’s services.¹²

After the body has been washed and purified, it is dressed for burial in a white shroud made of linen or muslin, known as a *tachrichim*, rather than in the clothes the person wore during life. This is rooted in the belief that all are found equal in death – no person is deemed better or wealthier – and the white shroud is symbolic of that equality. Usually the shroud is hand-sewn so that the stitches will easily disintegrate; if the

shroud is machine-sewn, someone will often rip some of the seams so that it disintegrates more easily. The *tachrichim* is so important to Jewish burial custom that if no one is immediately available to dress the body, the funeral will be postponed until someone can be found. Jewish men are also buried with their *tallit*, a traditional fringed shawl that is usually used by Jewish men during prayer; prior to burial, one of the fringes of the prayer shawl will be cut so that it is rendered ineffective. If the deceased did not own a *tallit* then usually one is provided for the burial.

Genesis 3:19 states that the proper cycle for the deceased is to return to dust; for this reason, once shrouded, it is preferable for a Jew to be placed directly into the ground. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be the simple pine box: generally speaking, they should be made of wood, with no designs or metal ornamentation (some Jewish communities contend that even metal nails or brackets may not be utilized in the construction of a casket, because metal is the material for weapons of war). Similarly, the inside must be plain and unlined, with no ornamentation or decoration.¹³

Obituaries will often announce both the death and the funeral service (though because of the tendency to bury immediately following a death, they are more often perceived as announcements than invitations); they also may state where donations can be made. At the funeral service itself, it is common for several people close to the deceased to offer eulogies, either at the beginning of the ceremony, or at the site of burial (unless the deceased has previously specified that nothing be said about them). Many Reform Jews will recite Psalm 23 as the deceased exits the funeral home, and some recite Psalm 91 as they accompany the deceased to his final resting place in the cemetery (when Jews first immigrated to the United States, cemeteries were often among the first things they purchased; many Jews will therefore have their own cemeteries and will opt to be buried there). Jewish tradition holds that the burial should be attended by as many as possible: viewing the final interment of the body is considered the final act of kindness one can perform for the deceased, since it is a kindness that cannot be reciprocated.¹⁴ Often, attendees are

11 “A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices,” published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.3.

12 David Zinner, “Tahara Supplies for the Chevrá Kadisha,” <http://jewish-burial.pbworks.com/w/page/8065012/Tahara%20Kit%20Contents%20List>, last accessed July 28, 2015.

13 Zalman Goldstein, “The Taharah; Preparing the Body for Burial,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/367843/jewish/The-Taharah.htm, last accessed June 21, 2015.

14 “A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices,” published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.5.

exam question...

9. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be _____.
- Made of synthetic materials
 - Highly ornamental
 - The simple pine box
 - Lined and padded

expected to place dirt on top of the casket if they cannot actually bury the body themselves – this is seen as beneficial for both the deceased and the bereaved. When the deceased is lowered into the ground, it is customary for a Rabbi to recite Psalm 91 once more, along with a prayer for the dead. Finally, if the deceased cannot be placed directly into the ground, it is not uncommon for the casket to be broken to speed the decomposition process.

The first meal, or *seudat havra'ah*, is served at the home of the deceased upon returning from the cemetery, and is usually provided by the family, friends and synagogue of the bereaved. Among other foods, things that are round in shape such as hard-boiled eggs, bagels, round pasta, and round cakes are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life¹⁵ and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle. This meal marks the official beginning of sitting *shiva*, the intense seven-day mourning period, discussed below.

The Jewish holiday calendar affects both services and burial: for example, Jews may not be buried on the Sabbath, or on a high holy day, though burial may occur on one of the intermediate days of Sukkot or Passover. Likewise, eulogies are forbidden on intermediate high holy days.

*Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are considered high holy days, and are observed by most Jews by time off of work, attending services in the synagogue, and spending the day in prayer and reflection; the days between these two holidays are considered intermediate holy days.*¹⁶

Beliefs Regarding the Afterlife

As a group, Jews do not concern themselves with the specifics of an afterlife (though the beliefs of particular sects may differ). Thus, a wide variety of individual interpretations exist, ranging from a belief in the final judgment and a resurrection of the dead, to a belief in reincarnation, to a belief in extinction. In Judaism, there is no concrete concept of heaven and hell, though many embrace the belief of *Gehinnom* (*Gehenna* in Yiddish, and sometimes also referred to as *She'ol*), which is somewhat similar to the Catholic concept of purgatory, and is essentially viewed as a purification of the soul so that it is ready to enter the presence of

exam question...

10. During the first meal (or *seudat havra'ah*), among other foods, things that are _____ are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle.
- Locally-grown
 - Round in shape
 - Highly spiced
 - Freshly-baked

God; this purification is believed to last up to one year following a person's death.

Unlike some traditions, Judaism stresses the world of the living over that of the dead, which generally means that a belief in dead spirits – or even prayers to, or private conversations with, the dead – are strongly discouraged as they are believed to be too similar to a worship of the dead.

Mourning and Remembrance

Unlike those seen in Roman Catholicism, for example, which focus on speeding the deceased's entry into Heaven, Jewish mourning and remembrance rituals center on the bereaved and the community. They give those impacted by loss a way to both reintegrate the dead into the community in their new role as deceased, and to honor their memory. Judaism stresses the need for a balance: "that people should avoid the extremes of constant visitation on the one hand, and of complete disregard on the other." Thus, some visitation is permitted, particularly on days of distress, anniversaries of the death, etc., as long as these visitations do not occur on a Jewish holy day, when the living should be focused on the worship of God.

Traditional Jewish custom dictates that mourners rip their clothing when someone close to them dies; this is meant to symbolize the breaking of their hearts at the loss of their loved one. Today a *keriah* ribbon, representing clothing, is often ripped instead: it is worn over one's heart on the left side when mourning the loss of one's parents; when mourning the loss of one's spouse, children, and/or siblings, it is worn over the right side. The ribbon (or ripped clothing) is worn during the entire initial mourning period of seven days, or *shiva*.

Shiva

The custom of observing *shiva* has its basis in Genesis 50:1-14, in which Joseph mourns the death of his father Jacob, or Israel, for seven days (in fact, "*shiva*" comes from the Hebrew word seven). During this time, mourners are expected to devote themselves solely to the task of grieving, withdrawing from all social activities and performing no tasks that might be associated with work. (If one's occupation involves saving others' lives, such as a doctor or a nurse, or if not working will cause extreme financial hardship, one

15 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.5.

16 The exact dates for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur change yearly, so consult a Jewish calendar for exact dates. A good Jewish calendar is found at www.chabad.org or here <http://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/month.htm>, last accessed July 22, 2015.

may be excused from observing the full seven days, though a minimum of three days of mourning are expected.)

Mourners are expected to forgo many of life's daily pleasures and mundane tasks during *shiva*: bathing and grooming (particularly for pleasure) are given up, women usually wear no makeup, men give up shaving, and mirrors are covered for the duration, so that one's focus is inward rather than on one's appearance.¹⁷ Those observing *shiva* are traditionally expected to sit on low stools or chairs as an expression of humility; in reality, this aspect of *shiva* is not always strictly observed, though many mourners may remove the cushions from their sofas and chairs in order to sit on hard surfaces. All of these customs are meant to remind the mourner of the absence of the deceased, and allow the bereaved to focus nearly exclusively on her loss.

Mourners are not supposed to leave their house during this period, except to observe Shabbat, or the Sabbath, during which they may participate in synagogue activities, but must not mourn publicly. Exceptions to observing the full seven-day period also exist: if one of the Jewish high holy days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot occurs during a *shiva*, then the Jewish holiday takes precedence, and the rest of the *shiva* is cancelled. The reason for this is similar to the reason the bereaved still observe Shabbat (the Sabbath) as God's worship takes precedence over bereavement.

A candle traditionally burns in the dining room for the entire seven-day period: it is lit, accompanied by a prayer, upon returning from the funeral and burial of the deceased (or upon hearing of the death). This candle symbolizes the bond between the deceased and the mourners, with the flame serving as a metaphor for the soul of the deceased, and it is not affected by the Sabbath or by high holy days (though it will be moved to a more private place during these times, as their focus should remain on God).

In Jewish custom, it takes ten adults to form a *minyan*, or a quorum – the minimum number required to hold a public prayer service. This reminds Jews that though they may individually hold much power or prosperity, it is only in a group of ten or more that they can form a true Jewish community. Correspondingly, because it takes ten Jewish adults to hold a *shiva minyan*, or a prayer service for the dead, the act of visiting and participating in a *shiva* is considered to be a good deed. There are several expectations of the greater Jewish

community surrounding the bereaved during this time. Because Jews observing *shiva* are neither allowed nor expected to prepare meals, and may not serve those who come to visit, it becomes the task of the community to ensure that the bereaved are well fed and cared for. It is considered a blessing to prepare food for the bereaved, bring it to their home, and then serve them. Additionally, in lieu of bringing flowers to the home during *shiva* – which are considered ostentatious and unnecessary, rather than humble – most Jews will select a charity to which the grieving may donate. This, again, is considered a blessing – particularly to the deceased, who can never repay the gift given in their name.

Kaddish

Kaddish, a Jewish prayer that celebrates the sanctification and power of God, originated sometime in the 8th century, as mention of this practice is mentioned in the Talmud text of Sofrim. It is widely recited during mourning as reminder that even in the midst of sorrow, God is great and worthy of praise. Additionally, some believe that offering *kaddish* prayers will accumulate merit on behalf of the deceased and thus their souls will not suffer (in this way, it is not unlike the Roman Catholic recitation of the rosary, which directly praises God, but is indirectly believed to benefit the soul of the deceased and ease its time in purgatory).

The *kaddish* is said for the first year following the death – for more distant relatives and friends, the typical timeframe is thirty days, or one month – and then annually on the anniversary of the death. Since Jews traditionally pray three times a day (in the morning, afternoon, and evening), the *kaddish* will usually be recited several times in the morning, both before and after the prayers, and then again in the afternoon and evening, following the prayers. Jewish law dictates that the son pray the *kaddish* for his parents following their death, but if no son (or son-in law) is available to recite the prayers, then someone else is chosen to recite the prayers on the parents' behalf. This practice is gradually expanding to include women.

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit is the celebration of the anniversary of a death, and occurs in three locations: the home, the synagogue, and the cemetery. In the home, a 24-hour candle is lit at sundown, *kaddish* prayers are recited, the deceased is remembered, and the person engaging in remembrance foregoes any social events, and sometimes fasts as well. Most synagogues will also remember and honor the dead, with many modern synagogues lighting a lightbulb next to the person's name once a year in honor of the deceased, and sending a notice to the family remembering their loved ones and reminding them of the *yahrzeit*; sometimes a

17 Jewish law also states that worship services may not be held where one can see a reflection of oneself, and since worship services are held in the home of the deceased, mirrors need to be covered in order for the minyan to occur. For more on this, see Maurice Lamm, "Preparing the House of Mourning," http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/281594/jewish/Preparing-the-House-of-Mourning.htm, last accessed June 25, 2015.

family member of the deceased will lead the synagogue services. Family members also often visit the graveyard and recite psalms. In this way, the dead are reincorporated into the realm of the living, reinforcing the greater Jewish community.

As ever, exceptions exist: if one forgets to observe the memorial, then it should be observed as soon as it is remembered; if one is too sick to observe the memorial, someone else can observe it by proxy, lighting the candle and reciting the prayers in their place. If the anniversary of a death falls on a Sabbath, the candle is lit before sundown, and the grave is visited the day before or after the Sabbath, so as not to interfere with worship. Likewise, if a mourner chooses to fast in honor of *yahrzeit* but the death anniversary falls on a Sabbath, then they must schedule their fasting either one day prior or one day after.

Yizkor

The Hebrew word *yizkor* means to “remember;” accordingly, Jews pray the *Yizkor* to ask God to remember those family and friends who are deceased.¹⁸ This special memorial is prayed four times a year:¹⁹ after the Torah reading on the last day of Passover, the second day of Shavuot (the Jewish high holy day celebrating the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people), Shemini Atzeret (the eight day of Sukkot), and on the Jewish day of atonement, Yom Kippur. Generally, those whose parents are both still living will leave the synagogue during the *Yizkor* service, while those who are in their first year of mourning (and therefore actively mourning, and not quite yet in the remembering or memorializing stage of their grief) will remain for the service but will not actually recite the *Yizkor*. In this way, the Jewish calendar accounts for the various stages of grief – gradually moving from active mourning into more passive remembrances – while also helping the mourners through their grief by accompanying them ritually as a community.

The prayer varies according to those for whom it is being prayed, but it is generally customary to also attach a private vow to perform a charitable service in honor of the deceased (which mirrors the emphasis placed on performing charitable works or giving donations immediately following a death). Charity on behalf of someone who has died has two functions: performing deeds for the dead that they would have cared deeply about but can no longer perform themselves, and reminding the living that they remain in the world of the living and there is still work to do to make that world a better place. In other words, it helps the living remap their place in the world without the dead by finding meaningful work to do that the dead would have valued and cared about.

Additional Points of Cultural Sensitivity

It may seem as if the Jewish mourning tradition is very self-contained, centering on the home and/or the synagogue; however, a funeral director can still perform some important duties, including functioning as an intermediary for Jews who are not actively practicing, yet wish to bury or be buried in the traditional Jewish custom; helping those who are unfamiliar with Jewish traditions to understand why there is no viewing, embalment, etc.; and helping to identify propitious days for burial and interment. If the funeral home is in an area with a sizable Jewish community, it would be advisable to identify a ready source of wooden coffins and Jewish headstones, and to familiarize oneself with the more popular charities in the area that may need donations. Also, if there is not an active synagogue in the area, the funeral home might consider holding *Yizkor* prayers for the local Jewish community.

- Be certain to ask the family for both the full Hebrew name and English name of the deceased, and find out which (if not both) should be on the program for services
- For Jews, there is no Old Testament (because there is no New Testament), only the Hebrew Bible. Calling the Hebrew Bible the Old Testament is a faux pas that should be avoided.
- Do not assume that all Jews are also pro-Zionist and pro-Israel. These are political issues, while Judaism is a religion.
- Do not assume all Jews keep kosher or don't eat pork. While some prefer to follow strict dietary guidelines, some choose to observe their religious faith in ways that are not dietary.

18 Zalman Goldstein, “Yizkor—The Memorial Prayer,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/371509/jewish/Yizkor-The-Memorial-Prayer.htm, last accessed May 25, 2015.

19 The prayer is as follows, and is taken from the Chabad.org website. This particular translation is for a person's deceased father. Remember the original is in Hebrew, but this will give one a sense of the meaning behind the prayer. “May G-d remember the soul of my father, my teacher (mention his Hebrew name and that of his mother) who has gone to his [supernal] world, because I will — without obligating myself with a vow — donate charity for his sake. In this merit, may his soul be bound up in the bond of life with the souls of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and with the other righteous men and women who are in Gan Eden; and let us say, Amen.” Zalman Goldstein, “Yizkor—The Memorial Prayer,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/371509/jewish/Yizkor-The-Memorial-Prayer.htm, last accessed May 25, 2015.