Life After Death

What Religions and Non-Believers Say | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. When you were a child, how did the adults around you explain death?
2. What do you already know about what different religions say happens after death?
3. How might ideas about death and what comes after it differ by country, age, or family background?

Reading: Life After Death

Every culture has to **grapple with** the same hard question: what happens when we die? The answers look very different around the world. In Varanasi, India, some elderly Hindus spend their final days beside the river Ganges. In Mexico, families build altars with candles and flowers. At a humanist funeral, there may be no prayers at all, only music and stories.

Christians and Muslims make up more than half of the world's population. Christians traditionally believe that the dead will be raised and judged by God, with heaven or hell as their final **destination**. In Islam, the soul waits until the Day of Judgment, when each person's deeds are weighed. Judaism speaks of a world to come, but it has no single official picture. Many rabbis **stress** that how you live now matters most.

For Hindus, death is a **transition**. The soul is born again and again, and karma shapes each new life. The final goal is **liberation** from this cycle. Many Hindus believe that dying in Varanasi and being **cremated** beside the Ganges frees the soul. Buddhists also speak of rebirth, but they teach that there is no **permanent** self. Their aim is nirvana, the end of suffering.

In many places, the dead stay part of the family as **ancestors**. In Japan, many families hold a **memorial** service 49 days after a death. During China's Qingming festival, people burn paper money, which is believed to reach the dead. In Mexico, the souls of the dead are thought to come home for a few days each year. These **rituals** comfort the living as much as they honor the dead.

People with no religion make up roughly a quarter of the world. Many of them see death as the end of **consciousness**. To some, that sounds **bleak**. The Greek philosopher Epicurus argued that death should not frighten us, because we will not be there to experience it. Humanists say people live on in the memories of others and in the **legacy** they leave. Still, the line between believers and non-believers is **blurred**. In a large survey, belief in life after death ranged from 85 percent of adults in Indonesia to 38 percent in Sweden. In Peru, nearly two-thirds of **unaffiliated** adults said there is probably or definitely life after death. No survey can tell us which answer is right.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

blurred	**legacy**	**stress**	**bleak**	**consciousness**	**memorial**	**cremated**	**ancestors**	**liberation**
rituals	**permanent**	**destination**	**transition**	**grapple with**				

1. Scientists still _____ the question of how life on Earth began.
2. After a long train journey, Rome was our final _____.
3. The coach likes to _____ that teamwork matters more than talent.
4. Moving from school to university is a big _____ for most students.
5. For many workers, retirement brings a feeling of _____ from early alarms.
6. After the funeral, her body was _____ and the ashes were scattered at sea.
7. After two years of short contracts, she finally got a _____ job.
8. My _____ came from a small fishing village three hundred years ago.
9. The school held a _____ concert for a teacher who had died.
10. Small morning _____, such as making coffee, help some people start the day.
11. The boxer lost _____ for a few seconds after the punch.
12. Without rain, the farmers face a _____ future.
13. The scientist left a _____ of discoveries that still help patients today.
14. For people who work from home, the line between work and rest can become _____.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. grapple with	_____	**a.** job
2. a smooth	_____	**b.** ancestors
3. a permanent	_____	**c.** service
4. honor your	_____	**d.** future
5. a memorial	_____	**e.** legacy
6. a bleak	_____	**f.** consciousness
7. leave a lasting	_____	**g.** transition
8. lose	_____	**h.** a difficult question

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Some people find the idea of having only one life strangely _____. (*liberation*)
2. After a year abroad, she decided to stay in the country _____. (*permanent*)
3. He was still _____ and able to speak when the ambulance arrived. (*consciousness*)
4. Every summer they visit their _____ village in the mountains. (*ancestors*)
5. The months between school and work can be a difficult _____ period. (*transition*)
6. In many countries, _____ is now more common than burial. (*cremated*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. What three scenes does the writer describe at the start?

2. What do Christians traditionally believe happens after death?
3. In Islam, what happens on the Day of Judgment?
4. What does the reading say about Judaism and life after death?
5. What is the final goal for Hindus, and why is Varanasi important?
6. How is the Buddhist idea of rebirth different from the Hindu idea?
7. Give two examples of how families honor the dead as ancestors.
8. How do many people with no religion see death, and what did Epicurus argue?
9. Why do you think so many cultures have rituals for the dead? Give two reasons.
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Judaism has one official teaching about what happens after death."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that a survey can show which answer about death is right."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer mention Epicurus? Is it (a) to give a non-religious argument that death should not be feared, (b) to prove that there is life after death, or (c) to describe an ancient Greek funeral?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. Christians and Muslims together make up more than half of the world's population. **T / F**
2. In Islam, the soul goes to paradise or hell at the moment of death. **T / F**
3. For Hindus, the final goal is a better rebirth. **T / F**
4. Buddhism teaches that there is no permanent self. **T / F**
5. In Japan, many Buddhist families hold a memorial service 49 days after a death. **T / F**
6. During Qingming, people burn paper money for the dead. **T / F**
7. People with no religion make up about half of the world's population. **T / F**
8. Epicurus argued that people should be afraid of death. **T / F**
9. Belief in life after death was higher in Sweden than in Indonesia. **T / F**
10. Nearly two-thirds of unaffiliated adults in Peru believe in life after death. **T / F**

Language Focus: Talking About Beliefs: Believe In, Believe That, and Be Believed To

believe in + noun or -ing: you think something exists or is right. *I believe in second chances.*
believe that + clause: you think a statement is true. *She believes that hard work pays off.*
be believed to / be thought to + base verb: what people in general think, without saying who. *Black cats are thought to bring bad luck in some countries.*
From the reading:
"Many Hindus **believe that** dying in Varanasi and being cremated beside the Ganges frees the soul."
"People burn paper money, which **is believed to** reach the dead."
Tip: *That* is often dropped in speech: *I believe (that) he is right.* But never say *believe in that*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you or your country.

believe in + noun or -ing

1. When I was a child, I believed in _____
2. One thing I strongly believe in is _____

believe that + clause

3. Many people in my country believe that _____

4. I used to believe that _____

be believed to + base verb

5. In many places, certain foods are believed to _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using believe in, believe that, *or* be believed to / be thought to. *Then ask a partner.*

6. As a child, did you believe in any magical creatures or characters?

7. What is something many people believe that you think is not true?

8. What is believed to bring good luck where you live?

9. Which animal is thought to be the smartest? Do you agree?

10. What do you believe makes someone a good friend?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. How are funerals usually held in your country or community?

2. Have you ever taken part in a festival or tradition that honors the dead? What happened?

3. Which of the beliefs in the reading did you know the least about before reading?

4. Should people follow their family's funeral traditions even if they do not share the beliefs behind them?

5. Is it easy or difficult to talk about death in your family? Why?

6. Why do you think the idea of being reborn appeals to many people?

7. Some people want a big funeral, and others want something small and simple. What are the advantages of each?

8. What kind of legacy would you most like to leave behind?

9. Why might some people with no religion still believe in some kind of life after death?

10. Do beliefs about what happens after death change how people live today? Give examples.

11. How might ideas about death change as more people in a society become unaffiliated?

12. Epicurus argued that death should not frighten us. Do you find his argument convincing? Why or why not?

13. Should schools teach about different beliefs on death? What are the benefits and the risks?

14. Imagine an app that let you chat with a digital copy of someone who has died. Would it help people grieve, or make grief harder?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/afterlife-beliefs** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.