

## Journal Entry #10: Multicultural Death

Respecting the cultural differences in death ceremonies is extremely important. As long as the traditions of any given group do not directly interfere with the lives of others, there is no legitimate reason to deny them whatever practices they wish. Even in cases where conflicts arise, such as the Buddhists' incense drifting into the non-Buddhist ceremony, peaceful and rational compromise is in the best interest of all.

I am reminded of something I read long ago, a selection from Herodotus' *Histories* involving an encounter between a party of Greeks and a party of Callatiae (an Indian tribe). The Greeks were horrified to learn of the Callatiaen practice of eating their dead relatives; the Callatiaens were equally horrified to learn that the Greeks cremated their dead. To a Western reader the disgust of the one will be clear – the idea of consuming human flesh is considered deeply taboo in Western culture. The Callatiaens may have thought something along the lines of “You just *burn* them? Like *trash*?”

This effectively illustrates the cultural divides present in funerary practices. I think there may be a tendency in American culture to dismiss foreign practices as silly or ridiculous. This tendency is dangerous. It extends not just to funerary practices but to cultural traditions of all kinds. Lack of respect for other ways of life is utterly impractical in a place and time where so many different cultures are colliding. It is imperative that we as a nation learn to accept and validate the traditions of other peoples.