

What to Do at a Buddhist Funeral

A day-by-day guide for a wake with cremation · works for 3, 5, or 7-day wakes

3-day wake: Day 1 → Day 2 (Final Night) → Day 3 (Final Day & Cremation)

5-day wake: Day 1 → Day 2–3 (Middle) → Day 4 (Final Night) → Day 5 (Final Day & Cremation)

7-day wake: Day 1 → Day 2–5 (Middle) → Day 6 (Final Night) → Day 7 (Final Day & Cremation)

On timing: when someone passes away, that passing date is treated as the first day of the wake. Depending on the time of death, the wake can either take place the same day, or might be held the next day instead. If you're unsure, please don't hesitate to clarify this with me directly.

DAY 1

Encoffinment

First day of every wake

- Encoffinment ceremony begins — at least one monk chants
- Purchase a meal(s) for the deceased. Vegetarian is recommended, but I usually suggest buying what the deceased likes to eat
- Keep joss sticks / incense burning throughout the day

MIDDLE DAY

Repeat as needed

Skip for 3-day wakes

- Continue buying breakfast, lunch, and dinner for the deceased
- Keep joss sticks / incense burning throughout the day

Repeat this block once per Middle Day — 2× for a 5-day wake, 4× for a 7-day wake

FINAL NIGHT

Night before cremation

Always the 2nd-to-last day

- Buy breakfast — lunch usually not needed, check with your funeral director
- Confirm with your funeral director whether dinner is needed (often already provided)
- At least one monk begins the final night's chanting
- Keep joss sticks / incense burning throughout the day
- You may start preparing red packets for staff and monks — confirm amounts and recipients with your funeral team first

FINAL DAY

Cremation

Always the last day

- Buy breakfast — lunch depends on your cremation timing
- Final outgoing chant begins
- Proceed to the crematorium for cremation
- Ash collection ("ash picking") may happen later the same day or the next day, depending on your cremation timing and preference
- Speak to your funeral director about next steps — columbarium, An Ling, or ash scattering

If your wake is extended by one extra day (landing on an even-numbered day instead of the usual odd number), your funeral team may perform a "coffin lifting" rite — this isn't part of a standard wake, so check with them if it applies to you. This guide covers Buddhist wakes ending in **cremation**. Burial and Taoist-specific rites follow a different sequence — ask your funeral director if you're unsure which applies to your family.