

Going Without God

“ Many of us do not believe in an afterlife, another incarnation, a heaven, or a hell. These ancient ideas are sugar-coated pills – or worrying threats!

Instead, I believe we have this one life. It is a life we must live well and that should be celebrated when it is over.

A humanist funeral is entirely non-religious. It's not about dogma or doctrine. Instead, a humanist funeral celebrates the particular life that has ended – all its ups and downs, twists and turns. Being non-religious there are no hymns or prayers, but there is bound to be music, poetry and even some laughter.

The British Humanist Association (BHA) trains and runs Humanist Ceremonies, a network of humanist celebrants in England and Wales. In Scotland, humanist funeral celebrants can be found via the Humanist Society of Scotland.

If you want a humanist funeral, you can simply inform your next of kin. Or, if you have a pre-paid plan, make sure you include this instruction in it. When the time comes, the funeral director should contact a BHA celebrant who will immediately get in touch with your family and arrange to visit them.

During this family visit the celebrant will gather as much information as he or she can about the life and character of the person who has died; about memories others hold and share of them; about the human legacies they have left.

The celebrant will discuss poems, readings and pieces of music appropriate to the person: the family may already know what they want to include in the funeral but in most cases bereaved people quite naturally feel themselves adrift. It's at times like this that the celebrant's experience and confidence are invaluable.

The BHA's funeral celebrants come from all walks of life: mothers, grandfathers, nurses, journalists, a vet, musicians, actors, naval officers and a bereavement counsellor to name but several. They are experienced people with the skills and human touches required to prepare, script and conduct a humanist funeral.

The best aspect of any humanist funeral is that a unique life has been celebrated appropriately. The funeral is about that person and the contributions they have made. It has been prepared in consultation with the people who knew and loved them. Its significance, relevance and benefit to the bereaved cannot be underestimated.

Demand for humanist funerals is increasing. However, BHA funeral celebrants are still struck by the number of grateful mourners saying, 'I never knew you could have a funeral like that'. Well, now you know: you can. ”

Tana Wollen
Head of Ceremonies, BHA

Humanist celebrants can be found on the BHA website at www.humanism.org.uk or by calling us on 020 7079 3580.

All funeral directors have a listing of the BHA's trained and accredited humanist funeral celebrants and can be asked to provide one.

