

FUNERAL RITES (PART 2 OF 2)

Rating:

Description: Washing, shrouding, burying and condolences.

Category: [Lessons](#) › [Islamic Lifestyle, Morals and Practices](#) › [General Morals and Practices](#)

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Objectives

- To understand the Islamic method of burying the dead.

Arabic Terms

- Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- Qiblah* - The direction one faces during the formal prayers.
- Dhikr*- (plural:*adhkar*) remembrance of Allah.
- Fard Kifayah* – An act that is obligatory on the entire Muslim community, and must be carried out by at least one person.
- Salat ul-Janazah* – the funeral prayer.
- Takbir* – uttering “Allahu Akbar”.
- Tasleem*– The salutation of peace that ends the prayer.

Preparing the body for burial

Islam has given us a comprehensive set of instructions for preparing a body for burial. Washing the body of a dead believer is *fard kifayah*, which means that it is a collective obligation. If someone does this then it is done on behalf of the Muslim community. Failure to wash the body is not only a failure by the next of kin or family; it is a failure by the whole community.



The deceased should be washed by close family members of the same gender. If no relative is available then it must be the most trustworthy and pious people present.

Nowadays washing the body is often left to qualified Muslims in the mortuary section of an Islamic centre or mosque, or a government facility.

Washing the deceased believer should be carried out in a dignified manner ensuring that the body is always handled gently and carefully. Those who wash the body should be...

1. Trustworthy and thus not talk about what they might see.
2. Know the Islamic way to wash the dead.
3. Not comment on the body
4. Be of the same gender as the deceased. If the deceased is married, the spouse can perform the washing. If the deceased is a child the parents may perform the washing or either gender.

Shrouding

After washing the deceased, the body should be placed in a shroud; a cloth that a deceased Muslim is wrapped in for burial. In some places, due to council by-laws the use of a coffin is often mandated. In these cases the body would be wrapped in a shroud before being placed in the coffin. The shroud should be big enough to cover the entire body, should be clean and made from inexpensive white material. Silk should be avoided for men and perfuming the shroud is allowable.

The Funeral Prayer

The funeral prayer of a Muslim is called *Salat ul-Janazah* and it is *fard kifayah*. That is, the Muslim community is obligated to say the funeral prayer. However it is not mandatory that there is a congregation, if even one person says the prayer the obligation has been fulfilled. Muslims should never hesitate to take part in this prayer whether or not they know the deceased or his family. The prayer is performed to seek forgiveness and mercy for the deceased and all Muslims. *Salat ul-Janazah* should be performed outside the mosque and the body should be placed in front of the person leading the prayer. The normal conditions for prayer are the same although the prayer does differ significantly. It is said silently, except for the *takbir* and *tasleem*, and there is no bowing or prostration.

Burial

As short a time as possible should elapse between the death and the burial, and the deceased should, under normal circumstances, be buried in the locality in which he lived rather than be transported to another town or country. After the funeral prayer the body should be transferred to the Muslim cemetery or the Muslim section of any

cemetery. Brisk walking is recommended. Those accompanying the funeral procession should not raise their voices with crying or *dhikr*. Women are usually not permitted to accompany a funeral procession.

Muslim graves and cemeteries are characterised by their simplicity. The grave should be dug perpendicular to the *qiblah*, and the body should be placed in the grave on its right side, facing the *qiblah*. After the body is in the grave, a layer of wood or stones should be placed on top to prevent direct contact between the body and the soil that will fill the grave. Each mourner then places three handfuls of soil into the grave.

Points to remember-

1. There is no special *dhikr* to be recited.
2. Quran should not be recited in the cemetery.
3. There is no Islamic teaching of putting flowers, food, water or money around the grave to benefit the deceased.
4. There is no ruling requiring an animal to be slaughtered before or after the burial.

It is allowable to leave a mark or place a stone on the grave in order to remember the location. And after the burial, the deceased's relatives may stay in the cemetery to make *du'a* because it is believed that at this time the deceased is being questioned by the angels.^[1]

Condolences

The offering of condolences is an important act of kindness. It entails sharing the grief of the people affected and offering comfort. There is no limit to the period of time when one can offer condolences, however, the words should be chosen carefully and be gentle, encouraging patience and the acceptance of Allah's will. When visiting the home of the bereaved a person should only stay a short time unless an offer of assistance has been accepted and necessitates staying longer. Friends and neighbours usually prepare food to alleviate some of the burden felt by the grieving family.

Islamic scholars say that if a Muslim offers condolences to another Muslim he should say, "We all belong to Allah and to Him we shall return." It is permissible to add something similar to this *du'a* once made by Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, "O Allah! Forgive (name of the deceased), elevate his status among the guided people and look after the family that he left behind. O Lord of the universe, forgive us and him, comfort him in his grave and lighten his stay (in the grave)."^[2] If someone wants to give condolences to a non-Muslim, he should say "We all belong to Allah and to Him we shall return," and add any customary forms of condolence that are free from religious connotations.

When a non-Muslim relative dies

A Muslim is able to make the funeral arrangements for his non-Muslim relative if there is no one else to perform this duty. Although it is a subject of scholarly dispute, generally it is also permissible to attend the funerals of non-Muslim relatives provided you do not commit an act that is against the *Shariah*. It is part of keeping up good family relationships and showing relatives the best manners inherent in Islam. It is not permitted for a Muslim to pray for forgiveness^[3] for his deceased non-Muslim relatives or friends, however instead he should turn to Allah for comfort and hope in His mercy.

Footnotes:

[1] Abu Dawood

[2] Saheeh Muslim

[3] Quran 9:113

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