

MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE

MAKKAH AL MUKARRAMAH

**FUNERAL REGULATIONS
IN ISLAM**

**With Compliments
MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE
MAKKAH AL MUKARRAMAH**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

FUNERAL REGULATIONS IN ISLAM

هدية عن :

الأمانة العامة لرابطة العالم الإسلامي
مكة المكرمة

Gift From
MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE
MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH

FOREWORD

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe, blessings and peace be upon our Prophet Mohammed and upon his family and his Companions one and all.

The aim of this booklet is not to clarify the General regulations of Islam to the mass of Muslim, whose knowledge of them makes any further explanation unnecessary, but to set them forth clearly and simply for the Muslim communities in western countries, where there are both western converts to Islam and emigrants from Muslim countries.

In the west, Muslims often find themselves obliged to conform to local practices which are contrary to the precepts of Islam;

And I find it my duty to speak out against some of these practices, especially those connected with the laying out and burial of the dead.

This alarming state of affairs was brought to my attention by the detailed report submitted by His Excellency Muhammad Safwat al-Saqqa Amini, the Assistant Secretary general of the Muslim World League, about the proceedings of the Second Islamic Conference of the Union of Muslim Societies in America and Canada (Detroit, February 3-4, 1978). The report touched on the subject of the laying out and burial of Muslim dead in a way contrary to Islamic Law, which is often due to the ignorance of some Muslims of the correct Islamic pro-

cedure in this respect, a procedure which should under circumstances be influenced by the practices common in western societies dominated by a materialistic way of life, in the manner described in the report.

In view of the extreme importance of this matter, and since it cannot be dealt with satisfactorily by an individual, I submitted the report to the Supreme World Council for Mosques in order that a joint decision on the issue could be reached. At the same time, I felt obliged to write this booklet in the hope that it will provide a simple outline of Muslim funeral rites which can be understood and put into practice by every Muslim reader living outside the Islamic world and especially those Muslims who live in the United States.

I have tried to be concise, and have chosen to present the point upon which all four orthodox schools of Law agree; I leave my colleagues the Imans and missionaries of Muslim communities abroad to deal with the matter in greater detail in their preaching, and to set up training courses later if necessary.

I know that to read about a subject is not the same as receiving personal instructions; therefore if the reader finds any point difficult to understand, I should appreciate it if he would communicate comments or his difficulties to me so that I can elucidate the point in question fully.

I am convince that the problem of funeral rites for the dead cannot be separated from the need to special cemeteries for Muslims in America. I shall direct my

efforts to find a solution to this problem, and have already asked the Union of Muslim Societies in U.S.A. and Canada to take the initiative in promoting a plan to provide Muslim cemeteries, specially in view of the increasing numbers of Muslims in these countries.

This booklet is also to be translated into English, French and Spanish so as to be generally useful. When a second edition is published, I hope to incorporate in it answers to the questions raised by readers.

May Allah accept this work as a sincere effort in the cause of Islam, and enable our brother Muslims to benefit from it.

May Allah bless and give peace to our Prophet Muhammad, to his Family and his Companions.

Allah keep you all,

Muhammad Ali Al-Harakan
Secretary General of the
Muslim World League

*In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
Cling fast to the rope of Allah and be not dispersed.*

FUNERAL REGULATIONS IN ISLAM

Praise be to Allah «Who created life and death to test which of us is best in conduct,» and Who «made the world a receptable for both the living and the dead» among us. Blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the last of the prophets.

Allah the Most Blessed and Exalted, has honoured mankind from among all His creatures, and among mankind, He has favoured the Muslim believer, distinguishing him from the rest by the bestowal of special privileges, and conferring honour on him both during his life and after his death. For just as the Muslim is welcomed into this world at birth by the purification of his body and by joyful exclamations of «There is no god but Allah» and «Allah is most great», and the face of the earth is spread before him as a dwelling, so also is he bidden farewell at death by the washing and shrouding of his body and by prayer over him, and the depths of the earth are made a grave for him, and a cover to preserve his dignity.

Dear reader, since you wish to know those of the rules for funeral rites which pertain to the Muslim at his death and thereafter, ask your questions, and you will receive the answers.

THE DYING MUSLIM

Question: What should we do for someone on the point of death?

Answer: First: Turn him so that he faces in the direction of the Kabba at Makkah. This may be done in one of two ways: either he is placed on his right side with his face towards the Kaaba, which is best; or he is laid on his back with his feet in the direction of the Kaaba and his head raised slightly so that his face is towards the Kaaba.

Second: He should be prompted to say the profession of faith, by someone saying aloud, so that he can hear, «There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.» This should be said gently and soothingly in such a manner that «There is no god but Allah» may be his last words, but should not be repeated in case the dying person is disquieted.

Third: That member of the dying man's family whom he loves most and who will be gentlest with him, and is the most Allah-fearing, should be at his side to help him turn his thoughts to Allah the Exalted, and to remind him to repent of his sins and to make his last testamentary injunctions.

Fourth: Menstruating women, women during the fortyday period after child-birth, persons in a state of major ritual impurity, and all things abhorrent to angels, such as musical instruments and other means of diversion, should be kept away from the dying person, and any sweet-smelling substance may be placed by him.

Fifth: Many prayers, both for the dying person and for those present, should be offered up, and the Qur'an, especially Surat Yasin, should be recited, though the reciter must recite inaudibly so as not to disturb the dying person. However, as soon as he has died, all recitation should cease in his presence, since there is no attestation for any such practice in the *Sunna* (the body of reported acts and sayings of the Prophet), nor did the early Muslims do this.

Sixth: It is recommended that whoever is with the dying person should help him to turn his thoughts of Allah the Exalted, and to the good deeds he performed during his life, so that he may anticipate the favour of his Lord, great be His majesty; since Allah the Blessed and Exalted has said, according to a sacred tradition: «I am as my servant expects to find Me.»

Question: What should be done for the deceased after his death has been ascertained and before he is washed?

Answer: First: His eyes are closed.

Second: His lower jaw is bound to his head so that it does not sag.

Third: Something suitable is placed on his abdomen so that it does not become inflated.

Fourth: Straight after death, the deceased's joints should be loosened up, if this is possible, otherwise it is not necessary. This is done as follows: the forearms are flexed back to the upper arms, the upper arms to the sides of the body, and likewise the lower legs to the

things, and the thighs to the abdomen. This is to ensure that the body does not stiffen, thus facilitating the washing and shrouding of it.

Fifth: The deceased is raised slightly from the ground, and turned to face the Kaaba.

Sixth: He is undressed and covered with a sheet which should conceal the whole of his body.

Seventh: Haste must be made to pay his debts.

Eight: It is commendable to inform people of the death so that they may attend the funeral. This must be done without raising the voice in lament, as that was how people used to announce a death in the days of paganism before the coming of Islam.

Ninth: It is forbidden to raise the voice in lament, to wail, to beat one's cheeks, to tear one's garments and so forth, although there is no objection to quiet weeping for the deceased as long as it is not accompanied by any of the above-mentioned actions. The mourner must bear himself patiently, and look for his reward in the Hereafter, until such time as Allah consoles him and recompenses him for the calamity.

Tenth: Out of respect for the deceased, it is commendable to make haste in preparing him for burial and in shrouding him.

WASHING THE DEAD

Question: What is the ruling about the washing of the deceased?

Answer: Washing the dead Muslim is a religious duty, by consensus of Muslim opinion, and the performance of this duty is a collective obligation; that is, as long as someone performs it, the rest are exempt.

Question: What are the qualifications which the person who washed a dead Muslim must fulfil?

Answer: First: He must be an adult Muslim, in full possession of his senses.

Second: He should form the resolve of carrying out the washing of the deceased.

Third: He should be honest, trustworthy, and well-acquainted with the rules for the washing of the dead, so that he can carry out the washing in accordance with the *Sunna* (the body of reported acts and sayings of the Prophet). He should not make public any of the deceased's imperfections, but conceal any shortcoming that he observes.

Question: To whom may the washing of the deceased be entrusted?

Answer: First: The fittest person to wash and shroud the deceased is whomever the deceased himself chose; then; in order of preference, the deceased's father, his grandfather, his closest male relative among his agnates, and then his closest male relative on his mother's

side. It is also permissible for his wife to wash him.

Second: The fittest person to wash a woman, in order of preference, is first her mother, then her grandmother, then her closest female relative. It is also permissible for the husband to wash his dead wife.

Third: If the deceased is a young boy, women may wash him, if a young girl, men may wash her.

Forth: If a woman dies, and only men are present, none of whom is her husband, then one of these alien men must cleans her with sand, covering his hand so as not to touch her naked body. Similarly, if a man dies among women none of whom is his wife, then an alien woman must cleanse him with sand using a covering over her hand.

Question: Which dead must be washed?

Answer: First: The deceased must be a Muslim, since an unbeliever is not washed.

Second: The deceased must not be an aborted foetus: if the foetus is born dead it is not washed.

Third: Enough of the deceased's body must be present.

Fourth: The deceased should not have been slain in battle, killed while upholding the word of Allah, since if he is a martyr in such a battle, he is not washed.

Fifth: Clean water must be available, and if this cannot be procured, the deceased must not be washed; he must be cleansed with sand instead.

Question: What is the ruling about the washing of a

pilgrim to Makkah, who is in a state of ritual consecration?

Answer: A deceased pilgrim is washed with water, but nothing sweetly-smelling should be brought near him, nor should his head be covered, because on the Day of Resurrection, he will be resurrected as a pilgrim.

Question: What is the ruling about the washing of one who is martyred in battle for Islam?

Answer: A martyr in battle is not washed: his weapons, his belt and everything except his clothes are removed, and he is then buried in the clothes in which he was slain. It is not wrong to shroud him without his clothes, but it is better for his clothes not to be removed. Also no funeral prayer is performed over the body of a man slain in battle; he is buried without prayer, just as it was commanded by the Prophet, upon whom be blessings and peace, according to the tradition of Jabir, in which it is related that the Prophet ordered that the martyrs of the battle of Uhud be buried all bloodstained as they were, and he did not have them washed, nor did he pray over them. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

Question: How is the deceased washed?

Answer: First: When the washing is begun, the deceased must be covered from his navel to his knees.

Second: The deceased must be washed in a secluded, private place.

Third: The washer winds a cloth round his hand, and with this he cleans away any impurities from the body of the deceased.

Fourth: He then takes a clean cloth and washes the rest of the body, and presses the abdomen lightly, unless the deceased is a pregnant woman. It is recommended to have incense or another sweet-smelling substance at hand, so that no offensive smell be perceptible.

Fifth: The head of the deceased should be raised slightly so that the washing water with any exudations from the body flows down and does not run back towards the head.

Sixth: The washer inserts two fingers wetted with water between the deceased's lips and cleans his teeth, then he inserts them in his nostrils and cleans them. Then he performs the ritual ablutions on the deceased just as if for prayer, except that water should not enter the deceased's mouth or nose.

Seventh: Water is poured on to the body, and first the right side is washed back and front, to the feet, then the left side washed in the same way. The washer should begin by washing the deceased's hair and beard.

Eighth: The deceased is washed with water and powdered lotus-tree leaves, or with pure water, or with any substance which cleanses the body, such as soap. Some sweet-smelling substance, such as camphor, should be put in the water of the final washing.

Ninth: Out of respect for the deceased, the washer should always be gentle in turning over the body, and in rubbing the limbs, pressing the abdomen, loosening up the joints and in everything else he does.

Tenth: The washing of the deceased once all over is a religious duty. However the *Sunna* of the Prophet prescribes the repetition of the washing an odd number of times.

Eleventh: If any impurity is discharged from the body of the deceased after it has been washed, and clings to the body, it must be removed and the body must be rewashed an odd number of times, up to five or seven times over. However, if the impurity is discharged after the body has been placed in the shroud, the washing is not repeated, but the impurity is removed.

Twelfth: The body of the deceased is dried with a cloth after the washing in order to avoid wetting the shroud.

Thirteen: When the washing is finished, the hair and beard of the deceased are scented with any sweet-smelling substance except saffron, and those parts of the body upon which one rests during prostration in prayer are also scented, that is the forehead, the nose, the hands, the knees and the feet. Likewise scent is placed on the ears and in the armpits. It is preferable that the scent be camphor.

THE SHROUDING OF THE DEAD

Question: What is the ruling about the shrouding of the dead?

Answer: The shrouding of a dead Muslim, other than a martyr slain in battle, is a religious duty by consensus of Muslim opinion, and the performance of this duty is a collective obligation: as long as someone performs it, the rest are exempt. The expenses of the deceased's shrouding, preparation for burial, and burial must be paid out of that part of the deceased's private assets on which nobody has any claim. If the deceased has no assets from which these expenses may be paid, his shroud be provided by whoever had to support him while he was alive. If whoever supported him cannot afford this expense, the shroud is paid for out of the Muslim public treasury, and, failing that, the responsibility devolves on those Muslims collectively who can afford the shrouding, preparation for burial, and burial expenses of the deceased.

Question: What is a man's shroud like?

Answer: A man is shrouded in three white winding-sheets none of these being a shift or a turban. The shrouding may also be done with two sheets only, and the least number of sheets which will suffice for shrouding is one, on condition that it covers the whole of the body.

Question: What is a child's shroud like?

Answer: A child is shrouded in one winding-sheet; however there is no objection to shrouding him in three.

Question: How is a man shrouded?

Answer: First: The shrouds are spread out one on top of each other, after having been perfumed with incense, and the final winding-sheet should be the longest and widest.

Second: The deceased, covered with a sheet is lifted, laid out upon the shrouds, and perfumed with incense.

Third: The edge of the top winding-sheet is folded over the deceased's right side, then the other edge over his left side; the second and third winding-sheets are treated in the same way.

Fourth: These winding-sheets are fastened in place round the deceased, and unfastened only when he is placed in the grave.

Fifth: If no sheet big enough to cover the entire body of the deceased can be found, then the head should be covered, and grass or paper or such like should be placed over the legs. If nothing except what suffices to cover the deceased's private parts is available, then these alone are covered.

If the slain are many, and there are not enough shrouds, then two or three men may be shrouded in one winding-sheet and buried in one grave, as was done with the martyrs slain at the Battle of Uhud, may Allah be pleased with them.

Question: What is a woman's shroud like?

Answer: A woman is shrouded in five white garments, which are: a shirt a waist-wrapper, a winding-sheet, a

head-veil, and a loin-cloth to bind the upper part of her legs. If these are not available, she must be shrouded in whatever suffices to cover her body, as was described under shrouding of a man.

Question: How is a woman shrouded?

Answer: First: The shrouds are spread out in order, then the deceased, covered with a sheet, is lifted, laid out on the shrouds, and perfumed with incense.

Second: The loin-cloth is bound round her upper legs.

Third: The waist-wrapper is tied in place.

Fourth: She is clothed in the shirt.

Fifth: Her hair is plaited into three plaits hanging down her back.

Sixth: She is clothed in the head-veil.

Seventh: She is wrapped in the winding-sheet, which is fastened in place and unfastened only when she is placed in the grave.

THE FUNERAL PRAYER

Question: What is the ruling about the funeral prayer?

Answer: The performance of the funeral prayer is a religious duty, by consensus of Muslim opinion. It is a collective obligation: as long as it is performed by one Muslim, the rest are exempt.

Question: Who is the fittest to perform the the funeral prayer over the deceased?

Answer: The fittest person to pary over the deceased is whomsoever the deceased himself chose, provided that he is not immoral or a heretic. After that, in order of preference: the ruler or his deputy, then the deceased's father, his grandfather, or great-grandfather, then the deceased's son, his grandson or his great-grandson, then this closest male relative among his agnates.

Question: Describe the funeral prayer.

Answer: Frist: You form the resolve of performing the funeral prayer over the dead man or woman or child, and this resolve should be expressed from the heart.

Second: The formula «Allah is most great» is used four times in the prayer: The first is upon beginning the prayer, and after it you recite the *Fatiha* (the opening chapter of the Qur'an) alone. Then you raise your hands while you say the second «Allah is most great», and after this you recite prayer of Abraham, as follows: «O Allah bless Muhammad and his family, as You blessed Abraham and his family: You are the Benign, the Exalted. Grant You benediction to Muhammad

and to his family, as You granted it to Abraham and his family; You are the Benign, the Exalted.» Then you raise your hands and say the third «Allah is most great», after which you pray for the deceased, using the traditional prayer, as follows: «O Allah, grant forgiveness to our living and our dead, our present ones and our absent ones, our young and our old, our men and our women. O Allah, to whomsoever of us You give life, let it be as a Muslim, and whomsoever of us You take unto You, let it be as one of the Faithful. O Allah, deprive us not of the recompense for our departed one, and do not subject us to trial as a result of his death.» It is also permissible to use prayers other than those quoted here. Then you raise your hands while you say the fourth «Allah is most great», and there after you maintain a short silence, or else you may repeat: «O Allah, deprive us not of the recompense for our departed one, and do not subjects usto trial as a result of his death.» Then you say the closing formula of prayer once, and with this the funeral prayer is ended.

Third: The practice laid down by the *Sunna* of the Prophet is that the funeral prayer be performed in a group if a number of Muslims are present; this is done as follows: the *imam* or prayer leader stands in front, and those present pray in three rows behind him; this is the recommended way.

Question: If anyone wishing to join in the prayer is late and misses one «Allah most great» or more, what should he do?

Answer: He joins in the group prayer following the *imam*, and when the *imam* finishes with the words «Peace be upon you», he completes his prayer by reciting the sections he missed, in accordance with the description given above.

Question: What prayer should be used if the deceased is a child?

Answer: The prayer for a child is the same as that for a man, except that after the third «Allah is most great», instead of the request for Allah's forgiveness for the deceased, the following prayer is said: «O Allah, make him a precursor to lead the way for his parents, and make him a recompense and a treasure laid up for them.»

CARRYING THE BIER

Question: How should the funeral procession be carried out?

Answer: The funeral procession should proceed swiftly, for the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, said, «Convey the deceased swiftly, for if he was a good man, then you are taking him to good things, and if he was not, then you should lower the evil from your shoulders as soon as possible.» (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

Question: What is the ruling about whether the bier should be followed?

Answer: Following the bier is a practice attested to in the *Sunna* of the Prophet, and it may be done in one of three ways:

First: The deceased is prayed over, and then one may leave.

Second: The bier is followed to the grave, and those present wait until the deceased has been buried, and then depart.

Third: Those present wait after the burial, and pray for Allah forgiveness for the deceased, and request Him to strengthen him in his faith, and pray mercy for his soul. This is the way which will be most rewarded by Allah.

Question: How should the follower of a bier behave?

Answer: First: He should be humble and pay heed to his own end and to his duties; he should take warning from death and from the fate of the dead. He should keep

repeating the name of Allah and praying for the deceased without raising his voice, and he should not speak of worldly things or allow himself to be distracted by laughter and such like.

Second: It is recommended that he should not seat himself until the deceased is lowered to the ground. But there is no objection to anyone who precedes the bier sitting down before the bier arrives.

Third: It is reprehensible for any of the followers of the bier to ride; if however someone cannot walk and is of necessity obliged to ride, then the *Sunna* of the Prophet is that he rides behind the procession.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Question: What is the grave like?

Answer: First: The grave should reach the depth of a man's chest, and it should preferably be well-made and large.

Second: The *Sunna* is that a niche should be made in a side-wall of the grave, as was done in the grave of the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace. This niche is a hollow which is dug out at the bottom of the grave in the side of the wall which faces the Kaaba, and the deceased is placed in it.

Third: If a niche cannot be made, then a trench is dug in the ground for the deceased. This trench is dug in the floor of the grave, and after the deceased has been placed in it, is roofed over so that no earth falls upon the body,

Fourth: The deceased must be buried in a Muslim cemetery unless this is impossible. However it is commendable that a martyr slain in battle be buried wherever he was killed if this is possible, as was done with those martyred at the Battle of Uhud, may Allah be pleased with them.

Question: How is the deceased buried in the grave?

Answer: First: It is commendable to put the deceased into his grave from the direction where his feet will be, if that is feasible.

Second: It is commendable to cover a woman's grave with a sheet.

Third: A woman is placed in her grave by a male relative within the forbidden degrees of marriage, or if that is not possible, by any old men present who are capable of carrying out the burial. Male relatives within the forbidden degrees of marriage are those who were permitted to see the woman while she was alive, and who were allowed to accompany her on journeys.

Fourth: The deceased is placed in the niche on his right side with his face in the direction of the Kaaba. He should be placed close to the wall so that he does not fall on his face, and be supported by a pile of earth behind him so that he does not roll over on to his back.

Fifth: Whoever places him in the grave says, «In the name of Allah, and in the faith of the Prophet of Allah.»

Sixth: The fastenings of the shroud at his head and feet are undone.

Seventh: Once the deceased has been placed in the grave, a wall of mud bricks is erected next to him, the interstices of which are stopped with mud to prevent any earth from falling on him. Instead of mud brick, canes or such like may be used.

Eighth: It is commendable to sprinkle a little dust over the grave three times, after which the earth is heaped over it.

Question: What is done to the grave after the burial?

Answer: First: The surface of the grave should be raised a hand's breadth from the ground, so that it will be

recognized as a grave and thus passers-by will take care not to tread upon it, and will pray for Allah mercy upon the owner of the grave.

Second: There is no harm in marking the grave with a stone or such-like to show that it is a grave.,

Third: It is better to make the surface of the grave convex than to make it flat.

Fourth: It is forbidden to build any structure over the grave, or to plaster it, since this was a pre-Islamic practice.

Fifth: It is reprehensible to sit on or lean against a grave, and seeking sanctuary among the graves is forbidden.

Sixth: It is not permissible to erect mosques over graves nor to light lamps over them, for the Prophet, upon whom be blessings and peace, said, «May Allah curse women who visit the graves and those who erect mosques and light lamps over them» (related by Abu Dawud), and also «May Allah curse the Jews; they used the graves of their prophets as places of worship.» (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

Question: What is the ruling about the visiting of graves?

Answer: The visiting of graves is commendable for men, since there is a tradition from the Prophet which commands the visiting of graves because this makes one think of the Hereafter. But it is reprehensible for women, because of the tradition «Allah curse, women who visit the graves» mentioned above.

It is commendable that a visitor to the graves say «Peace be upon you. O believers and Muslims who dwell here; we shall, Allah willing, be joining you. We ask Allah to grant well-being to us and to you.» It is also recommended to pray for forgiveness and mercy for the dead.

However it is absolutely forbidden to ask the dead to answer one's prayers, or to invoke their aid, or to solicit their intercession, and stroking the grave with one's hand, circumambulating it and similar superstitious practices are also forbidden; all these are abominable and heretical actions which lead to idolatry and to the denial of the absolute unity of Allah, which is the creed which Allah sent His prophets and apostles to announce, upon them be blessings and peace.

Question: What is the ruling about the offering of condolences to a bereaved Muslim?

Answer: According to the *Sunna* of the Prophet, condolences are offered to the bereaved for up to three days and nights after the death. The formula used is «May Allah make your reward abundant and your solace great, and grant forgiveness to the departed,» to which the reply is «May Allah hear your prayer, and have mercy upon us and upon you.»

Question: What is the ruling about the common practices of arranging a funeral celebration and special gatherings for mourning?

Answer: The common customs of holding a gathering during which the Qur'an is recited for three nights

following the death, and of arranging a mourning celebration and special gatherings on the day of the death, or on the third day after it, or on the fortieth day, or on the anniversary of the death, are all abominable and heretical practices which people have introduced, and have no basis whatsoever in the Qur'an, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, or in the practices of the early Muslims, may Allah the Exalted have mercy upon them.

To close, we ask Allah, the Blessed and the Exalted, to strengthen us in the life this world and the next by the never-changing World, and to bring us to life in the faith of Islam and the *Sunna*, and to take us unto Him again in the same, and to enroll us among the numbers of His pious worshippers. He is the Hearer and Answerer of all prayers.

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