

FUNERAL RITES IN ISLAM (PART 2 OF 3): THE FUNERAL PRAYER AND BURIAL

Rating: 2.5

Description: What should be done immediately after death and by whom?

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In part 1 we learned that the religion of Islam upholds the rights of the dead and the dying. Death should not be a stranger to us and Muslims are encouraged to remember death even in the midst of life. Death is an ever present, a part of everybody's life and the simple procedures set by Islam ensure that the dying and dead are treated with the upmost respect and gentleness.

Immediately after death

Immediately after death, those in attendance should gently close the eyes of the deceased and say the simple supplication for those afflicted by a calamity. To God we belong and unto Him is our return.^[1] If the deceased did not clear his debts before dying now is the time to pay his debts from his own wealth or from the wealth of family, relatives or friends. This is an important matter. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, encouraged the believers to pay the debts of the deceased. As mentioned in part 1, *a believer's soul remains in suspense until all his debts are paid off.*

The entire body of the deceased should be covered, except for the one who dies in a state of *Ihraam* - that is, whilst performing pilgrimage (Hajj or Umrah), in which case the head and face should not be covered. It is permissible to kiss the deceased. We know that when Prophet Muhammad died, his best friend leaned over and kissed him on the forehead between the eyes saying, 'O my Prophet, O my best friend'.

When hearing the news of a person's death a believer should try to remain steadfast and patient. Greif at the loss of a loved one, friend or relative is normal and weeping for the dead is allowed. However wailing, shrieking, beating the chest, and pulling the hair or clothes are not permissible.

Finally, immediately after death, those in attendance should hasten to prepare the body for washing, shrouding and burial. Islam has set out strict and comprehensive instructions for these procedures and nowadays they are usually done by qualified Muslims in the mortuary section of an Islamic centre, mosque or government mortuary.

Preparing the deceased for burial is the responsibility of the Muslim community. The deceased body is handled with respect, and great care and gentleness. The washing and preparation for burial are usually performed by those of the same gender as the deceased.

The funeral prayer

A prayer service should be held for every dead Muslim, young or old, even infants who have lived who died before their birth. Women are permitted to attend the funeral prayer just as they are permitted to perform other non obligatory prayers. In order to keep the time between death and burial to a minimum this should be held in the same city or area in which the person died. It is not necessary for the body to be sent to another country.

The funeral prayer should be performed in congregation, it is a rewarding act and believers should not hesitate to participate in any funeral prayer even those of people not known to them. Prophet Muhammad encouraged this saying that whoever attended the funeral prayer until it was finished would earn rewards as hefty as a great mountain [\[2\]](#). The number of attendees at the funeral prayer also brings great reward to the deceased. Prophet Muhammad said that if a Muslim dies and forty pious Muslims pray for him in the funeral prayer God will accept their prayers.[\[3\]](#)

After the funeral prayer the deceased should be taken to the Muslim cemetery or the Muslim section of the local cemetery. Carrying a coffin and accompanying it to the burial ground is a recommended and rewardable act.

The Burial

Islam has a unique style of building graves and cemeteries that is characterized by simplicity, and humility. All Muslims, rich, poor, king or commoner are all buried following the same procedure. Burying the deceased in the coffin is not allowed unless there is a requirement that must be followed in a particular area or country.

The burial should be done as soon as possible after death; however there are specific times when it is prohibited to bury the dead. They are, from sunrise until the sun has risen, when the sun is at its highest and, from when the sun begins to pale until it is fully set. After the burial it is permissible for the believers to stay in the graveyard making supplication as this is the time when the deceased is being questioned by the angels.

In part 3 we will discuss what happens after the burial, particularly the mourning period and condolences. We will also look briefly at the funeral rites and practices of other religions and compare them to the simplistic yet beautiful Islamic methods and procedures.

[1]

Saheeh Muslim

[2]

Saheeh Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

[3]

Ibid.

The web address of this article:

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