



Preparing and burying the dead in non-Muslim countries

Fatwa no. 9024

Q: Your Eminence knows the problems and difficulties that Muslims face in non-Muslim countries, to live their lives and carry out the affairs of their life and death according to the true path of Islam. One of the problems that Muslims suffer from in the USA is preparing and burying the dead in the way prescribed by Islam.

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Some American Muslims have requested the authorities there to facilitate the special procedures for washing and burying the dead Muslims in the Islamic way. In order to achieve this goal, Muslims have to get a Fatwa (legal opinion issued by a qualified Muslim scholar) from an authorized body to prove to those in authority that these procedures are required by the Islamic Shari'ah (Law). The Constitution of the United States has a provision for freedom of worship and religion, so a request on this basis is likely to be beneficial and fruitful. We hope that you will write and tell us what is required and obligatory to be done for a deceased Muslim when preparing and burying them. Could you also please write what is desirable to be done in this regard, and, if you could translate all of this into English, and seal and ratify it so as to be authoritative, this would be much better.

A: When a Muslim dies, those around them should close their eyes, tie their jaw closed, cover them, and hurry to prepare them. They should start by performing the Islamically prescribed Ghusl (ritual bath) by washing their hands, cleansing their private parts with water (Istinja'), and then perform Wudu' (ablution) for them the same way it is done for Salah (Prayer). They should then wash their head and beard [for a man. ed] with water and Sidr (lote tree) leaves, or something similar, such as

soap or saltwort. Then water should be poured over their right side and their left side, washing twice or three times. If the body is not purified yet, this washing may be increased to five or seven times. Some camphor may be added to the water in the last washing, if possible, and perfume applied to the armpits, inner thighs and places of Sujud (prostration). If perfume is applied all over the body, this will be better. It is also permissible to wash the dead body just once. As for women, their hair should be made into three braids at the back. After this, the body should be shrouded in three white pieces of cloth - not including a Qamis (long shirt) or turban - that should be wrapped around them. It is permissible to shroud a body in a Qamis, Izar (lower garment), and a wrapper, or just a wrapper only.

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As for women, they should be shrouded in five pieces of cloth including a chemise, veil covering to the waist, lower garment, and two wrappers, but it is permissible for them to be shrouded in just one wrapper. The Islamically prescribed Funeral Prayer should be offered over the deceased starting with the Takbir (saying: "Allahu Akbar [Allah is the Greatest]"), then reciting Surah Al-Fatiyah (the opening chapter of the Qur'an), then saying (the second) Takbir, then invoking peace and blessing on the Prophet (peace be upon him), then saying (the third) Takbir, and then supplicating for the deceased. It is better to recite the transmitted Du'a' (supplication), which says: ("O Allah! Forgive our living and our dead, those who are present among us and those who are absent, our young and our old, our males and our females. O Allah! Whoever You keep alive, keep him alive in Islam, and whoever You cause to die, cause him to die with Iman (Faith). O Allah! Do not deprive us of his reward and do not let us go astray after this. O Allah! Forgive him (her) and have mercy on him, keep him safe and sound and pardon him, honour the place where he settles and make his entrance wide; wash him with water and snow and hail, and cleanse him of sins and misdeeds as a white garment is cleansed of dirt. O Allah! Give him a house better than his house and a family better than his family. O Allah! Admit him to Paradise and protect him from the trial of the grave and the torment of Hellfire.") After this, (the fourth) Takbir is said and one Taslim (salutation of peace ending the Prayer) is offered to the right. It is not permissible to follow the deceased with lights or to raise voices in Du'a' or saying Tahlil (saying: "La ilaha illa Allah [There is no god except Allah]"). The deceased should be put in a Lahd (a crevice on the side of a grave facing the direction faced for Prayer) if it is possible or in a Shaq (a rectangular hole in the bottom of a grave in which the body is buried). After leveling the grave, it is desirable for the attendees to stand for a few moments, asking forgiveness for the deceased and praying for them to be firm.

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It is not permissible to delay a burial, except for the time taken to prepare the deceased or to wait for their relatives or neighbors to come, if the time taken is not long, falling within the ordinarily acceptable limits. This is because the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ("Make haste with the funeral (dead body)...") It is not permissible to hold a funeral ceremony for the deceased and set up pavilions for mourners, memorial gatherings, or anything similar, such as the so-called consolation rites. Those who could not attend the Funeral Prayer may offer it at the grave of the deceased, if they are in the city where the deceased is buried, within a period of two months, because (The Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed at the grave of Um Sa'd one month after her burial.) It is not permissible to bury a Muslim in Christian cemeteries or those of other disbelievers, such as the Jews, communists, or idol worshipers.

May Allah grant us success! May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and Companions!

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