# SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE FUNERAL RITES IN ISLAM: FROM THE POINT OF DEATH TO THE BURIAL

By Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid Alam (May Allāh forgive him and his parents)

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على المبعوث رحمةً للعالمين، نبيّنا محمد وعلى آله وأصحابه ومن تبعهم بإحسان إلى يوم الدين

#### **Death is Inevitable:**

One reality that each and every person must face is death. Allāh (جَارَيَكِ) has stated, "Every soul shall taste death." and He said, "Verily, the death from which you flee will meet you."

<sup>1.</sup> Āli 'Imrān 3:185.

<sup>2.</sup> Al-Jumu'ah 62:8.

### At the Point of Death:

At the point of death, one should encourage the dying Muslim to have good thoughts and expectations of Al-lāh (سُبْحَانُوْتِعَالَى). The Prophet (صُالِسُهُ عَنْدُوْتِعَالَى) said, "None of you should die except that he has good thoughts towards Allāh, the Most High." The Muslim should be patient and seek Allāh's reward. One should prompt the dying person to utter as his final words 'there is none worthy of worship except Allāh', as the Messenger (صَالَّا الْمُعَالَيْدُونِكُمُّ) said, "Prompt your dying ones to say: lā

<sup>1.</sup> An-Nisā 4:115.

<sup>2.</sup> Sahīh Muslim.

ilāha illallāh."¹ This is not to be done continually, it is done such that they are the last words uttered. The Messenger (مَا اللهُ عَلَيْهِ عَلَيْهِ ) also said, "Anyone who dies without associating anything in worship with Allāh enters Paradise."²

So a Muslim should die upon the pure and sincere worship of Allāh, not calling upon the Prophet, or those in their graves for aid, salvation or forgiveness.

Islām should be presented to a dying non-Muslim, as this is a praiseworthy invitation and in accordance with Prophetic tradition. The Messenger (with prophetic tradition) used to invite non-Muslims to Islām whilst they were in good health, in sickness and upon their deathbeds as he did with his own uncle, Abu Tālib, as this is the last opportunity to invite them to the worship of their Lord and Creator.

Once a Muslim has died, his eyes should be closed and the entire body should be covered. It is obligatory to make haste in washing, shrouding and the burial, as the Prophet (مَمَالَلُهُ عَلَيْهُ وَسَالًا) stated, "Hurry with performing the funeral."

<sup>1.</sup> لا إله إلا الله Sahīh Muslim.

<sup>2.</sup> Sahīh Muslim.

<sup>3.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

<u>False practices</u> at the point of death which have no proof from the Qur'ān and Sunnah must be avoided, such as reciting Sūrah Yāsīn over the dying or dead person as this practice is based upon a weak *hadīth*; turning the bed or body towards the Qiblah; putting a copy of the Qur'ān on the chest; chanting remembrances of Allāh in the presense of the deceased; delaying the burial whilst people arrive to view the deceased; video and photography. It is also not correct to transport the deceased to other countries as this delays the burial and opposes what the Salaf (early generations) were upon.

# **Grieving and Mourning:**

Let the relatives and close ones who have been struck with the calamity of death be patient and beware of saying anything that will cause them to anger their Lord and lose reward. They should remember that Allāh (شَيْنَاتُوْنَاتُ) is just and does not oppress. Whatever He took belongs to Him and whatever He gives belongs to Him. The Prophet (مَا الْمُعْنَاتُونِينَاتُوْنَ) said, "Whoever strikes the cheeks, tears the clothes and calls out with the cries of the days of ignorance is not from us."

<sup>1.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

Wailing, raising voices with grief and tearing clothes is completely forbidden and is a sign of one's displeasure at the decree of Allāh. Allāh's Messenger (took an oath from the believing women that they would not wail and he said, "The one whom the people wail over is punished." That is a serious point to note. There is no doubt that sadness and grief is something which Allāh places in the hearts of those close to the deceased, but one is not allowed to go outside the bounds of Islamic guidance in expressing that grief.

The Prophet (مَالَسُعَلَيْوسَلَةُ) shed tears at the death of his young son and he said, "Crying is a mercy! The eyes shed tears, the heart feels sad, but we do not say except that which pleases our Lord. We are indeed saddened by your departing, O Ibrāhīm." Grief or sadness does not have a time limit, as one may feel sadness for several weeks after a death.

Mourning however is something different. Mourning has been legislated for women for a specified period wherein they withhold from beautification, perfume and displaying outward joy. The Prophet (مَا اللهُ اللهُ اللهُ عَلَيْهُ اللهُ ا

<sup>1.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

<sup>2.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

person for more than three days, except for her husband for whom she mourns four months and ten days." There is no mourning period for men. During this time the wife confines hereself to her husband's home and does not leave except for a need. Her sons and close family should always be at hand to serve her needs such as food, provision and clothing.

## **Condolences:**

The condolence in Islām is an important way of expressing one's support for his fellow Muslim, comforting him and reminding him of Allāh. This can be done whenever the deceased's family is seen and is not restricted to three days. However, the condolence itself must be in accordance to the Sunnah of the Messenger ( ) so as not to displease Allāh and earn His anger. It is from the Prophetic Sunnah to say when one is afflicted by a calamity:

"Innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn." The Muslim knows that everything has an appointed term with Al-

<sup>1.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

<sup>2. &</sup>quot;Verily, we belong to Allāh and unto Him we are returning." (Sahīh Muslim)

<sup>6 |</sup> abukhadeejah.com

lah, and therefore one says,

"Innā lillāhi mā akhadha, wa lahu mā a'tā, wa kullu shay'in indahu bi ajalin musammā." 1

Gentle comforting words of condolence are important when people lose a loved-one, such as:

"To Allāh belongs what He took, and to Him belongs what He gave, and everything with Him has an appointed term. So be patient and anticipate His reward." Some of the early scholars also recommended the following words, or that which resembles them:

<sup>1. &</sup>quot;To Allāh belongs what He took, and to Him belongs what He gave, and everything with Him has an appointed term." (Bukhārī)

<sup>2. &</sup>quot;Innā lillāhi mā akhadha, wa lahu mā a'tā, wa kullu shay'in indahu bi ajalin musammā fal-tasbir wal-tahtasib." (Bukhārī and Muslim)

"A'dhamallāhu ajrak, wa ahsana 'azā-ak wa ghafara li-mayyitik." These words of condolence can be said in the local language as the purpose is to bring comfort.

# A Place for Receiving Guests for Condolences:

As for the family of the deceased establishing a room or a building to receive condolences for a number of days or to prepare food for visitors, then all of this is not permissible and is in fact in opposition to the religious guidance and increases the burden and stress upon the deceased's family.

The Sunnah is to provide food for the family of the deceased whilst they are occupied with the washing, shrouding and the burial. The Prophet (صَالِمُتُعُلِيْوسَلَّةُ) said, "Make food for the family of Ja'far, because they have become occupied [by his death]."

Many people designate a place to receive condolences and to make congregational supplications for the dead. This is an innovated practice that was forbiddenby the Companions of the Prophet (مَرَالِسُمُولِيَّةُولِيَّةُ) one of whom said, "We would consider gathering to visit

<sup>1. &</sup>quot;May Allah magnify your reward, and make perfect your bereavement, and forgive your deceased." (An-Nawawī, Kitāb al-Adhkār)

<sup>2.</sup> Abu Dāwūd.

# the house of the deceased and making food after their burial, both to be from wailing over them."

Shaikh Ibn Uthaimīn (ﷺ) stated that the family of the deceased should not gather to receive condolences. Rather they should close their doors to prevent these gatherings and inform the people that this is a un-Islamic practice. Condolences, can be given when one meets the family of the deceased, or at the funeral prayer. There is no need to gather for the purpose.

From the false practises and innovations that take place immediately after the death are: continuously reciting the Qur'ān; counting the remembrances of Allāh using beads, stones, etc; announcing deaths by cryers or from the minarets; gathering in a place and reciting Sūrah al-Fātihah known as a ma'tam; making congregational supplications with raised hands; wearing specific colours such as black as a sign of grief or mourning.

## Washing the Deceased:

It is important to make haste with the funeral and burial of the deceased. This begins with the washing. In

<sup>1.</sup> From Jarīr Ibn Abdullāh (ﷺ) collected in Al-Musnad of Ahmad 6905, Ibn Mājah 1/490. Also reported as a saying of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb (ﷺ). See Ahkām al-Janā'iz p. 210.

general, men wash men and women wash women, except in the case of spouses, in which case a husband may wash his wife and likewise a wife may wash her deceased husband.<sup>1</sup>

The body should be washed three times, or more if required, so long as it is an odd number using a crushed lotus leaf and water mixture or a soap and water mixture; and the final wash should be using a camphor and water mixture or a perfume and water mixture. During the washing process, the private areas of the body known as the 'awrah' must remain covered with a sheet or towel, and this can be placed on the body and the clothes removed carefully underneath, using scissors if necessary. One should carefully raise the head and shoulders of the deceased, and gently press the stomach to expel any remains still present in the bowels. This should not be done to a woman who was pregnant still carrying a fetus.

One begins by washing the private parts of the deceased using a soapy sponge or cloth, and wearing gloves if possible. Any tied hair is untied, then  $wud\bar{u}$  (ablution) is performed on the deceased:

<sup>1.</sup> Musnad of Imām Ahmad.

<sup>2.</sup> The 'awrah extends from the naval to the knees.

- 1. Say bismillāh.
- 2. Wash mouth and nose without pouring water directly into the mouth or nose. One may moisten a cloth and clean the nose and mouth, including the teeth.
- 3. Wash the whole face.
- 4. Wash the hands up to and including the elbows beginning with the right.
- 5. Wipe the head and ears.
- 6. Wash the feet up to the ankles.

The  $wud\bar{u}$  is now complete. Then the *ghusl* (bathing) is performed, as follows:

- 1. Wash the head times with water and soap.
- 2. Then wash the rest of the body beginning with the right side, then moving to the left.
- 3. This is done three times. The *ghusl* can be increased to five or seven if needed, finishing with an odd number.
- 4. In the final odd wash, use camphor or perfume mixed with water to leave a pleasant fragrance.
- 5. Towel dry the body.
- 6. If the hair is long, comb it and plait into three braids placing it behind the head.

Remember to keep the 'awrah covered throughout.

# **Shrouding the Deceased:**

Now shroud the deceased with three large white sheets, each one large enough to wrap the entire body. Each sheet is wrapped separately over the entire body, including the face and head¹. Use a strip of cloth to tie the shrouds over the head, below the feet and around the mid-section of the deceased. This is done to keep the shroud secure whilst carrying and burying the deceased. Once the body is placed in the grave, these ties can be undone. If the law of the land prevents burial except in a coffin, then the cloth ties are not necessary, unless one fears the shroud slipping away. The shrouding cloth should be perfumed with bukhūr (aloeswood) incense or another perfume before dressing the deceased with it.

Some of the Salaf stated regarding the woman specifically that she should be dressed with a scarf, a shirt, and lower waist sheet (*izār*), then wrapped in two large white sheets that cover her entire body, and tied with ties as stated above. However, that is not an obligation and three large sheets are sufficient.

<sup>1.</sup> The exception to this is the male who dies in a state of *ihrām* for Hajj or 'Umrah whose head is left uncovered.

Sinful innovations that people fall into at this stage include: making loud congregational dhikr; reciting Quranic verses over the deceased; writing on the shrouding cloth; using expensive and ostentatious shrouds; using additional cloth for the private parts; enclosing personal possessions within the shroud.<sup>1</sup>

# The Funeral Prayer (Janāzah):

Once the deceased has been washed and shrouded, he or she should be prayed over and buried as soon as possible. The deceased must not be taken to another place for viewing as this opposes the command of the Messenger of Allāh, "Hurry with the burial." The janāzah can take place in the mosque or in a place designated outside the mosque.

There is no bowing or prostrating in the *janāzah* prayer. It is prohibited to pray or bury the deceased when: i) the sun is rising till it has fully arisen, ii) when it is at the highest point in the sky till it passes midday, iii) and when the sun is setting until it has fully set.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> See Ahkām al-Janā'iz of Shaikh Al-Albānī (رَحَمُهُ اللَّهُ).

<sup>2.</sup> Sahīh al-Bukhārī.

<sup>3.</sup> Sahīh Muslim.

The janāzah is conducted as follows:

- 1. The prayer is led by the *imām* if in a Masjid, reciting silently throughout except for the *takbīrs* (i.e. *Allāhu akbar*) and the *salām* at the end, facing the Qiblah with the body of the deceased in front of him. He stands at the head of a male and at the middle of a female.
- 2. The people line up behind him in rows and follow him as in the regular prayer.
- 3. He begins by saying, "Allāhu akbar" raising the hands and then placing the right hand upon the left on the chest as in the regular prayers.
- 4. He then seeks refuge in Allāh with the words,

"A'ūdhu billāhi minash-shaytānir-rajīm" followed by,

#### "Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim."

5. He recites the first chapter of the Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Fātihah followed by another short Sūrah if he wishes.

الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

(آمين)

6. Then the imām makes *takbīr* for the second time and the people send the peace and salutations upon the two Prophets, Muhammad and Ibrāhīm just as one does at the end of the regular prayer:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدِ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّد وَعَلَى آلَ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى مُحَمَّد وَعَلَى آلَ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مُجِيدٌ

"O Allah, send salāh upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad, as You sent salāh upon

<sup>1.</sup> Meaning: praise the Prophet (صَّالَتَهُ عَلَيْهُ وَسَلَّمٌ) in the highest company of Angels.

Ibrāhīm and the family of Ibrāhim. You are indeed worthy of praise, full of glory. And send blessings upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad as You sent blessings upon Ibrāhīm and the family of Ibrāhīm. You are indeed worthy of praise, full of glory."

7. The third *takbīr* is then made by the imām and the people sincerely supplicate for the deceased. There are many supplications reported in authentic narrations, from them is the authentic supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِحَيِّنَا وَمَيِّتِنَا وَشَاهِدِنَا وَغَائِبِنَا وَصَغِيرِنَا وَكَبِيرِنَا وَكَبِيرِنَا وَدَكُرِنَا وَأُنْثَانَا اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ أَحْيَيْتَهُ مِنَّا فَأَحْيِهِ عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ تَوَفَّيْتَهُ مِنَّا فَتَوفَّهُ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ اللَّهُمَّ لَا تَحْرِمْنَا أَجْرَهُ وَلَا تُضِلَّنَا بَعْدَهُ

"Allāhummaghfir lihayyinā wa mayyitinā wa shāhidinā wa ghā'ibinā wa saghīrinā wa kabīrinā wa dhakarinā wa unthānā. Allāhumma man ahyaitahu minnā fa ahyihi 'alal-islām waman tawaffaitahu minnā fatawaffahu 'alal imān. Allāhumma lā tahrimnā ajrahu walā tudillanā

ba'dahu." Or one can supplicate with:

اللَّهُمَّ عَبْدُكَ وَابْنُ أَمَتِكَ، احْتَاجَ إِلَى رَحْمَتِكَ، وَأَنْتَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْ عَذَابِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ مُسِيْعًا فَزِدْ فِي حَسَنَاتِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ مُسِيْعًا فَزِدْ فِي حَسَنَاتِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ مُسِيْعًا فَتَجَاوَزْ عَنْهُ

"Allāhumma 'abduka wabnu amatika ihtāja ilā rahmatika, wa anta ghaniyyun 'an 'adhābihi, in kāna muhsinan, fa-zid fī hasanātihi, wa in kāna musī'an fatajāwaz 'anhu." If a person has not memorised the supplications, they may supplicate general supplications seeking forgiveness and mercy for the deceased.

8. The fourth and final takbīr is again followed by sup-

<sup>1. &</sup>quot;O Allah forgive our living and our deceased, those present and those absent, our young and our old, our males and females. O Allah whomever you give life to from us, let such live upon Islam and such whose life you take, then take it upon Imān. O Allah, do not prevent us from his reward and do not cause us to go astray after him." (Ibn Mājah)

<sup>2. &</sup>quot;O Allah, Your servant and the son of Your maidservant is in need of Your mercy and You are without need of his punishment. If he was righteous then increase his reward and if he was wicked then look over his sins." (See Ahkām al-Jazā'iaz, p. 125)

plicating for the deceased as above.

9. The prayer is concluded with the *taslīm* which is the saying, "As-salāmu alaikum wa rahmatullāh" as in the regular prayers.

Women should not be prevented from the janāzah prayer but they must not go to the graveyard to bury the deceased. The sinful innovations of the janāzah prayer that some people fall into at this stage include: Chanting remembrances of Allāh in unison loudly as the body is brought into the mosque and after the prayer; taking the body to another location other than the graveyard for people to view the face of the deceased and thus delay the burial; also wailing, lamenting and screaming in grief are all forbidden, as is calling out to Allah asking Him why He has caused a person to die.

#### The Burial:

The Sunnah of the Prophet (المؤلفة) and his Companions (المؤلفة) was to bury the deceased in the graveyard in the land in which he dies and not to transport the body to other lands. The grave should be amongst other Muslim graves, it should be dug deep and wide. It can be dug as a deep rectangular hole with its long side facing Makkah, such that when the body is placed within it, it faces the Qiblah.

At the bottom of the grave, another spacious cavity can be dug in the side closest to the Qiblah, within which the body is placed on its right side facing the Qiblah. Both types of grave were used in the time of Prophethood. The closest male relatives should lower the deceased into the grave - from those who did not have recent sexual relations with his wife in the previous night. The body should be entered lengthwise into the grave from the feet-side of the grave so the head enters the grave area first, and on the right side facing the Qiblah. As the dead person is placed in the grave, one should say, "Bismillāh wa 'alā millati rasūlillāh." The body is then covered with soil. The Prophet once buried a Muslim, and put three hand- صَا لِللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَالًم ) fuls of soil into the grave. The grave should be filled and mounded by approximately a handspan as was done with the grave of the Prophet (صَرَّالِتَهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) himself. The Prophet (صَالَّتَهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَالَّم) finished a burial and said to his Companions, "Ask forgiveness for your brother, ask for steadfastness for him for indeed he is now being questioned." It is permissible to mark the head of the grave with a rock so that it is distinguished for family members who are to be buried in the same

<sup>1.</sup> Abu Dawūd.

## vicinity later.1

**Note:** As for placing wreaths, flowers, twigs<sup>2</sup>, etc on the grave, then all of these are sinful acts that have no proof from the Book and Sunnah, and was not practised by the Companions of the Prophet (مَا اللّهُ عَلَيْكُ عَلَيْكُ اللّهُ عَلَيْكُ عَلَيْكُ اللّهُ عَلَيْكُ عَلِي عَلَيْكُ عَ

We must remember that the Muslims have a distinct method of conducting funerals in accordance to the Prophetic Sunnah. Muslims are commanded <u>not to follow</u> and imitate non-Muslims in their rites and rituals. In this regard there are many authentic narrations from the Prophet (Timber): "Differ from the people of the Scripture...", "Differ from the unbelievers...", "Whoever imitates a people is from them."

<sup>1.</sup> Abu Dawūd.

<sup>2.</sup> Once a branch was placed on two graves by the Prophet (مَالِمُتَابِينَالِينَ). However, that cannot be used as a proof for anyone else after him for the following reasons: a) The Prophet was given knowledge of the Unseen wherein he knew they were both being punished. No one after him has this knowledge of what takes place in the graves. b) This act was specific for the Prophet (مَالَّمُونَالِينَّةُ) as not a single Companion after him did it. c) The placement of the branch was not for decoration or commemoration, unlike the wreaths and flowers of today!

<sup>3.</sup> At-Tirmidhī, Ibn Hibbān and Abu Dawūd.

Allāh's Messenger (مَالَسُتَهُوسَةُ) forbade plastering graves, building structures over them such as Mosques and shrines, making them high and writing upon them.¹ The Prophet commanded his son-in-law, 'Ali (عَوَالَيْكَةُ) saying, "Do not leave a statue in a house except that you demolish it and do not leave a grave except that you level it."²

Common innovations that must be avoided: Reciting Sūrah al-Fātihah at the graveside; gathering in a house before or after the burial to supplicate for the deceased<sup>3</sup>; wailing at the graveside; hanging pictures at the grave; planting flowers on the grave, placing lights and candles at the grave; organising gatherings, commemorations and anniversaries after the funeral.

#### After the Burial:

It is legislated to visit the graveyard so as to be re-

<sup>1.</sup> Sahīh Muslim, Abu Dawūd and Ibn Mājah.

<sup>2.</sup> Sahīh Muslim.

<sup>3.</sup> This is from the customs of the Christians called a "Wake" where relatives and friends gather in the home of the deceased, usually with the body present in a prayer vigil. The family of the deceased provide refreshments for their guests. This alien practice has been introduced into our communities by ignorant people who claim they are mourning the deceased and praying for him!

minded of one's own mortality and to supplicate for the deceased Muslims. This practice is permissible so long as lamenting and wailing is avoided. Women likewise are permitted to visit but they should not do so frequently as stated by the Prophet (مَعَالَمُهُونَامُةُ) in the authentic narrations.

May Allāh have mercy upon the Muslims, and may He guide them to live and die upon Islam and the Sunnah. All praise is to Allah, and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet, his family and all who follow him precisely.

#### End.

The information contained in this booklet is supported by evidences from the Qur'ān, the authentic Sunnah and the statements of the Companions, most of which can be found in the monumental work, Ahkāmul-Janā'iz by the great scholar of hadīth, Al-Albānī (ﷺ), and also in the fatāwa of Shaikh Al-Fawzān, Shaikh Ibn Uthaimīn (ﷺ) and Shaikh Ibn Bāz (ﷺ).

Compiled by Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid Alam, 5th January 2018CE / 18th Rabī' Ath-Thānī 1429AH, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

First Edition.

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(There may remain some typos in this short booklet, so please accept my apologies. You may offer your corrections and comments via abukhadeejah.com under the link to this booklet.)