

## ***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - ISLAMIC FUNERAL RITES AND PRACTICES***

### **QUESTION**

Is post mortem allowed in Islam?

### **ANSWER**

It is not permitted under normal circumstances since the *mayyit* should be treated with respect. According to a *hadith* of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace), "Breaking the bones of a deceased person, is tantamount to breaking his bones when alive." (Reported by Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah). The only exception is when foul play is suspected, and there is a need for criminal investigation. *Maslahali 'aammah* (public interest) outweighs other considerations in this situation.

### **QUESTION**

Can a *mayyit* be transported to another country for burial?

### **ANSWER**

It is preferred that the *mayyit* be buried in the country of death. However, if a person dies while travelling abroad, his body can be transported to his homeland for burial. The body of Caliph Abu Bakr's son was brought to Madinah for burial, although Aishah, the mother of the faithful, expressed displeasure over it, and wished he had been buried at the place of death. It is also reported that (because of some pressing reasons) Jabir b. Abd Allah, one of the Companions of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace), relocated the body of his father six months after burial (*Abu Dawud*).

### **QUESTION**

Are there any special *du 'as* to be recited while bathing a *mayyit*?

### **ANSWER**

There are no prescribed *dua's* to be recited. However one should recite *Bismillaahi arrahmaani raheem* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) when starting *ghusl*. There is no mention anywhere that the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) prescribed any *du 'as* for this occasion.

### **QUESTION**

Is it necessary for someone who has bathed a *mayyit* to bathe himself after?

### **ANSWER**

It is not obligatory for him to make a *ghusl* unless he became unclean in the process of giving *ghusl* i.e. by being sprayed with dirty water). However, *ghusl* is recommended for the person who performed the *ghusl* on the *mayyit*.

## QUESTION

Is the use of perfume recommended for females (in shrouding), especially when we know that women are not allowed to wear perfumes when going out?

## ANSWER

Use of light perfume is recommended for both males and females. The restriction for women to abstain from use of perfume is not applicable in this case. However, by perfume we only mean light scents, which is more commonly known as *'itr*.

## QUESTION

Some people are in the habit of putting make up on females and dressing up the *mayyit* in suits and stuffing the coffins with all kinds of articles. Are these practices desirable or permitted?

## ANSWER

It is clearly forbidden to do so. This is called *israf* (unlawful wastage). The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) has prohibited all sorts of *israf*, especially in funerals. He is reported to have said, "Do not be wasteful in *kafan*, for it rots and decomposes *quickly*." (Reported by Abu Dawud). Abu Bakr, the first caliph, said, "The living is more deserving than a *mayyit*. The shroud is only for pus and blood." (Reprtned by al-Bukhari)

Islam's insistence that funerals be kept simple and free from all kinds of wastage is not accidental. This attitude is derived from Islam's philosophy of life and death. Death in Islam is not the end of "life". The body is dead but the soul survives. After death the *mayyit* does not live in his body, but rather by his soul. This means that the *mayyit's* needs are not material in nature but spiritual. Therefore, those who care for the welfare of the *mayyit*, should spend their wealth in charity on his behalf rather than on unnecessary things.

## QUESTION

If a person missed some *takbeers* of the *Janazah* prayer, how should he make up for them?

## ANSWER

If one missed some *takbeers* of the *Janazah* prayer, his prayer is still valid. He does not have to make up for them.

## QUESTION

What should a person do if he arrives after the *Janazah* has already been performed?

## ANSWER

If a person arrives after the *Janazah* has been performed, he can go to the grave site and perform it there by himself or with others. This permission to pray *Janazah* at the grave site is still valid even if the burial has taken place days or even months before. According to Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) prayed *Janazah* at graves after one day, three days and even after a month. He did not place any time restrictions on this.

## QUESTION

Can burial be delayed in order to wait for relatives to arrive?

## ANSWER

The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) said, "It is not permitted for a *mayyit* to be kept waiting for burial among his *farnily*." (Reported by *Abu Dawud*). He also said, "Hurry to bury the dead without *delay*." (Reported by *al-Bukhari, Muslim and others*) Therefore, it is not within the spirit of Islam to delay funerals unnecessarily. However, a moderate delay to wait for a very close relative is allowed, provided that the body does not begin to decompose.

## QUESTION

Can *Janazah* be performed on a person who has died in another country?

## ANSWER

According to scholars it is not necessary to pray *Janazah* on someone who died in another country. However, there is an exception if nobody prayed his *Janazah* in the country of his death.

The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) prayed *Janazah* on *Najjashi* (Negus), the emperor of Abyssinia, upon receiving the news of his death. According to Imam Ibn Taymiyah, the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) did so because there was no one around Negus to pray his *Janazah*.

Since there are no other reports of the Prophet praying on anyone else who died in another country, it can be concluded that this was not one of his common practices. However, there are scholars who see no harm in praying *Janazah* for someone who died elsewhere, although a *du'a* is preferable.

## QUESTION

Should one pray *Janazah* over a child who has died during birth?

## ANSWER

Some scholars are of the opinion that one should only pray if the child was alive at birth. In other words, they do not prescribe *Janazah* over a still-born.

There are other scholars who prescribe *Janazah* on all children, regardless of their state at birth. This opinion is based on a report from Ibn Umar that the Prophet said, "Pray on the still-born, and beg Allah for forgiveness on behalf of his parents." (Reported by *Abu Dawud*)

In light of various other reports with regards to the above, some scholars have aptly concluded that it is not obligatory to pray over a child (that died during birth).

## QUESTION

Is pouring water on the grave after burial a recommended practice?

## ANSWER

There is no mention of this practice in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet or traditions and customs of the early Muslims (including the four *imams*)-- whose example all Muslims are supposed to follow. As Muslims, we must not take away or add anything to the established rites of Islam, including funerals. The Prophet said, "Any innovation which is not initially prescribed in our religion, should be *rejected*." (*Reported by al-Bukhari*), May Allah help us to keep the pristine purity of Islam, and save ourselves from innovations in religion, for "every innovation is a deviation and every deviation leads to the fire of *hell*." (*Reported by Muslim*)

## QUESTION

Is reading of the Qur'an necessary before or after burial?

## ANSWER

The *Sunnah* is to read the Qur'an before death. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) is reported to have said, "Read (*Surah*) *Yaseen* in the presence of those who are *dying*." (*Reported by Abu Dawud*)

The Qur'an is the source of true healing and salvation for the faithful. Aware of this fact, pious Muslims of the past were in the habit of either reading the Qur'an themselves or asking those around them to read it at the time of their death. One may also read the Qur'an on the grave after burial. The first and the last parts of *Surat al-Baqarah* is especially recommended.

As for gathering people to read the Qur'an after burial, if it is read for a remuneration (payment), then it is definitely undesirable. No reward should be expected from such a practice, since the Qur'an has to be read solely for the pleasure of Allah. Consequently, the *mawayit* will not receive any rewards from this kind of reading.

If, on the other hand, people gather voluntarily and read the Qur'an, and donate the rewards to the *mawayit*, then according to the majority of scholars, it is permitted to do so. However, there are also some scholars who feel that reading the Qur'an after burial will not generate any rewards for the *mawayit*.

The scholars who are of the opinion that the *mawayit* will benefit from such donations base their view on a number of traditions. The traditions suggest that good deeds such as fasts, charities, and pilgrimages performed on behalf of the deceased by their children, will benefit them. Based on these facts, they believe that there is no reason to exclude reading of the Qur'an from the category of such good deeds. Moreover, there is also evidence to suggest that some of the *al-Salaf as-Salib* (pious generations) were in the habit of reading the Qur'an over their beloved ones even after burial.

In light of this, one should not object to the reading of the Qur'an after burial if no remuneration is involved. At the same time, it must also be noted that the reading is not a prescribed requirement.

## QUESTION

What is the proper Islamic manner of mourning for the dead? Are there any restrictions that one should observe while mourning?

## ANSWER

A Muslim firmly believes that life and death are decreed by Allah. Therefore, Islam has been very strict in discouraging all forms of wailing and lamentation. Any words or actions that express one's displeasure with the will of Allah is clearly forbidden. The permitted form of mourning is to grieve and express sadness within moderation. Shedding of tears is permitted.

Islam has also restricted the number of days allowed for mourning. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) explicitly states, "It is not permitted for a person who believes in Allah and the last day to mourn any deceased person for more than three days and nights, except in the case of a wife mourning her husband." (*Reported by both al-Bukhari and Muslim*) In the case of a wife, she should sit in *'iddah* (period of waiting) for four months and ten days. While in this state, she must avoid all kinds of indulgences, beautification, and she should not contemplate or entertain marriage proposals.

## QUESTION

Is a woman permitted to visit graves?

## ANSWER

A woman is permitted to visit graves on the condition that she observes proper Islamic etiquettes. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) cursed those who frequent the graves for wailing and lamentation. If a person can abstain from such pagan practices, then he/she is permitted to do so. 'Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) visited the grave of her brother Abd al-Rahman. When questioned about it, she replied, "Yes, the Prophet had earlier forbidden people from visiting graves, but he did permit it afterwards." (*Reported by al-Hakim, al-Bayhaqi and authenticated by al-Dhahabi*) In other words, in her view, the permission to visit graves applies to both males and females.

## QUESTION

When visiting graves what *du'as* should be recited?

## ANSWER

While visiting graves one should greet the *mayyit* with the greetings mentioned earlier. One may also ask for mercy and forgiveness- on behalf of the *mayyit* by using the supplications generally used in *Janazah* prayer. According to some scholars, one may also read verses from the Qur'an prior to offering *du'as*.

## QUESTION

What is the Islamic teaching concerning building, decorating or engraving the tombstones?

## ANSWER

According to Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, it was not the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) to erect structures on graves, put mud on them, or raise mausoleums. All such practices are forbidden innovations and in stark contrast to his clear example. He sent Ali b. Abi Talib to Yemen with the mission of erasing statues, and levelling built-up graves to the ground. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) has also forbidden the practice of embellishing, whitening, or engraving tombstones. He further prohibited converting grave sites into mosques and lighting lamps on graves. At the same time, the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) clearly prohibited all forms of desecration of graves such as walking or relieving oneself over them.

### **QUESTION**

What is the Islamic position regarding celebration of death anniversaries?

### **ANSWER**

Celebrating death anniversaries, whereby people gather for mourning and spending wealth extravagantly, is a clear innovation. Such a practice did not exist in early Islam, and so we should shun it in order to keep our religion pure. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) himself had lost many of his dear companions, including his wife Khadijah, but he never celebrated any death anniversaries. The pious generations (*al-Salaf as-Salih*) followed this example and abstained from such innovations.

### **QUESTION**

What should relatives do if a person had requested that a certain questionable practice be performed at the funeral?

### **ANSWER**

If a Muslim had requested that a certain un-Islamic or questionable practice be performed at the funeral, this wish should not be respected. Rather one should respect the laws of Allah and His Messenger. A person will be held responsible for actions done on his behalf by his relatives, if he knew in advance that it was going to be done, and yet he did not try to prevent it-- even if he had not requested it. For this reason the early Muslims were in the habit of leaving specific instructions as to what should and should not be done at their funerals.

### **QUESTION**

There are people who say that it is not permissible to pray *Janazah* inside a mosque. What is the correct Islamic view?

### **ANSWER**

*Janazah* should be performed, preferably, outside the mosque if at all possible. This was the most common practice of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace). Nevertheless, on rare occasions, he did perform *Janazah* in the mosque, as in the case of Suhail and his brother, according to a report of Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace). (*Reported by Muslim and Abu Dawud*).

Furthermore, according to Imam al-Khattabi, the famous hadith scholar, the *Janazahs* of both Abu Bakr and Umar b. al-Khattab were performed in the Prophet's mosque. If it had been undesirable, the Prophet's Companions would not have done so. (See *Mukhtasar SunanAbi Dawud*, Vol.4: 326)

## QUESTION

What should a son or daughter do on behalf of his/her deceased parents?

## ANSWER

Pray constantly for them, especially after the *fard* (obligatory) prayers. According to the Qur'an, a righteous offspring prays for his parents:

*Rabbi irhamhumaa kamaa rahbayaanee sagheran*

"O my Lord! Bestow Your mercy upon them (my parents), even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!" (*al-Qur'an: 17: 24*)

One should also perform good deeds such as giving charities, setting up endowments, performing pilgrimages, etc. on behalf of one's parents. When a woman asked the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) whether she could offer charity on behalf of her deceased mother, he replied, "yes."

Other obligations to deceased parents include clearing their debts and obligations, fostering blood ties, honoring their friends, and fulfilling their commitments and promises.

## QUESTION

Are we permitted to pray *Janazah* on someone who had been *neglecting Salah*, committing major sins such as adultery, drinking, etc.?

## ANSWER

If someone declares himself a Muslim and is known among the people as one, then he must be treated as such. This is true even if he had been guilty of neglecting *Salah* or committing major sins. The scholars of Islam concur that all the external laws of Islam such as *Janazah*, inheritance, and burial in Muslim graveyards apply to such people.

But the rule is different in the case of someone who had been notorious for his *nifaq* (hypocrisy) and *zandaqah* (atheism). No *Janazah* should be performed on such a person, even if he paraded himself as a Muslim. This rule also applies to anyone who has renounced Islam by denying any of its fundamental beliefs or practices such as the obligations of *Salah*, fasting, *Zakah*, resurrection, etc. Such a person should be treated as a *munafiq* (hypocrite) or *mushrik* (polytheist), and prayers should not be performed on his behalf. Referring to *munafiqeen* (hypocrites), Allah says: "Do not pray over anyone of them, should he die, and do not stand over his grave imploring mercy on his behalf." (*al-Qur'an: 9: 84*), and referring to the *mushrikeen* (polytheists): "It is improper for the Prophet and the believers to ask forgiveness for the pagans." (*al-Qur'an: 9: 113*)

As for those who had been guilty of major sins, the best approach is that while some Muslims pray, others abstain. It is best that the knowledgeable people and leaders refrain from praying. This is to serve as a deterrent and lesson for others. The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) refused to pray on those who had committed suicide or those who had incurred loans—if he or anyone else could not pay them on their behalf. However, at the same time he asked the companions to pray over them. According to scholars, the Prophet's action was intended to serve as a deterrent for others from committing the same sins.

## QUESTION

Some people put off marriage celebrations during the month of *Muharram* on the pretext of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace). Is this practice Islamically justified?

## ANSWER

The prescribed period of mourning for a *mawayit* is three days only (the only exception being in the case of a wife mourning her husband). The reason for this restriction is due to Islam's insistence that life must continue regardless of someone's death or birth.

Therefore, the custom of refraining from marriages in the month of *Muharram*, because of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, is an innovation and has no basis in Islamic teachings. There is no mention that any of the *al-Salaf as-Salih* observed mourning for Imam Husayn, or for anyone else for that matter, and thus refrained from marriage in any month including the month of *Muharram*.

If one were to refrain from marriages because of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, must not we do the same in the case of the martyrdoms of others such as prophets, caliphs, etc.? If we were to observe this rule, we would not be able to conduct any marriages at all, as it would be almost impossible to find a month free from martyrdoms. Therefore, it is an absurd idea.

The Prophet (upon whom be Allah's blessings and peace) knew that such innovations are destructive and harmful as they amount to disrupting human life. We ought to deeply ponder the following *hadith*, "This religion (of ours) is both simple and easy to follow; whoever makes it hard will be defeated by it (by being forced to give it up altogether)." (*Reported by al-Bukhari*)

*"All praises are due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds."*