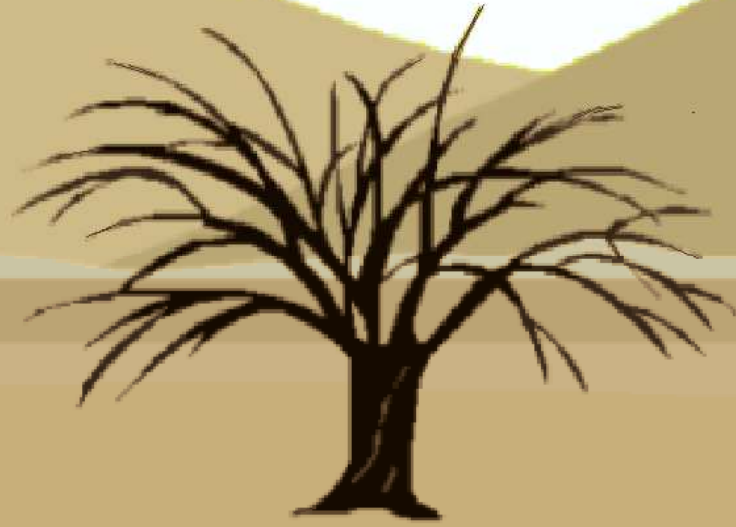
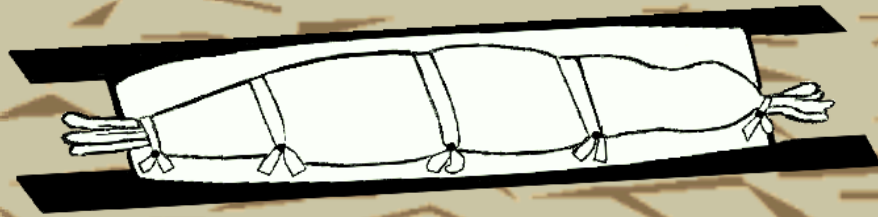




A Simplified Guide to
**Preparation of the Deceased
for Burial**
& Related Issues



تجهيز الميت للدفن



By Şaḥeeḥ International

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FOREWORD

Allah (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) has stated in His noble Book:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

*Every soul shall taste death. Then to Us you will be returned.*¹

To each human being brought into the life of this world, the Creator granted particular mental and physical abilities, all of which will finally be taken back from him at death, if not before. One's time for decision and action will then be over, and only a bequest² enables him to direct certain of his affairs for a limited period thereafter. Now completely helpless, the deceased is unable to do anything further for himself. He cannot, in fact, even attend to his most pressing worldly need of the moment: the cleansing and concealment of the body he left behind, being totally dependent for that service upon others. From the instant of death, the deceased is in need of assistance.

Such assistance is the duty of those Muslims, relatives or others, who are near him at death. It is a source of great reward in the Hereafter for those who offer it conscientiously. And it is a *fardh kifāyah* (community obligation) in that, when fulfilled by some, the rest are excused, but if not fulfilled satisfactorily, the entire group will be held accountable by Allah. Thus, every Muslim family should have some members with knowledge of how to correctly prepare the deceased for burial or at least should know someone who may be called upon when the need arises.³

Of the numerous books and papers presently available on this subject, some advocate practices that have become customary in many countries and cultures but have no real basis in the Qur'ān or authentic Sunnah, while others are overly detailed, causing a measure of confusion about some aspects of washing and shrouding, in particular.

In response to several requests and attempting to remedy this situation and alleviate the anxiety of ordinary Muslims who anticipate the possibility of being called upon at the death of a relative or friend, we have compiled a simple outline limited to basic information for use in a step-by-step procedure. The principal reference for this guide is the well-known work by Shaykh Muḥammad Naṣiruddeen al-Albani, *Aḥkām ul-Janā'iz wa Bid'auhā* (Funeral Rulings and Innovations), a scholarly collection of evidences from the Qur'ān and authentic ḥadīths to which a reader may refer for additional information. This short guide, however, is meant as an aid to those in need at times of urgency, when practical application takes priority over a deeper study.

We ask Allah's acceptance and an abundance of His mercy in this world and the next.

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¹Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:57.

²See "Appendix I," p. 22.

³Unfortunately, many who have set themselves up as professional washers in some Muslim countries are actually quite ignorant of the Sunnah, often following erroneous practices or even what is ḥarām, such as carelessly exposing the body during washing and shrouding. Such persons are obviously more interested in earning wages than in the reward of Allah. It is therefore preferable that these duties be performed or at least overseen by a close relative, if possible.

Duties of Those Present at the Time of Death

1. Reminding the dying person to say, "*Lā ilāha ill-Allāh*" – Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Instruct your dying ones to say, '*Lā ilāha ill-Allāh*.'"¹ There is no authentic ḥadīth regarding the recitation of Sūrah Yā Seen or turning the person toward the qiblah at this time.
2. Closing the dead person's eyes once the soul has left the body, and supplicating for him/her as the Prophet (ﷺ) did at the death of Abū Salamah²
3. Covering the entire body and face with a cloth or garment – When the Prophet (ﷺ) died, he was covered with a striped gown.³
4. Notifying people of the death, especially close relatives and those expected to assist in preparation of the deceased for burial – It is desirable for those informing of the death to request righteous people to ask Allah's forgiveness for the deceased Muslim.⁴ Announcements should not be made in the loud and ostentatious way of pre-Islamic times, which was prohibited by the Prophet (ﷺ).

Duties of the Deceased's Relatives

1. When informed of the death, the family members and close friends should show patience and acceptance of Allah's will.⁵ Although weeping is natural and to be expected, people must avoid what was prohibited by the Prophet (ﷺ) of loud wailing and shouting, tearing of clothing, slapping the face, and other exaggerated displays of grief and anger which reflect rebellion against the decree of Allah, the Exalted. It is permissible to briefly uncover the face to see or kiss the deceased, but this applies only to those who could have lawfully done so while he/she was alive.
2. The wife of the deceased begins her waiting period (*'iddah*)⁶ as soon as she learns

¹Narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim. Another authentic version from Ibn Ḥibbān adds: "He whose last words were '*Lā ilāha ill-Allāh*' at death will enter Paradise someday during eternity, even if he is afflicted before that with whatever afflicted him [of the Hellfire]."

²The ḥadīth describing this was narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim on the authority of Umm Salamah.

³Narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim. However, a man who dies in the state of iḥrām for Ḥajj or 'Umrah will be resurrected in that state, so his head and face should not be covered. This was instructed by the Prophet (ﷺ) as related by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁴It was not the practice of the Prophet (ﷺ) or his companions to recite Sūrah al-Fātiḥah over the dead or ask others to do so.

⁵It is encouraged to repeat the words taught by the Prophet (ﷺ) to Umm Salamah upon the death of her husband: "*Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn. Allāhumma ajurni fee muṣeebatee wakhluḥ lee khayran minhā,*" meaning: "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. O Allah, reward me in my affliction and follow it up for me with something better." (Narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim.)

⁶The period of *'iddah* for death lasts four months and ten days (see Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:234) except in the case of a pregnant woman, whose term ends at delivery (as mentioned in Sūrah aṭ-Ṭalāq, 65:4), however long or short it may be.

of her husband's death. The *'iddah* is an obligation toward the husband and is observed in obedience to Allah. Therefore, it is rewarded by Him as a righteous deed. During the *'iddah* she is required to: remain in the marital home unless circumstances compel her to move elsewhere. She may attend to her needs outside during the day. She should avoid direct proposals of marriage and not remarry until the term has ended, and refrain from beautifying herself with decorative clothing, jewelry, ornaments, makeup, henna or other dyes, and from using perfume and scent. However, she should not appear shabby and disheveled and should observe cleanliness of the body and hair as usual. All other customs and restrictions have no basis in Islamic law and should be considered as blameworthy innovations.

Female relatives other than the wife may observe mourning for three days on the condition that their own husbands do not object, but more than three days is prohibited. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) stated, "It is not lawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day to mourn a dead person over three days, except for the husband [who is mourned] four months and ten."⁷

3. Relatives of the deceased or others who might be present in place of them should hasten to prepare him/her for burial⁸ as soon as death is confirmed.⁹ It is *makrūh* (disliked) to delay burial without a valid cause. Hence, it is preferable to bury the deceased in the same location in which he died or in the nearest Muslim cemetery and refrain from transporting the body long distances.
4. Any debts incurred by the deceased should be settled as soon as possible,¹⁰ the foremost of these being his zakāh if due. For one who left wealth, the debt must be paid from his property before the fulfillment of bequests and distribution to the legal heirs, even if it should consume the entire estate. For one who left little or nothing, the Islamic state is responsible. But in its absence, any Muslim or group may volunteer to benefit the deceased by paying off his debt, and this is acceptable even from those other than his children. Death does not annul a debt.

Washing the Body (Ghusl)

Preliminary Notes:

A great reward is obtained by washing the dead when two conditions are fulfilled:

- 1) That it is done seeking only the reward of Allah and no worldly benefit – This is true for every act of obedience and worship, for the Messenger (ﷺ)

⁷Narrated by al-Bukhāri.

⁸This process will be described in the following sections.

⁹Today, confirmation is usually required of a medical specialist, who issues a written death certificate.

¹⁰Several authentic narrations state that a person is held back from Paradise or from his account being settled in the Hereafter until his debt has been paid.

confirmed that deeds are judged according to intention.¹¹

2) That the washer is not only careful to conceal the body properly but does not mention thereafter anything disagreeable observed¹² – However, if the body appears pleasing, it is good to mention it.

Every Muslim who dies, even a stillborn baby,¹³ should be washed and shrouded, with the exception of the martyr (*shaheed*) who died in battle for Allah's cause.¹⁴ A person who died in the state of *iḥrām* is washed but not perfumed, and the man is shrouded in two *iḥrām* garments with his head uncovered.

A man must be washed by men and a woman by women, except that a man may wash his wife and a woman her husband.¹⁵ A baby or child may be washed by either gender. If one person can manage alone, it is sufficient, but one or more assistants may be present.¹⁶ If a person dies where there is neither a spouse nor a member of the same sex to wash him/her, *tayammum* (dry ablution) is performed on the body in

If only part of a body is intact and recognizable, it should be washed, wrapped, given a funeral prayer and buried.¹⁷ This was the practice of the Prophet's companions. If the body is badly burned, already decomposing, or it is feared that it will disintegrate if water is used, *tayammum* may be performed on it instead.

A non-Muslim relative is not washed or given a funeral prayer but simply buried. The Prophet (ﷺ) told 'Alī to bury his father, Abū Ṭālib, when he died.¹⁸

The washing should preferably be done in a room with a drain or some place where the water used will flow or be swept away easily. The body of the deceased is placed on a low table, board or other surface with the head slightly elevated, if possible.

All that is needed for the washing should be collected and placed within reach. It includes:

¹¹As related by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

¹²In an authentic narration by al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever washes a [dead] Muslim and keeps silent about him – Allah will forgive forty times." Disclosing a Muslim's faults whether alive or dead is sinful.

¹³This applies to a clearly formed fetus of four months or more.

¹⁴The Prophet (ﷺ) ordered that the martyrs be buried as they are, or more literally, "in their blood," as their wounds will emit the fragrance of musk on the Day of Resurrection. (Narrated by al-Bukhāri and others.) Other categories of martyrs which are mentioned in the Sunnah but did not die in battle are washed and shrouded as usual.

¹⁵In a sound ḥadīth, 'A'ishah reported the Prophet (ﷺ) as having said, "If you died before me, I would wash and shroud you, pray over you and bury you." (Aḥmad) And after the death of the Prophet (ﷺ), she said, "If I knew before what I know now, none but the Prophet's wives would have washed him." (Abū Dāwūd – ṣaḥeeḥ) It is also confirmed that 'Alī washed the body of his wife, Fāṭimah, and that Abū Bakr was washed by his wife.

¹⁶Besides the washer and his/her assistants, no one else should be present during the *ghusl*.

¹⁷With the exception of the *shaheed* as mentioned previously.

¹⁸Related by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and an-Nasā'ī.

- 1) A sufficient quantity of lukewarm water (perhaps three buckets) if there is no faucet nearby
- 2) A large towel or other thick material with which to cover the body from the neck down,¹⁹ or else a sheet which is held by the assistants to conceal the body during washing
- 3) A glove or washcloth for cleaning the private area
- 4) A sponge, cotton or second washcloth for the rest of the body
- 5) *Sidr* (ground lote-tree leaves) or what serves in place of it, such as soap or shampoo
- 6) Ground camphor or a similar scent to be mixed with the final rinse
- 7) *Hanūt*²⁰ or non-alcoholic scent for application after washing
- 8) A large towel or other material to dry and cover the body until its transfer onto the shroud

Procedure:²¹

- 1) The intention (*niyyah*) should be present in the hearts of those participating but not pronounced aloud.
- 2) Place the deceased on the table or board. (It is not a sunnah practice to face him/her toward the qiblah)
- 3) Remove all clothing²² while keeping the body covered from the neck down with a towel or cloth. The private area (from the navel to the knees) must never be uncovered or touched by the bare hand. During the washing process, the assistant(s)

¹⁹Thin material is unsuitable as it becomes transparent when wet.

²⁰*Hanūt* is any mixture of scents used to perfume a dead body and its shroud, particularly musk, sandalwood, ambergris and camphor. Any of the oil scents may be used as well.

²¹The method of washing the dead is based mainly on the instructions given by Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) to women who were washing his daughter, Zaynab. Umm 'Aṭiyyah reported, "The Prophet (ﷺ) came in while we were washing his daughter and said, 'Wash her three or five times or more than that, if you consider it necessary, with water and *sidr*. [In one version, she said, 'An odd number?' He said, 'Yes.'] Put in the final wash camphor, or something of camphor, and when you have finished, notify me.' So when we finished, we notified him, and he threw us his waist wrapper and said, 'Make it her innermost piece.'" Several versions of this ḥadīth were narrated by al-Bukhāri, Muslim and others. Other versions added:

* "Begin with her right side and the places of *wuḍhū*."

* "Undo her hair and wash it."

* "And we combed her hair into three parts and braided it in three braids: two at the sides and one at the forehead, and put them behind her."

This ḥadīth contains most of the sunnah acts, and other points are suggestions by scholars to facilitate the process. Basically, this washing is like any other *ghuṣl* for the living. In circumstances of difficulty or urgency the requirement (*fardh*) is merely the intention to wash the dead for burial and then pouring water over the entire body once. If water is unavailable, *tayammum* is done on the body.

²²The garments may be cut if removing them normally is difficult. Also removed are all ornaments, hair accessories, bands with which the body may have been tied, etc.

hold the covering in place, raising it only slightly to enable the washer to work underneath it. If a large sheet is used, it is held over the deceased with the sides draping down to conceal the body. Long hair which was braided or pinned is undone.²³

- 4) The upper portion of the body may be raised a bit and the stomach lightly pressed downwards to expel any impurities. Water is poured from above the covering to wash them away, and the private parts are cleaned with the left hand covered by a glove or washcloth from under the covering and without looking at the area directly. Discard the glove or cloth after use.
- 5) Begin the *ghusl* in the name of Allah by performing *wudhū'* on the body as for prayer.²⁴ Do not pour water into the mouth and nose, but they may be cleaned with a piece of cotton if necessary. There is no supplication (*du'aa'*) mentioned in the authentic Sunnah to be said during the *wudhū'* or *ghusl*. Any supplication one wishes to make should not be done aloud.
- 6) The body is then washed an odd number of times with a cloth or sponge. The obligation (*fardh*) is once, but the sunnah is three times, or if necessary, five or seven.
 - a) A cleansing agent, such as *sidr*²⁵ or soap, is added to lukewarm water for the first washing. The head (face and hair) is washed first with this mixture, followed by the right side of the body from the upper portion down. The deceased is turned onto his/her left side to wash the right side of the body.²⁶ Then he/she is turned onto the right side while the left side is washed. This is considered the first washing.
 - b) The body is then rinsed with plain water in the same way. This is the second washing.
 - c) If it is seen that the body has not yet been sufficiently cleansed, the previous two steps may be repeated. If they are repeated once, the total is now four washings; if twice, the total is six.
 - d) The final rinse (which will be the third, fifth or seventh washing) is done in the same way with ground camphor²⁷ or some other scent added to the water.
- 7) The hair may be combed gently. When a woman's hair is long enough, it should be braided in three plaits, two at the sides and one at the forehead, and then placed behind her head without pins or clips.

²³*Ghusl* is performed on the body for the purpose of purification only. No hair of the head or body should be cut without necessity, nor the fingernails.

²⁴This is the sunnah at the beginning of *ghusl* for the living as well.

²⁵The ground leaves are dry and should be green in color, not yellow. When mixed with water, *sidr* becomes soapy after about fifteen minutes. When unavailable, shampoo or soap may be used instead.

²⁶Turning the body may be facilitated by first placing the right leg over the left when possible. For turning it to the right side, the left leg is placed over the right.

²⁷Camphor (*kāfūr*) has a temporary preserving effect on the body and repels insects. It has been warned, however, that inhaling it may cause miscarriage in pregnant women, who are advised to avoid it when possible.

- 8) Dry the body with a towel or cloth. Cotton is not to be inserted into the nose or any other body openings unless it is to prevent the continued emergence of blood or other impurities.²⁸ A bleeding wound may be packed with dry camphor or medicinal powder or with a cloth.
- 9) Apply scent (*ḥanūt*) to the body, but not specifically at the points of prostration (*sujūd*), as this is an innovation.
- 10) The body is to remain under a cover until the first stages of shrouding have been completed.

Many scholars consider it desirable (*mustaḥabb*) for one who has washed the dead to perform *ghusl* afterwards, based on an acceptable (*ḥasan*) ḥadīth.²⁹ It is not obligatory, as shown by other narrations.³⁰

Shrouding the Body (Takfeen)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "When one of you shrouds his brother, he should shroud him well."³¹

Shroud (*kafan*) material may be obtained before or after the death.³² It is purchased from the wealth of the deceased (before its distribution) unless someone else contributes it voluntarily. It should be clean,³³ unstitched,³⁴ and preferably white³⁵ cotton or a similar inexpensive material, and it should be sufficient to completely cover the entire body.³⁶

²⁸In case an impure substance should emerge from the private area after the *ghusl* is complete, it may be simply washed away with water. If after shrouding, it may be overlooked. The use of cotton or a sanitary pad has been suggested after *ghusl* for a woman who was bleeding due to menses or childbirth.

²⁹Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi related that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Let whoever has washed a dead person perform *ghusl* and let whoever carried him perform *wudhū*."

³⁰For example, Ibn 'Umar reported, "We would wash the dead, and some of us would [then] bathe and some of us would not." (Narrated by ad-Dāraqūṭni and al-Khaṭīb – *ṣaḥeeḥ*) This applies to the dead Muslim. But 'Alī was ordered by the Prophet (ﷺ) to perform *ghusl* after burying his father who had remained a polytheist.

³¹Narrated by Muslim.

³²Some people prefer to be prepared by keeping a shroud at home. This is not a sunnah practice but merely one of convenience and is permissible. However, soaking the cloth in Zamzam water with the assumption that it will benefit the deceased in the Hereafter is both an innovation (*bid'ah*) and an erroneous belief.

³³But not necessarily new.

³⁴i.e., not sewn to fit the body.

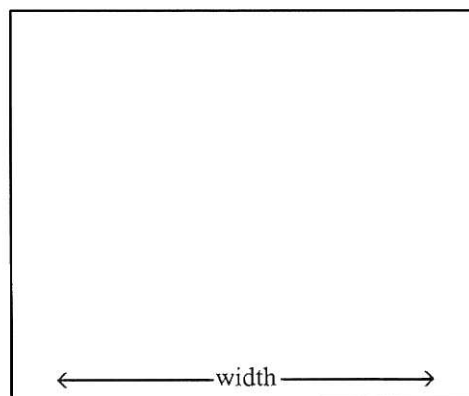
³⁵Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Wear the white ones among your garments, for they are the best of your garments, and shroud your dead in them." (Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi – *ṣaḥeeḥ*)

³⁶In adverse circumstances where the dead are numerous and cloth is scarce, one large wrapper is sufficient for each, although the sunnah is three pieces. If the piece is not long enough to cover the whole body, then the head is covered rather than the feet.

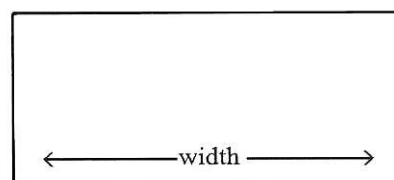
For an average sized adult, from ten to twelve meters is recommended, and less for a child, according to size. The sunnah is to use three separate pieces³⁷ for both males and females, although some scholars have recommended two additional pieces for women.

The shroud is prepared in the following manner:

1. First, measure and cut the large outer wrap. It should be long enough to tie at each end (at least ½ meter longer than the body) and wide enough to wrap completely around the body – about 2½ to 3 times its width. (If the width of the cloth is insufficient for one large sheet, another piece may be attached to it.)

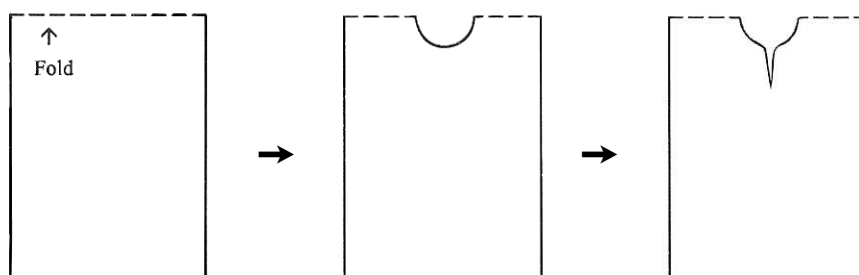


2. Next, measure and cut the piece with which the lower part of the body will be wrapped. Again, it should be nearly three times the width of the body. Its length is from the deceased's waist to his/her feet.



3. The third piece resembles a gown with an opening at the neck. It is made as follows:

- a) Take a piece of cloth slightly wider than the width of the body and twice its length from the shoulders to the feet.
- b) Fold it in the middle so that each half is the length of the body.
- c) Cut a small half circle (approximately 15 cm. in diameter for an adult) in the middle of the folded edge.
- d) Cut a slit of about 10 cm. in the front half to allow the head to go through.



³⁷Ā'ishah related that the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was shrouded in three garments of white Yemeni fabric of cotton, among which was neither a shirt nor a turban. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.)

4. If desired, two additional pieces may be cut for a woman only: a single sheet the length and width of the body, and another with which the head is wrapped.³⁸



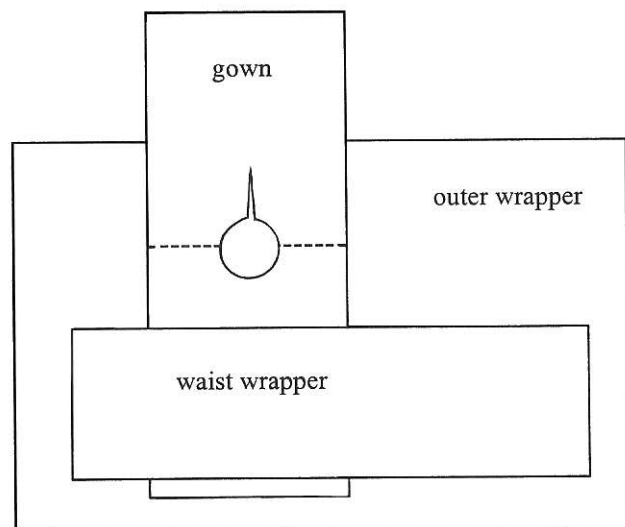
5. Keep three or five strips of fabric to use as ties around the body and two for tying the shroud ends after the final wrapping is complete.



After completion of the washing and while the deceased is covered by a towel or sheet, lay out the shroud pieces in the following arrangement:

1. Spread out the large outer wrap.
2. On top of it, place the gown slightly to one side, which is then unfolded so that the front section extends outside the wrap.
3. The waist wrapper is placed over the other two pieces. The shroud will then appear as shown:

While still covered, transfer the body onto the shroud pieces which have been laid out. (The body may be moved more easily by inserting a folded sheet under it as is done in hospitals.) The neck is placed at the circle cut in the gown. The cloth may be scented, as well as the body of the deceased, before wrapping, but do not remove the cover over the body.



Begin shrouding by wrapping the lower half of the body (from the waist down) with the waist wrapper, working underneath the towel or sheet without exposing or touching the private area. Pull the longer end of the wrapper firmly around the deceased and tuck it under the body to keep it in place.

Then, put the deceased's head through the circle in the gown and pull the front

³⁸There is no difference stated in the authentic Sunnah between the shrouds of men and women. The ḥadīths mentioning five pieces for women were found by Shaykh al-Albāni to be weak. However, it is permissible to use the extra pieces if deemed necessary for adequate covering.

section down over the body. Now remove the towel or sheet from under it. The arms of the deceased will normally remain at his sides.³⁹ Tuck the side edges of the gown in around or under the body.⁴⁰

The three shroud pieces which have been laid out are sufficient for a woman as well as for a man. However, if it is preferred to use the two additional pieces, the woman's head is now wrapped with the headcover, and the extra sheet placed over the front of the body, being tucked under it at the shoulders and the sides.

Finally, the entire body is wrapped well in the large outer shroud. Gather the excess cloth above the head and below the feet and tie it together with small strips of the fabric. Then, using one or more of the longer strips, insert them under the body and tie them at the left side in a way that they can be easily loosened in the grave. For a child, one long strip at the hips may be sufficient, while an adult may require three ties, according to the size and weight of the body. These will keep the shroud in place and the body stabilized until it is placed in the grave. The final form appears thus:



Remaining Obligations Toward the Deceased

Once the deceased has been shrouded, three community obligations remain:

- ... Conveying him/her to the place of the funeral prayer and after that to the grave
- ... Performance of the funeral prayer (*ṣalātul-janāzah*)
- ... Burial.

The Funeral Procession:

Participation in the funeral and accompanying it is an obligation upon the men⁴¹ of a Muslim community. If the distance is not too great, four men should carry the body on a stretcher-like conveyance, walking quickly.⁴² They may be replaced by others if they

³⁹One should not attempt to bend the arms or place the hands on the chest.

⁴⁰An alternative to the "gown" can be a body length wrapper whose width is the same as the waist wrapper and is wrapped around the body in the same way.

⁴¹It is preferable that women not accompany the procession. Umm 'Atīyyah reported, "We were prohibited by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) from following funerals, although he was not firm with us." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.) The prohibition is absolute in the case of anyone (male or female) who would show disobedience publicly by loud wailing and/or unsuitable behavior. Also prohibited is accompanying the procession with fire, incense or music.

⁴²The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Hasten with the funeral, for if it was a righteous person, you will be sending him to what is good; and if otherwise, you will be removing evil from your necks." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.) When four men are not available, the body may be carried by two. Women assist only in the absence of men.

become fatigued. Those accompanying the procession walk in front of, beside or behind the body, or they may ride behind it. It was not the practice of the Prophet (ﷺ), his companions or any early scholars to raise their voices with recitation of the Qur'ān or *dhikr*, but rather to supplicate quietly and reflect upon the lesson before them, the inevitability of death and the meeting with Allah.

Wudhū for those who carried the body is considered desirable, though not obligatory, according to the ḥadīth cited in Footnote 29, page 6.

Prayer for the Deceased:

The funeral prayer is an obligation toward every deceased Muslim⁴³ with the exception of a martyr (*shaheed*) who died in battle⁴⁴ and a child below the age of puberty,⁴⁵ although it may be done for both and is lawful. In fact, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The child [and in another version: "the miscarried child"]⁴⁶ is prayed for, and supplication is made for forgiveness and mercy for his parents."⁴⁷ And 'Ā'ishah reported that he (ﷺ) prayed over a boy from the Anṣār.⁴⁸

The authentic Sunnah offers the following points: the obligation is fulfilled with the prayer of even one Muslim over the deceased, although a congregation is preferable, and the more worshippers, the better.⁴⁹ Both men and women may participate in this prayer. It is preferred outside in a place designated for prayer, but may be held in a masjid as well. It may be conducted at any time, though some scholars make exception of the times when prayer is *makrūh* (disliked): immediately after sunrise, immediately before sunset, and when the sun is directly overhead. As in any prayer, *wudhū'*, adequate covering of the body, and facing the qiblah are required. The body is placed between the imām and the qiblah. The imām stands opposite the head if the deceased is a man, and opposite the waist if it is a woman.⁵⁰ Those praying behind the imām are arranged in rows. The prayer is conducted standing throughout.⁵¹

⁴³Including those known to have committed major sins, as long as one did not deny what was revealed in the Qur'ān.

⁴⁴The Prophet (ﷺ) did not usually conduct a funeral prayer for such martyrs, although he did so for Ḥamzah bin 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib. And after a period of eight years, shortly before his death, he prayed a funeral prayer for those killed at Uḥud.

⁴⁵'Ā'ishah reported that when the Prophet's son Ibrāheem died, he did not pray over him. The ḥadīth was narrated by Abū Dāwūd and graded *ṣaḥeeḥ*. Other narrations stating the contrary are all weak. This shows that the prayer is not required for children, although it does afford blessings if done.

⁴⁶Scholars specify that the prayer is held only for a fetus that died after four months in the womb but not for one miscarried before that whose formation was not complete.

⁴⁷Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and others – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁴⁸Narrated by Muslim.

⁴⁹As related in ḥadīths by Aḥmad and Muslim.

⁵⁰These details were reported in narrations by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi, which were graded as *ḥasan*. When there are two or more bodies of both sexes, the men are placed nearest the imām and the women nearest the qiblah. An-Nasā'ī related with a sound chain that four companions witnessed to the fact that this was the Sunnah.

⁵¹i.e., there is no *rukū'*, *sujūd* or *julūs* during it.

The following form for the funeral prayer has been given in authentic narrations by al-Bukhāri, Muslim and at-Tirmidhi:

1. After having the intention (in the heart),⁵² the imām, followed by the congregation, raises his hands to the level of his shoulders or ears and says, "*Allāhu akbar*" placing his hands on his chest as in usual prayers. He then recites Sūrah al-Fātiḥah silently, while the congregation does the same.
2. He says, "*Allāhu akbar*" a second time⁵³ and then recites (as does the congregation) silently the prayer for blessings upon the Prophet (ﷺ) (*aṣ-ṣalātul-Ibrāheemiyah*), which is said in regular prayers after the final *tashahhud*.
3. Saying, "*Allāhu akbar*" a third time, he then recites a supplication (*du`aa*) from the sunnah.⁵⁴ Members of the congregation do the same, or each of them may silently offer any supplication for the deceased.
4. After saying, "*Allāhu akbar*" the fourth time, one continues in supplication briefly and concludes with the *salām* to the right side.

Burial:

The grave is among the greatest benefits held by the earth for a human being. For as soon as the soul is taken from it, the body begins a process of rapid decomposition that is best concealed from one's fellow men. Thus, burial is required for the Muslim and non-Muslim alike. However, based on several ḥadīths, a Muslim is to be buried in a place separate from the non-Muslims, preferably in a cemetery when possible.

The grave is normally dug about one by two meters to a depth of approximately the height of a man. Its width should be in line with the qiblah. It is sunnah to make an excavation near the bottom into the side nearest the qiblah⁵⁵ within which the body is laid on its right side, facing the qiblah with the head to the right and feet to the left. If this is difficult, the body may be placed in the same position in a shallow trench at the bottom of the grave. Some sand or stone may be placed to slightly raise the head. The one laying the body says, "*Bismillahi, wa `alā millati rasūlillāh.*"⁵⁶

A wall or ceiling is made in the grave with stones or bricks which can be cemented with mud or soil. At this point the Prophet (ﷺ) would throw three double handfuls of soil into the grave without reciting anything in particular aloud.⁵⁷ The grave is then filled up with sand or soil.

⁵²Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) did not pronounce the intention for prayer aloud, nor did his companions. To do so is an innovation which should be avoided.

⁵³Most scholars advocate raising the hands with each pronunciation of "*Allāhu akbar*" though some restrict it to the first one.

⁵⁴See "Appendix II."

⁵⁵This is called the *lahd*.

⁵⁶This was the practice of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as related by Aḥmad and by Abū Dāwūd with similar wording (*ṣaḥeeḥ*).

⁵⁷The ḥadīth in which he (ﷺ) is said to have recited verse 20:55 of the Qur'ān is extremely weak.

The area over a grave should be raised slightly (about 15 to 20 cm. above the ground) to indicate its presence. It is prohibited to raise it higher than that or to erect any kind of structure over the grave. It may, however, be marked by a stone at the head of the deceased. After a burial the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), standing at the grave, would say, "Ask [of Allah] forgiveness for your brother and pray that he will be steadfast, for now he is being questioned."⁵⁸

Beyond the aforementioned obligations there are a few specific things mentioned in the authentic Sunnah that benefit the deceased:

- ... The attendance to and payment of his debts, if any⁵⁹
- ... Supplication for him/her by other Muslims,⁶⁰ and especially by a righteous child⁶¹
- ... Any trace of good done by him/her which continues on after death, for example, a bequest made for someone in need, beneficial knowledge that was taught or spread, the excavation of a well to supply water, a masjid, school or hospital built, etc. Of this good, righteous children and the deeds they do may be included, for the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Indeed, his child is among what one has earned."⁶²

Condolence (Ta'ziyah)

In Islam there is also an obligation toward those afflicted by calamities – to support and comfort them in their time of sadness and distress. Visiting the relatives of someone who has just passed away is among the duties of a Muslim. The purpose of such a visit is to encourage patience by reminding of the great rewards of the Hereafter as well as to supplicate for the deceased and for the stricken family members. One may console them by any lawful means (speech or act) which he thinks will distract them from their sorrow, lighten their pain, and enable them to show patience and acceptance.⁶³

⁵⁸Narrated by al-Hākim - *ṣaḥeeḥ*. The ḥadīth encourages *du'aa'* for support of the deceased while being questioned in the grave by the angels. However, "prompting" the dead by those near the grave is an innovation (*bid'ah*) with no basis in the Sunnah. The same is true of reciting particular *sūrahs* or verses of the Qur'ān at the time of burial and of raising the voice in *dhikr* or *du'aa'*. The authentic narrations serving as evidences for the burial procedure are found in al-Albānī's *Aḥkām ul-Janā'iz*.

⁵⁹Refer to page 13.

⁶⁰The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The *du'aa'* of a Muslim for his brother in absence is answered." (Muslim.)

⁶¹Based on the ḥadīth narrated by Muslim: "When a child of Ādam dies, his deeds are severed except for three: a continuing charity, knowledge giving benefit, or a righteous child who supplicates for him."

⁶²Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and an-Nasā'ī – *ḥasan*. As it was not mentioned by the Prophet (ﷺ), scholars differ over whether or not charities or deeds done for him by other than his children would benefit the deceased. There is no doubt concerning supplication and continuing a good work he had begun, however, as shown above.

⁶³Among the words of the Prophet (ﷺ) were: "To Allah belongs what He took and what He has given, and all things with Him are for a specified term. So be patient and seek reward." (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Although it is preferable to pay condolences soon after the death, the period is not limited to three days, and one can visit whenever it is thought to be beneficial. It is a sunnah practice to provide food for the family the first days, and they must not be expected to provide it for their guests.⁶⁴ The early scholars disliked that special gatherings be held for condolences. Rather, the family members should be encouraged to return to normal life as soon as possible.

May Allah cover us with His mercy in life and death.

Appendix I: The Bequest (Waṣīyah)

In Sūrah an-Nisaa',⁶⁵ Allah *ta'ālā* dealt with the subject of inheritance, establishing the right of children, parents and spouses to inherit a specific share without leaving the matter to human judgement and emotion. In the absence of some close relatives a share is appointed to more distant ones. The system is a product of the Creator's perfect knowledge of human need and takes into account His imposition of responsibilities upon certain members of the family in varying situations.

In addition, the Muslim of means is encouraged to be an instrument of benefit and mercy through his charities and assistance to others, and this can extend even beyond his death in the form of a bequest. One may, at his own discretion, will up to one third of his property to any who would not inherit otherwise, or he may allocate it toward good works of his choice. Through a bequest he may also direct his heirs to perform specific deeds on his behalf.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "A Muslim person has no right to spend two nights, while he has something he intends to will, without his written will being by his head."⁶⁶ Thus, the will or bequest is an Islamic obligation, especially so in particular situations:

1. When the person is in debt, in order to facilitate clearance as quickly as possible. The debt must be paid out of his estate before all other considerations, even if he did not instruct it in a will.

He may also make mention of anything owed to him by others.

2. When a person lives under a non-Muslim government that acts according to its own laws when there is no written legal will. In such a case the Muslim has a duty to instruct that his estate be distributed according to Islamic law. This might necessitate his specifying exactly what every heir's share would be.

⁶⁴When Ja'far bin Abī Ṭālib was killed, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Prepare food for the family of Ja'far, for something has happened which occupies them." (Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi - *ṣaḥeeḥ*) Serving a meal for visitors on the third day, the seventh day, the fortieth day or any other specified time is not only contrary to the sunnah but an additional burden for the family of the deceased. Such customs should be abolished, seeking the acceptance of Allah rather than that of the people.

⁶⁵Verses 7-12, 33 and 176.

⁶⁶i.e., in his possession. Narrated by al-Bukhāri, Muslim and others.

3. When there is a needy relative, orphan or other person(s) who would not normally inherit by law. A special provision may be made for these people and for charities in general.

4. When there is a prevalence of un-Islamic customs in society, necessitating that the Muslim direct his heirs to prepare and bury him according to the sunnah and to avoid *bid'ah* (innovation in religious practice).

There are certain things which are not permitted in a bequest:

1. It may not include any who would inherit by law, such as parents and children (unless their mention is necessary to uphold their right). The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "There is no bequest for an heir."⁶⁷

2. It may not deprive a rightful heir of his share. The Qur'ān⁶⁸ has stated the right of each.

3. One is not free to will except one third of his total estate, and less is preferable, for the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A third, and a third is much."⁶⁹ Any number of bequests is allowed within this limit.

Additional notes:

1. All bequests are to be fulfilled following the payment of debts, if any, and before the remainder of the estate is distributed among the lawful heirs.

2. Any unlawful bequest (one that is contrary to the Islamic *Sharī'ah*) is not to be honored by the heirs and would not be upheld in an Islamic court.

3. Since a bequest may be considered a person's final deed on earth, he should strive to make it one which is pleasing to Allah.

4. An oral bequest should be witnessed by two Muslim men of good character or, if unavailable, two non-Muslims, as described in Sūrah al-Mā'dah, verses 106-107. However, for a written bequest most scholars consider the deceased's recognized personal signature as sufficient.

⁶⁷Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi – *ḥasan*.

⁶⁸In Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:11-12 and 176.

⁶⁹Narrated by Aḥmad, al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

Appendix II: Supplications Recited by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in the Funeral Prayer

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِحَيِّنَا وَمَيِّتِنَا وَشَاهِدِنَا وَغَائِبِنَا وَصَغِيرِنَا وَكَبِيرِنَا وَذَكَرْنَا وَأَنْثَانَا اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ أَحْيَيْتَهُ مِنَّا فَأَحْيِهِ عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ تَوَفَّيْتَهُ فَتَوَفَّهُ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ. اللَّهُمَّ لَا تَحْرِمْنَا أَجْرَهُ وَلَا تُضِلَّنَا بَعْدَهُ.

"O Allah, forgive our living and our dead, our present and our absent, our young and our old, our males and our females. O Allah, whoever You keep alive of us – keep him alive on Islam; and whoever You take in death of us – take him in the faith. O Allah, deprive us not of the reward for him and let us not go astray after him."⁷⁰

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لَهُ وَارْحَمْهُ وَعَافِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنْهُ وَأَكْرِمْ نُزُلَهُ وَوَسِّعْ مُدْخَلَهُ وَاغْسِلْهُ بِالْمَاءِ وَالتَّلْجِ وَالْبَرَدِ وَنَقِّهِ مِنَ الْخَطَايَا كَمَا نَقَّيْتَ الثَّوْبَ الْأَبْيَضَ مِنَ الدَّنَسِ. وَأَبْدِلْهُ دَارًا خَيْرًا مِنْ دَارِهِ وَأَهْلًا خَيْرًا مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَزَوْجًا خَيْرًا مِنْ زَوْجِهِ وَأَدْخِلْهُ الْجَنَّةَ وَأَعِزَّهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ وَعَذَابِ النَّارِ.

"O Allah, forgive him and have mercy upon him, free him from all evil and pardon him, make his accommodation honorable and expand his entrance. Wash him with water, snow and hail, and purify him as You have purified the white garment from dirt. Give him in place of his home a better home and for his family a better family and for his spouse a better spouse. Admit him to Paradise and protect him from the punishment of the grave and the punishment of the Fire."⁷¹

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّ فُلَانَ بْنَ فُلَانَ فِي ذِمَّتِكَ وَحَبْلِ جِوَارِكَ فَقِهِ مِنْ فِتْنَةِ الْقَبْرِ وَعَذَابِ النَّارِ. وَأَنْتَ أَهْلُ الْوَفَاءِ وَالْحَقِّ فَاغْفِرْ لَهُ وَارْحَمْهُ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ.

"O Allah, so-and-so [mentioning his name] is under Your protection and in Your proximity, so protect him from the trial of the grave and the punishment of the Fire. You are the one of fidelity and truth, so forgive him and have mercy upon him. Indeed, it is You who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."⁷²

اللَّهُمَّ عَبْدُكَ وَابْنُ أُمَّتِكَ احْتَاجُ إِلَى رَحْمَتِكَ وَأَنْتَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْ عَذَابِهِ. إِنْ كَانَ مُحْسِنًا فَزِدْ فِي حَسَنَاتِهِ وَإِنْ كَانَ مُسِيئًا فَتَجَاوَزْ عَنْهُ.

"O Allah, Your servant and the son of Your female servant is in need of Your mercy, and You have no need to punish him. If he was good, then increase his reward; and if he was bad, then overlook what he did."⁷³

When the deceased was a child, al-Ḥasan bin 'Alī used to supplicate:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْهُ لَنَا فَرَطًا وَسَلْفًا وَأَجْرًا

"O Allah, make him for us a predecessor, an advance provision [for the Hereafter] and a reward."⁷⁴

⁷⁰Narrated by Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah - *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷¹Muslim.

⁷²Ibn Mājah and Abū Dāwūd - *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷³Al-Ḥākim and aṭ-Ṭabarāni - *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷⁴Al-Bayhaqī with a *ḥasan* chain.