



Q&A- Janazah During COVID-19 Pandemic

Prepared by Office of the Imam
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Q&A-Janaza During COVID-19 Pandemic

**The following questions and answers were mainly derived from fatwas issued by various Islamic Councils. **


Q. What are some reminders to empower Muslims during this time of crisis?

A. During this time of crisis, we remind all Muslims of their duty towards their Lord. We believe every calamity that occurs has benefits in this world and the next, and that a believer has the potential to always come out a winner no matter what the circumstances, if our intentions, frame of mind, and faith are correct.

Q. Is there a need to step outside of the existing Fiqh boundaries regarding ghusl and funeral prayers due to the changing circumstances of the pandemic?

A. Regarding ghusl and funeral prayers, the Fiqh Council felt that our earlier jurists have given pertinent guidelines for the situation we are currently facing, and there is no need to step outside of their boundaries. In deciding which of the following options to follow, the advice of medical experts, the laws of the land, and the skill level of those entrusted with the burial will all play a role. If one option is problematic, those in charge of the funeral may move down to the next option, and to err on the side of caution is allowed. One of the maxims of Islamic law states, “As matters become more constrained, the Sharī‘ah becomes more easy (إذا ضاق الأمر اتسع),” and we remind everyone of this reality of Islamic Law.

Q. Do the rights of the deceased change during times of a pandemic? Would these changes, if any, indicate an evil ending for the deceased?



A. It is one of the core rights of our Muslim brothers and sisters that at the time of their passing, we ensure they are ritually washed, shrouded, prayed over and buried. However, in times of social distancing and the potential fear of contagious diseases spreading, some of these rituals change. In such cases, these are not signs of Allah's displeasure or an evil ending for the deceased. Rather, we hope that those who succumb to this illness have their sins forgiven and their reward increased as a result of the hardship they endured. The following rulings are when and where there are restrictions from the health authorities. If no such restrictions are in place or do not apply to a particular individual, the usual rituals are followed.

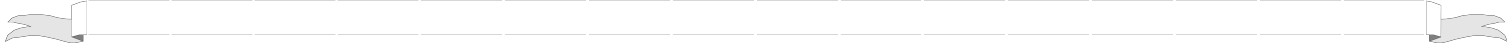
Q. Who is required to carry out the funeral rites for the deceased?

A. To fulfill the obligations of funeral rites is a collective duty upon Muslims. This means that so long as it is carried out by some people, it is sufficient. These people would usually be close family members, but other members of the Muslim community can take their place wherever possible. This may be the case if close family members are asked to quarantine themselves.

Q. What is the communal obligation towards washing the body of the deceased?

A. The default is that washing of the corpse is farḍ kifāya (communal obligation), and if we are allowed to do so without harm to the lives of those who perform the ghusl, it should be done. [As for the writing of this fatwa, the Center for Disease Control in America has advised that extra precaution be taken when washing the body (by wearing appropriate PPE), but that in and of itself, the washing of the body should not cause any danger as long as standard protocols are followed.]





In case the body cannot be washed in the traditional manner, it is allowed to pour water over the body without scrubbing and without even changing the clothes of the deceased.

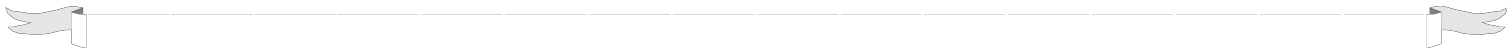
Q. In case there is a genuine danger or reasonable doubt that the body may be infected, what can be done in place of washing or pouring water over the body?

A. In case this cannot be done and there is a genuine danger or reasonable doubt regarding harming the health of those around the corpse, tayammum (dry ablution) can be done in which case the one in charge of the corpse may, while wearing gloves, wipe the face and hands of the deceased after touching some sandy surface. Tayammum takes the place of ghusl in dire circumstances, and this applies to both the living and the dead.

And in case tayammum cannot be performed and the corpse is required to be wrapped up in a special sealed body bag, the obligation of both ghusl and tayammum is lifted; and it would not be considered sinful if the body is laid to rest as is.

Q. What should be done if the person performing the Ghusl is asked to self-quarantine following the washing and shrouding of the deceased?

A. In this case, and Allah knows best, it is allowed for the health authorities to take the place of others in washing and shrouding. This is due to the major difficulty inherent in quarantining. The sharīah allows for an ease in obligations in times of necessity and this would be one such occasion. In such situations, expert Islamic guidance should be given to the health authorities to help them understand the rituals that need to be performed.



Q. How do we shroud the body under health restrictions?


A. The minimum requirement of shrouding is that the 'awrah be covered. If health authorities are using sealed bags for bodies, health officials can shroud the body before sealing. If they are unable to open the bag, then this obligation is removed due to necessity, and the shroud can be placed over the sealed bag.

Q. Is it permissible to bury Muslims in a coffin (wooden box)?

A. Burying the dead is a way of honoring them and the burial is a communal obligation. In terms of burial in a wooden box, the majority of scholars have gone with the opinion of that doing so is unfavorable; however, this ruling drops in case of necessity. Ibn Taymiyyah elaborated that necessity refers to difficulty in burial without a box in some Western countries, therefore, the ruling stating the act unfavorable drops. Imam Al-Nawawi also elaborated by stating that the unrecommended act of burying the dead in a coffin becomes permissible if there is no other way to keep the body together (as in: bodies that are no longer in one piece due to an accident, for example). As for the fear of disease transmission during a pandemic and causing harm to the living, according to people of knowledge, burial in a coffin or closed body bag is permissible. Not only would it be permissible, but it would also be the better thing to do Islamically. This is what necessity dictates in order to preserve the living and protect them from contracting the disease.

Q. Is cremation allowed under any circumstances during this crisis?

A. It is forbidden for Muslims to be cremated. Islam obligates that deceased Muslims be treated with dignity and that no form of desecration, harm or mutilation can take place. In Islam, the deceased have rights, one of which is the right to burial. If the government decides that there is not enough capacity




to bury the deceased as per the norm, every other option must first be exhausted. This includes the burying of multiple bodies in a single grave of a Muslim graveyard/ Muslim section of the graveyard. This already has precedent from the Sunnah. Other alternatives then include using a section of a non-Muslim graveyard, the use of alternative burial sites etc. In an eventuality that the government forces cremation upon Muslims, family members of the deceased should be assured that they are not sinful for this nor is it a sign of a bad ending for their loved ones who have passed. We do our best and Allah knows our intentions and what our loved ones would have preferred. Allah says, “Be mindful of Allah as much as you can...” And Allah says, “Allah does not burden any soul with more than it can bear...”

Q. What constitutes a valid funeral prayer with regards to location and required number of congregants?

A. The funeral prayer (ṣalat al-janāzah) can be performed anywhere, including in the graveyard itself, and there is no minimum that is required. Hence, in case larger congregations are not possible, even one person can pray if need be, and it will constitute a valid funeral prayer.

Q. In the case that the funeral prayer cannot be held in the masjid due to health restrictions, where should it be held alternatively?

A. The funeral prayer can be held in the cemetery away from the graveyards while facing the Qibla, for example: in the cemetery’s parking lot or any area in the vicinity away from the burial sites themselves.



Q. Is it permissible to pray the funeral prayer in absentia if family members and/or friends are unable to attend the prayer?

A. It is permissible in normal circumstances according to two of the schools of law to perform the funeral prayer in absentia (ṣalat ‘ala al-ghā’ib); hence in these extenuating circumstances, we would encourage this as an alternative for those who are not able to attend the prayer in person of a family member or a friend.

Q. Is it permissible to broadcast the Janazah procedure to family members?


A. There is no sin in broadcasting the janāzah procedure (the procession and burial) live to family members, as long as Islamic decorum and dignity is observed.

Q. Can we pray the funeral prayer without the body present?

A. The general rule is that the body is present for the funeral prayer. If this is not possible due to quarantine or other health restrictions, this condition is lifted and the prayer can be offered without the body, and is in essence a prayer in absentia (ṣalāt alghā’ib).

Q. Where should Muslims be buried?

A. As for burial, the rule is that Muslims are to be buried where they die. The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, were buried where they passed away. Also, Muslims are to be buried in Muslim cemeteries. However, in the case of unavailability, the deceased Muslims could be



buried wherever possible, even if it be non-Muslim cemeteries, as Allah does not overburden a soul. In addition, in such a situation if a Muslim is buried in a non-Muslim cemetery, it will not harm her/him. In the hereafter s/he can only avail of her/his deeds.

Q. How do we give condolences under health restrictions?

A. If it is not possible to meet due to social distancing to offer condolences, this can be done via phone. We should continue to make du'ā' for our deceased and offer any help we can to their bereaved families.

