

What to do at time of DEATH

**In the name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful**

Death is a subject that people often avoid to talk about, much less remember it. The Qur'an at various places reminds, "*Each soul shall taste death...*" (Aal 'Imran, 3:185)

Even though death is certain and inevitable, yet people tend to live as if they are going to live forever and not die. Death knows no age. The term of one's life or appointed time is predetermined before birth and this is known only to God. When death occurs, the spirit (*ruh*) leaves the body.

Some die suddenly while others may go through pain and suffering before they die. According to prophetic traditions, sickness is a source of mercy and a chance for forgiveness. In one saying, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him, pbuh) says, "For every misfortune, illness, anxiety, grief or hurt that afflicts a believer – even the hurt caused by the pricking of a thorn – God wipes off his sins and his sins fall away from him as leaves fall from a tree." The Prophet informed us that, "If a servant of God falls sick or goes on a journey, he (continues to be) rewarded for the good deeds that he used to do when he was healthy or at home." This is God's gift to the believer.

One may supplicate for the sick person the way the Prophet did, "O God, the Lord of mankind! Remove the grief and cure (the disease.) You are the Healer. There is no cure except Your cure. Grant (us) a cure that leaves no trace of illness." One may supplicate using his or her own words in any language he or she speaks.

Visiting someone who is on his/her deathbed is highly desirable. The Prophet said, "When you visit someone who is ill or is dying, say good things about him (or her). Indeed, the angels say "ameen" to whatever you utter." It is highly desired to have the patient or someone on his/her behalf or on behalf of a dying patient to do as much good deeds

as possible. It makes the person dies on a state of goodness.

People will have to eventually expire. Being the most certain reality, a conscious believer prepares him/herself here in this world for the eternal and perpetual blissful life of the hereafter. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in one of his sayings said, “Clever is the one who controls his passions and prepares for life after death.”

What Should A Dying Patient And Family Members Do?

The following are the most essential things a dying person and/or family members may do:

1. Repentance

The time of death is a time of repentance. The Prophet of God, Muhammad (pbuh) informed us that God accepts His servants’ repentance anytime even minutes before one is overtaken by death, as long as the spirit does not reach the throat. One must turn to God with utmost sincerity and beg for forgiveness.

2. Charity

In addition to asking God to forgive past sins, one must give in charity, for charity expiates sins. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reminds us, “Charity extinguishes sinful deeds just as water extinguishes fire.”

3. Supplication

The best way to depart from this world is the way Yusuf (Joseph, pbuh) did. He supplicated, “[O God] You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die as one who has surrendered to You and join me with the righteous.” (Yusuf, 12:101)

4. Declare the *Shahadah* (Testimony of Faith)

The dying person who is going through the agony of death and is able to speak is advised to recite the shahadah, or the declaration of faith, “I bear witness that there is no god except Allah (God) and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” A dying person who can hardly speak may be assisted by

someone to frequently say, “La ilaha illal-lah” there is no god but Allah (God). Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reminds us, “He whose last words are: La ilaha illal-lah, enters Paradise.” This method is called *talqeen*. The Prophet (pbuh) advised, “Prompt your dying people to say, ‘La ilaha illal-lah.’”

5. Pray for the Dying Person

Relatives among other visitors should pray for the departing soul. They supplicate, “O Allah (God)! Forgive him/her, have mercy on him/her, and cause him/her to enter Your Paradise. Indeed, You are the acceptor of prayers.”

6. Recite Surah *Ya Seen* (Chapter 36 of the Qur'an)

The Prophet (pbuh) informed the believers, “Ya Seen is the heart of the Qur'an. Whoever recites it seeking the pleasure of God and the hereafter will receive God's forgiveness. So recite it to your dying person.” He also said, “If any person is on his deathbed and Ya Seen is recited to him, God makes his suffering easier.” This can be done by immediate family members. If they are unable to recite it in Arabic, they may ask someone close to the deceased who can, otherwise one may ask a Muslim Chaplain or an Imam.

7. Will and Testament

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) instructed the believers, “It is not permissible for any Muslim, who has something to bequeath, to stay for two nights without having his last will and testament written and kept ready with him.” Family members should urge the dying person to prepare a written will and testament if he/she hasn't done so already. Civil courts will not divide the inheritance of the deceased among the heirs according to Islamic guidelines. Civil courts, however, will honor wills that are prepared according to Islamic guidelines.

The court will not interfere with the deceased's decision regarding the distribution of his/her wealth or property as long as it is specified in the will. It is best and fair for the beneficiaries to divide the shares according to the divine law of inheritance. For assistance and guidance in this matter one may contact a Muslim Chaplain or an Imam of an Islamic Center or Mosque.

8. Allowable Charity

According to the established prophetic tradition, the departing soul may not exceed one-third of his/her property to be given to charitable causes. He/she may assign a certain percentage of the one-third amount to different charitable organizations or individuals. This should be included in the will and testament.

9. Debts

It is the duty of family members to ensure that the dying person is debt free. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "A believer's soul remains in suspense until all his debts are paid off." The debt should be paid out of the property that he/she leaves behind. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "If anyone takes other people's money with the intention to repay it and then he or she should die without settling the debt (unable to pay it), God will pay the debt on his behalf. And if anyone takes money or property (of others) with the intention of destroying it (intending not to pay), God will destroy him."

Death by itself does not annul one's debt or other responsibilities to the living. The deceased person's estate is responsible for paying any unpaid debts. If there is no money or property left, the survivors may pay the debt of their deceased from their own pocket and if they are poor the debt may be paid by the public out of the zakat (compulsory charity) funds specified as the portion for people in debt. This is one of the prescribed categories of *zakat* recipients.

10. Forgiveness

If the dying person wronged anyone, he/she must ask for their forgiveness before departing this world, otherwise those who were wronged will demand justice on the Day of Judgment and the dying person may be setting himself up for disaster.

What Should Be Done When A Loved One Dies?

The following are the specific Islamic rites honoring the deceased:

1. Closing the Eyes of the Deceased

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "When a soul is seized, the eyesight follows it."

2. Covering the Deceased

Covering the deceased is a way of respecting and preserving the dignity of the deceased.

3. Donation of Organs

Donate any organ or part of the body only if the deceased requested in his/her will and testament or is registered as a donor. Family members have no rights to donate organs or parts of the body without the prior consent of the deceased.

4. Arrangements for Burial

Family members may contact any Islamic funeral director in the area to handle the burial procedures including the funeral prayer and prepare for burial without delay.

5. Informing Relatives and Friends

It is desirable to inform relatives, neighbors, friends and coworkers of the deceased about his or her death so that they may share in the reward of participating in the funeral prayer, burial, as well as praying for the deceased.

6. Washing the Body

The guardian of the deceased should wash, wrap and arrange for the funeral prayer prior to burial. The funeral director may assist in case the guardian is unable to do so.

7. Funeral Prayer

The funeral prayer or *salat al-Janazah* is a collective duty upon the Muslim community. The funeral prayer may be performed at a mosque or any public community hall. The prayer is led by a local Imam or preferably by the male guardian, son or any person the deceased may have designated.

8. Burial

It is recommended to bury the deceased in the town where he or she dies. The deceased is to be buried in a Muslim cemetery unless one is unable to locate one. If circumstances allow, the deceased is placed in the grave on his/her right side facing the direction of Mecca (*qibla*) where one directs his or her face in the daily prayers. After the grave is covered with dirt, an Imam, a Muslim chaplain, or a recognized pious person may lead the crowd in supplications (*dua*).

9. Weeping over the Deceased

Weeping over the deceased is permissible while wailing and shouting phrases, beating of chest and cheeks, tearing hair and clothes among other excessive actions are prohibited. The Prophet wept over his son Ibrahim (Abraham) at his death saying, "The eyes shed tears and the heart feels pain, but we utter only what pleases the Lord. O Ibrahim! We are aggrieved at your demise."

10. Mourning

It is generally accepted among the schools of thought that it is permissible for loved ones and relatives to mourn for a period of three days on the death of a near relative. During such period the family of the deceased mourn, receive visitors and condolences. The mourning period for a widow, on the other hand, is extended to four months and ten days. This waiting period is called the *iddah* and it is mandated by God as it appears in the Qur'an. To learn more about mourning check with a local Imam or a Muslim chaplain.

11. Execution of the Will

The family of the deceased may consult a lawyer if necessary, preferably a Muslim lawyer that understands the Islamic inheritance laws and may help in the execution of the deceased's will and testament.

12. Visiting the Grave

Family members are requested to frequently visit the grave of the deceased and pray for him or her.

13. Praying for the Deceased

Loved ones and dear friends of the deceased are requested to frequently pray to God to save the deceased from the torment of the grave and the difficulties of the hereafter.

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The Islamic Organization of North America is a non-profit organization dedicated to reviving the Qur'an into the hearts of Muslims, while sharing its message with non-Muslims.