

Preparing the Body for Burial

BURIAL REQUIREMENTS BINDING ON ALL BELIEVERS

With regard to the Faith's burial laws, which are set out in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the only requirements now universally binding are to bury the body in a coffin (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour's journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased believer is over the age of fifteen. Other aspects of Bahá'í burial law are not yet universally binding. (Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 21, 2021, to an individual believer)

NOTE: It is currently NOT BINDING upon the Western Believers to wash the body for burial.

WASHING THE BODY

This section may be helpful for those who may wish to assist in the cleansing of the body before burial. We have provided detailed explanations and illustrations to help prevent injury while turning the body and/or lifting the body.

Before beginning the washing of the body, it will be useful to discuss procedures with those who are assisting. Maintaining an attitude of flexibility and understanding that there are many options from which to choose will result in a more relaxed environment.

Gather all the materials you wish to use before beginning. If you are at a funeral home, they will have all that you need, but feel free to bring additional items if you wish. There will be a stainless-steel table upon which you can wash the body of the deceased. If you will be washing the body in a home setting, you will wash the body by either using a sturdy table, massage table or the bed. It may be soothing to have music playing and/or have someone say prayers. Additional suggestions:

- Light candles if you wish.
- Cover private areas of the body with towels.
- Begin by washing the hair and face. The funeral home will have a blow dryer for your use after the washing is complete.
- Continue washing the body. It is helpful to have one person lift and hold the extremity (arm & leg) while another person washes and rinses.
- When you have completed washing the front of the body, you can gently roll the body to the side to cleanse the backside. (see page 32) If you need assistance, please ask the funeral home to lend a hand.
- Once you have completed washing the backside of the body, dry off the table and the back of the body before rolling the deceased from his/her side to his/her back. This will prevent you from having to re-roll the body. Proceed to dry the rest of the body and then complete it by drying the hair.
- Some people choose to anoint the body. The time to do so after all the washing and drying is complete.
- Place the burial ring on the finger or place it in the coffin. (currently, not binding upon Western believers)
- The method used to shroud the body will determine whether you place the fabric in the coffin or if you shroud the body while on the table. (Shrouding the body is currently not binding upon Western Believers)

It is not uncommon for excrement to be released during moving of the body. You may want to place a disposable pad or towel beneath the buttocks and pull up between the legs (like a diaper) while cleansing the body. Communicable diseases can be transported via body fluids. It is important to be aware of standard safety practices while cleansing the body. **It is wise to wear protective gloves.**

BURIAL RING

There is no provision in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas determining the finger on which the burial ring should be placed. (From a letter dated 13 March 1978 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

The Lord hath decreed that the dead should be interred in coffins ... and that graven rings should be placed upon their fingers....

... If the following verse, which hath at this moment been sent down by God, be engraved upon the burial rings of both men and women, it shall be better for them; We, of a certainty, are the Supreme Ordainer: “I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraphs 128-129)

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

In the Prayer for the Dead six specific passages have been sent down by God, the Revealer of Verses. Let one who is able to read recite that which hath been revealed to precede these passages; and as for him who is unable, God hath relieved him of this requirement.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 8) [25]

Recital of this prayer should precede interment; and as regards the Qiblih:

“Whichever way ye turn, there is the face of God.”¹ (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, Questions and Answers, number 85) [27]

The Bahá'í funeral service is marked by its dignity, simplicity and flexibility. The only requirement is that the Prayer for the Dead be read before burial. Other prayers and passages from the Writings may, of course, be included. The friends are encouraged to avoid adopting a uniform procedure lest it become a ritual. The Prayer for the Dead is to be said when the deceased is 15 years of age or older. Bahá'u'lláh has clarified its recital should precede interment. Facing the Qiblih is not required, but the friends may choose to do so. With respect to how the Prayer for the Dead is to be said, it is to be recited by one believer while all present stand and listen in silence. As indicated in note 11 in The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book and in recently published editions of Bahá'í prayer books, such as Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002, 2011), the correct way of reciting the Prayer for the Dead is as follows: “Alláh-u-Abhá” is said once, then the first of the six verses, “We all, verily, worship God,” is recited nineteen times. Then “Alláh-u-Abhá” is said again, followed by the second verse, which is recited nineteen times, and so on.

The Prayer for the Dead should be offered even if a believer has lost his or her administrative rights. Normally it would not be appropriate for a believer whose administrative rights have been suspended to be asked to read the Prayer for the Dead at a Bahá'í funeral service unless there are special reasons to do so, for example, if such a believer is a close relative of the deceased. (From a response dated 3 March 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice) [28] 1 Qur'án 2:115

The Prayer for the Dead

... is the only Bahá'í obligatory prayer that is to be recited in congregation; it is to be **recited by one believer while all present stand in silence**. Bahá'u'lláh has clarified that this prayer is required only when the deceased is over the age of fifteen, that its recital must precede interment, and that there is no requirement to face the Qiblah during its recitation.



“Alláh-u-Abhá” is said once; then the first of the six verses is recited nineteen times.

Then “Alláh-u-Abhá” is said again, followed by the second verse,

which is recited nineteen times, and so on.)

O my God! ******(This is Thy servant and the son of Thy servant) who hath believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set his face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee.

Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.

Deal with him, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and concealest their faults, as beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounty and the ocean of Thy grace. Grant him admission within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

*Let him, then, **repeat six times** the greeting “Alláh-u-Abhá,”*

*and **then repeat nineteen times** each of the following verses:*

We all, verily, worship God.

We all, verily, bow down before God.

We all, verily, are devoted unto God.

We all, verily, give praise unto God.

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.

We all, verily, are patient in God.

*******(If the dead be a woman, let him say: This is Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden, etc... .)*