



The washing and the shroud

The ghusl is the last service a family gives the one who has died. It is usually done by trained volunteers from the masjid, and family members of the same sex may take part. This page explains what happens, so you know what to expect and what to ask for.

1

Who washes

Men wash men and women wash women. A wife may wash her husband, and most scholars allow a husband to wash his wife; the Ḥanafī school does not.

Sunan Ibn Mājah 1465 (ḥasan)

2

Privacy and gentleness

The washing is done in a private room, with the body covered from navel to knee throughout. Only those washing, and family who wish to help, are present. Handle the body gently, as you would if they were alive.

3

Begin with the right side and the parts of wuḍū'

The washers begin with the right side of the body and the places washed in wuḍū', then wash the whole body.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1255

4

Wash an odd number of times, with sidr, and camphor at the end

The body is washed three times, or five, or more if needed, with water and sidr (lote-tree leaves), and camphor is added to the last washing. Then it is dried gently.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1253

5

The kafan

A man is shrouded in three plain white sheets, with no shirt and no turban. Many scholars recommend five pieces for a woman: a lower wrap, a shirt, a head covering and two sheets. The ḥadīth behind the five pieces is graded weak, and one garment that covers the body is the minimum: Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr was shrouded in a single cloak at Uḥud.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1264 • Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3157 (graded weak) • Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1276

WHAT FAMILIES CAN ASK FOR

To be present or help; no embalming; plain white cotton; the washing as soon as possible.

LEARNING TO DO IT

Many masajid run ghusl workshops. Learning before you need it is a great service. Ask your masjid's funeral committee when the next one is.

NEXT

The janazah prayer