



LIFE IS TEMPORARY

Guides for Muslim Families

What to do when someone dies, and how to prepare

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- I When a Muslim dies: step by step
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كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

“Every soul will taste death.” Āl ‘Imrān 3:185



إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn. Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. Qur'ān, al-Baqarah 2:156

We are sorry. Here is what happens next.

You do not have to do this alone, or all at once. Your masjid has done this many times. Follow the steps in order, and open each one when you reach it.



As soon as you can, call your masjid's funeral committee.

They will arrange the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, and tell you which funeral home to use.

1

Have the death pronounced

In the first hour

A death has to be confirmed before anything else can happen.

☐ In a hospital or hospice, ask the staff to pronounce the death

☐ At home and unexpected, call 911

- ☐ Tell the staff early that the family needs a quick release for a religious burial

and

Close the eyes, cover the body, make duʿā

In the first hour · at the same time as the step above

Gently and without hurry. Those present can do this while the calls are made.

- ☐ Close the eyes and the mouth
- ☐ Straighten the arms and legs
- ☐ Cover the body with a clean sheet
- ☐ Pray for them, and say only good

EVIDENCE

The Prophet ﷺ closed the eyes of Abū Salamah and prayed for him. Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 920

2

Call the masjid's funeral committee

In the first few hours

They arrange the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, and usually know which funeral home to use.

- ☐ Call the funeral committee or the imam
- ☐ Tell them where the body is and who the next of kin is
- ☐ Agree a time for the ghusl and the janazah prayer

NO NUMBER?

Use the directory below, or call the nearest large masjid. They will know who to call.

3

Ask whether a coroner is involved PAPERWORK

If the death was sudden

After an unexpected death a coroner or medical examiner may need to examine the body, which can delay burial.

- ☐ Ask the hospital or police whether the case has gone to the coroner
- ☐ Ask whether an autopsy is required
- ☐ Ask how to register a religious objection under your state law

STATE RULES

Whether an autopsy can be declined on religious grounds differs from state to state. Ask the medical examiner's office directly.

4

Choose a funeral home that allows ghusl PAPERWORK

Within the first day

Many funeral homes work with Muslim committees. Your committee will usually name one.

- ☐ Confirm the committee can wash the body there
- ☐ Ask for no embalming and no viewing
- ☐ Ask the funeral home to file the death certificate and the burial permit

and

Wash and shroud the body

Within the first day • at the same time as the step above

Done by trained Muslims of the same sex, or by the spouse. The committee usually provides the cloth.

- ☐ Confirm who will wash
- ☐ Confirm the kafan is ready

A SPOUSE MAY WASH

The Prophet ﷺ told 'Ā'ishah that if she died before him he would wash and shroud her himself. Sunan Ibn Mājah 1465 (ḥasan)

5

The janazah prayer and the burial

As soon as possible

The prayer is often held after one of the daily prayers, and the burial follows straight after.

- ☐ Tell family and community the time of the prayer
- ☐ Confirm the grave in a Muslim cemetery or Muslim section
- ☐ Ask the plot price and the fee to open and close the grave

How to pray the janazah prayer >

HASTE

The Prophet ﷺ told us to hurry with the funeral. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1315

6

Get copies of the death certificate PAPERWORK

In the first week

Banks, insurers, the DMV and government offices will each want a certified copy.

- ☐ Order several certified copies through the funeral home
- ☐ Or order them from the your state vital records office

WHERE TO ORDER

The CDC lists every state's vital records office. [Open ↗](#)

7

Pay the funeral costs and list every debt

In the first weeks

The funeral is paid from the estate first, then the debts. Nothing is inherited until both are settled.

- ☐ Pay the funeral costs from the estate
- ☐ List loans, bills and money owed to family
- ☐ Ask a scholar about any unpaid zakat

THE ORDER

Funeral, then debts, then bequests from a third, then the heirs. al-Sirājiyyah (al-Sajāwandī), opening chapter

and

Find the will, and tell Social Security PAPERWORK

In the first weeks · at the same time as the step above

The executor named in the will leads what follows.

- ☐ Check papers at home, email, and with any attorney
- ☐ Confirm the funeral home reported the death to Social Security
- ☐ Ask about survivor benefits
- ☐ Secure the house and car, and keep the phone line active for sign-in codes

SOCIAL SECURITY

Funeral homes usually report the death. Survivors can also call 1-800-772-1213. Open ↗

8

Settle and divide the estate PAPERWORK

In the months after

Small estates may qualify for a simpler process in your state. One call to a local estate attorney will tell you.

- ☐ Open probate if the estate needs it
- ☐ Close accounts and cancel subscriptions

ONE THIRD

A bequest is limited to a third, and an heir cannot receive one. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2742 ; Sunan Abī Dāwūd 2870 (ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ)

☐ Pay any bequest, up to one third, to people who are not heirs

☐ Divide the rest by the fixed shares

See how the estate divides >

9

Look after the family

Four months and ten days

Mourning is kept to three days, except by a widow, who mourns four months and ten days, the length of her 'iddah, or until she gives birth if she is pregnant.

☐ Bring food and help with the household

☐ Help the widow with errands and appointments

☐ Make du'ā for the one who has died

What to say and do when you visit >

EVIDENCE

No mourning beyond three days except for a husband: four months and ten days. A pregnant widow's term ends with the birth. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1280 ; Qur'ān, al-Ṭalāq 65:4

FOOD

Prepare food for the family, for what has happened has occupied them. Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3132 (ḥasan)

General guidance, not a fatwa or legal advice. Rules on autopsies, embalming, burial permits and probate differ by state; your funeral home and a local estate attorney can confirm them.



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

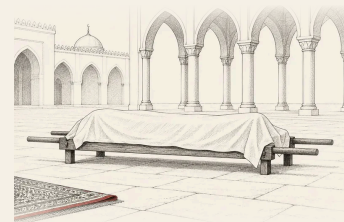
To be present or help; no embalming; plain white cotton; the washing as soon as possible.

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



How to pray the janazah prayer

The funeral prayer is prayed standing, with no bowing and no prostration. The imam leads; everyone else stands in rows behind him. It has four takbīrs, and something is said after each one.

1

Stand in rows and make your intention

Stand behind the imam facing the qiblah, with the body in front of him. Intend in your heart to pray the funeral prayer for this person.

The Prophet ﷺ prayed for al-Najāshī with the people in rows behind him and said four takbīrs: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1245

2

First takbīr, then al-Fātiḥah

Raise your hands and say *Allāhu akbar*, then recite al-Fātiḥah quietly.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. [All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds - The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Recompense. It is You we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path - The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1335 • Arabic: Tanzil; translation: Saheeh International

Where the schools differ. The Ḥanafī and Mālīkī schools praise Allah here instead of reciting al-Fātiḥah. The Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī schools recite it, following Ibn ʿAbbās. Follow your imam.

3

Second takbīr, then blessings on the Prophet ﷺ

Say *Allāhu akbar* and send blessings on the Prophet ﷺ, as in the sitting of every prayer.

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ، وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ، وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ، اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ، وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ، وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

O Allah! Send Your Mercy on Muhammad and on the family of Muhammad, as You sent Your Mercy on Abraham and on the family of Abraham, for You are the Most Praise-worthy, the Most Glorious. O Allah! Send Your Blessings on Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, as You sent your Blessings on Abraham and on the family of Abraham, for You are the Most Praise-worthy, the Most Glorious.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3370

4

Third takbīr, then the duʿāʾ for the one who has died

Say *Allāhu akbar* and pray for them. This is the heart of the prayer; any sincere duʿāʾ fulfils it, and this is one the Prophet ﷺ said.

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لَهُ وَارْحَمْهُ وَعَافِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنْهُ وَأَكْرِمْ نَزْلَهُ وَوَسِّعْ مَدْخَلَهُ وَاغْسِلْهُ بِالْمَاءِ وَالتَّلَجِ وَالْبَرْدِ وَنَقِّهِ مِنَ الْخَطَايَا كَمَا نَقَّيْتَ الثَّوْبَ الْأَبْيَضَ مِنَ الدَّنَسِ وَأَبْدِلْهُ دَارًا خَيْرًا مِنْ دَارِهِ وَأَهْلًا خَيْرًا مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَزَوْجًا خَيْرًا مِنْ زَوْجِهِ وَأَدْخِلْهُ الْجَنَّةَ وَأَعِذْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ أَوْ مِنْ عَذَابِ النَّارِ

O Allah! forgive him, have mercy upon him, give him peace and absolve him. Receive him with honour and make his grave spacious; wash him with water, snow and hail. Cleanse him from faults as Thou wouldst cleanse a white garment from impurity. Requite him with an abode more excellent than his abode, with a family better than his family, and with a mate better than his mate. Admit him to the Garden, and protect him from the torment of the grave and the torment of the Fire.

Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 963 · For a woman, “him” becomes “her” (lahā)

5

Fourth takbīr, then the salām

Say *Allāhu akbar*, pause briefly for a short duʿāʾ, then turn your head to the right and say *as-salāmu ʿalaykum wa raḥmatullāh*. Many also turn to the left.

IF YOU ARRIVE LATE

Join at the imam’s next takbīr and follow him. Ask the imam how to complete what you missed.

IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THE ARABIC

Pray for them in your own words after the third takbīr. Allah hears every language.

AFTER THE PRAYER

The body is taken straight to the grave. Follow if you can. **The full step-by-step guide**



Visiting a grieving family

You do not need the perfect words. Go, sit with them, help with something practical, and pray for the one who has died.

1

What to say

The Prophet ﷺ sent these words to his grieving daughter: *To Allah belongs what He took, and to Him belongs what He gave, and everything with Him has an appointed time. So be patient and hope for reward.* Saying *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn* and making duʿā' for the one who has died is always right.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1284 • Qurʾān, al-Baqarah 2:156

2

Tears are a mercy

When the Prophet ﷺ wept as his grandchild was dying and was asked about it, he said it was mercy that Allah places in the hearts of His servants. Let the family grieve.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1284

3

Bring food

The family is occupied with what has happened. Cook for them, or organize meals for the first days, so they do not have to.

Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3132 (ḥasan)

4

Mourning lasts three days, except for a widow

Mourning is kept to three days, except by a widow, who mourns four months and ten days, or until she gives birth if she is pregnant. After the first days, check in on her quietly with help for errands and appointments.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1280 • Qurʾān, al-Baqarah 2:234

THE REWARD

No believer consoles his brother in a calamity except that Allah clothes him in garments of honour on the Day of Resurrection. Sunan Ibn Mājah 1601 (ḥasan)

PRACTICAL HELP

Offer something specific: “I will bring dinner on Tuesday,”
“I can drive to the funeral home.”

When someone dies abroad

Whether the death happened overseas or the family hopes to bury someone in their home country, the same choice comes first: bury where they died, or bring them home.

1

Contact the US embassy or consulate

If a US citizen dies abroad, the nearest US embassy or consulate helps the family with local burial or the return of the body, and can issue a Consular Report of Death Abroad, which you will need in the US. The State Department cannot pay to bring remains home.

U.S. Department of State, Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad

2

Decide: bury there, or bring them home

Burying where the person died keeps to the haste the Sunnah asks for, and costs far less. Bringing a body home can take days or weeks of permits and flights. Scholars differ on moving a body before burial: many advise burying where the person died, and some schools discourage moving it without a strong reason. Ask a scholar before deciding.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1315

3

If you bring them home, ask about embalming first

Airlines and the countries involved set their own rules for transporting a body, and some require embalming. Ask the funeral home on both ends what is required, and whether refrigeration or a sealed container is accepted instead.

4

If you bury in another country from the US

A US funeral home that works with Muslim families can arrange the paperwork, the consulate of the destination country, and the flight. Ask for the total cost in writing before you agree.

Federal Trade Commission, The FTC Funeral Rule

THE JANAZAH

The prayer can be prayed wherever the body is. Family elsewhere may pray the funeral prayer in absence, as the Prophet ﷺ did for al-Najāshī; ask your imam. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1245

NEXT

The full step-by-step guide

If you have no Muslim family

If your family is not Muslim, they may not know what you would want, and by law they may be the ones who decide. A little preparation makes sure you are washed, prayed over and buried as a Muslim.

- 1** Tell your masjid, and keep their number with you
Let your imam or the funeral committee know your situation. Many committees will step in for a Muslim with no Muslim relatives, and some burial funds exist for exactly this.
- 2** Write your wishes down, and sign them
Families usually follow clear written wishes. Write your janazah wishes and give a copy to your family and to your masjid.
Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2738
- 3** Name someone to carry them out
In many states the closest relative has the legal right to decide about burial unless you have named someone else in a signed document. An estate attorney can tell you how to name a Muslim friend or your masjid to carry out your funeral wishes where you live.
- 4** Talk to your family while you can
Explain what a Muslim burial involves: a quick burial, a simple washing and shroud, no cremation. Most families honour wishes they have heard in person.

YOUR ESTATE

Muslims and non-Muslims do not inherit from one another by the Islamic shares; many scholars allow a bequest of up to a third to non-Muslim relatives, who do not inherit. Ask a scholar. Ask a scholar and an attorney together. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6764

FIND YOUR MASJID

The directory

When a child dies

Nothing prepares a parent for this. The steps are the same as for any death, and your masjid will carry as much of it as you let them.

- 1 Call the masjid's funeral committee
They arrange the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, as for any Muslim. Tell the hospital early that you need a quick release for burial.
- 2 The prayer is the same, with its own du'ā'
The janazah prayer has the same four takbīrs. After the third, the imam prays for the child and for the parents. You can pray in your own words.
How the janazah prayer is prayed
- 3 A miscarriage or a stillborn child
Scholars differ on whether a baby who died before birth is washed, named and prayed over, depending on how far the pregnancy had come. Ask your imam; there is no wrong question.
- 4 Your child's place
The Prophet ﷺ said that a Muslim whose three children die before puberty will be granted Paradise by Allah, out of His mercy to them. As his grandchild was dying, he wept, and called it mercy.
Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1248 • Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1284

FOR FRIENDS

Bring food, take the other children for an afternoon, and keep visiting after the first week. Visiting a grieving family

Autopsy, embalming and organ donation

Three questions families are asked in the first hours. Knowing your rights ahead of time keeps the burial simple and quick.

1

Routine embalming is not required by law

No state law requires routine embalming, though some states require embalming or refrigeration after a set number of hours, or for transport. Funeral homes may require it for a public viewing, which a Muslim funeral does not have. Tell the funeral home clearly: no embalming, no viewing.

Federal Trade Commission, The FTC Funeral Rule

2

An autopsy can sometimes be required

After a sudden, violent or unexplained death, the medical examiner or coroner may order an autopsy. Some states let families object on religious grounds; ask the medical examiner's office what applies in your state, and ask them to work quickly so burial is not delayed.

See your state's guide

3

Organ donation: scholars differ

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy permitted organ donation under conditions, including the donor's consent and no sale of organs. Other scholars do not permit it. If you have a view, write it in your wishes so your family does not have to decide for you.

International Islamic Fiqh Academy, Resolution 26 (1/4), 1988

4

Vaults and caskets

No state law requires an outer burial container, but many cemeteries do. Muslim cemeteries often allow burial in the shroud alone, or with a simple box. You may buy a casket elsewhere; the funeral home cannot charge you for doing so.

Federal Trade Commission, The FTC Funeral Rule

WRITE IT DOWN

Your answers to all three belong in your janazah wishes.

What a Muslim funeral costs

A Muslim funeral is simple by design, and it can cost much less than a typical American funeral. Often the largest cost is the grave.

-
- 1** **Where the money goes**
Usually: the funeral home's basic services and transport, the washing room, the shroud, the grave plot, and the fee to open and close the grave. There is no embalming, no viewing and no expensive casket.

 - 2** **What it can cost**
Costs vary widely by city and cemetery. Families in New York have reported costs from about \$6,000 to more than \$50,000 because of cemetery shortages. Ask for prices in writing before you agree.
AboutIslam, New York funeral costs

 - 3** **Your rights at the funeral home**
The funeral home must give you an itemized General Price List to keep. Apart from a basic services fee, you pay only for what you choose, and you can buy a casket elsewhere without paying the funeral home a fee.
Federal Trade Commission, The FTC Funeral Rule

 - 4** **Masjid burial funds**
Some masajid run funds that families join for a yearly fee, which then cover a member's funeral. For example, as listed on its site in October 2026, Dar Al-Hijrah in Virginia charges \$540 a year per person for coverage of up to \$10,000. Ask your masjid whether it has one.
Dar Al-Hijrah funeral fund

 - 5** **Who pays**
The funeral is paid from the estate first, before debts and before anything is inherited. If the estate cannot cover it, family and the community step in.
al-Sirājiyyah (al-Sajāwandī), opening chapter
-

FIND A BURIAL FUND

The directory lists masjid burial funds where we have found them.