

Death and Bereavement in Islam

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I am honoured -- and deeply humbled -- to be invited by the St Christopher's Hospice and Dr Colin Murray Parkes to invite me to talk to you on "**Death and Bereavement in Islam**"

Let me begin from the very outset to clarify Islam from Muslim. Most people treat Islam and Muslims as synonymous and mutually interchangeable terms, often saying Islam where they ought to say Muslims and vice versa. In my opinion the word "Islam" should be used exclusively for the "Way of Life" based upon divine sources: The Book known as Qur'an, "the word of God" and Sunnah, "the proven practices of the Prophet" (peace and blessing of God be upon him). "Muslims" as human beings are free to abide or deviate from Divine Guidance, as they feel fit according to their own conscience. Islam has never claimed to be a new faith. It is the same faith that God ordained with the creation of the first man sent to earth. Islam confirms almost all Biblical and Hebrew Prophets as the Prophets of Islam and their messages as the messages of Islam as long as they are confirmed in the Qur'an, the Book of Islam. The moral and ethical code of Islam is similar to Judaism, Christianity and many other major world faiths. The only difference is in theology, concepts and practices, in the methods of worship of the One and the Only One God and methodology of how morality and ethics should govern all spheres and aspects of our human life.

The general theory of Islam begins with a consideration of application of **Islamic Shariah (Law)** in daily life. Shariah is not a divine Law. It is a human interpretation of the sacred text. According to Islamic teachings, the Creator not only laid down laws governing the natural universe but rules for human conduct in all aspects of life. Unlike natural order, which follows its predetermined laws, mankind has the freedom to rebel and follow its own "man-made" laws, which is, however, a form of unbelief (**shirk**). Non-submission to the will of Allah is not only an act of ingratitude (**kufr**) for divine mercies, but also a choice for evil and misery in this world and punishment in the life hereafter. In Islam, all aspects of natural life have been God-willed, therefore, the ultimate purpose of all creation is the compliance of the created with the will of the creator. Islam is neither a purely otherworldly religion nor one that focuses too much on worldly affairs. Muslims seek the best of both worlds. Islam is simultaneously a creed, a set of ethical norms, a social order, and a way of life. Wherever they are, Muslims are expected to actively contribute to the common good and to show solidarity with their brothers and sisters in faith, worldwide. Islamic Shariah commands its followers to observe the local legal order.

Islamic Way of Life

Islamic way of life can be summarised in three words **1) Din** (religion), **2) Dunya** (Community), **3) Dawla** (State / Society). Islamic Shariah covers all of these three aspects. From Islamic point of view, life is a unity. It cannot be divided into watertight compartments. Islamic Shariah gives directions to all aspects of life in their entirety. Islamic Shariah is a complete scheme of life and an all-embracing social order where nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking. Therefore there is no

separation between state and church. Islamic State is not a theocratic state. Secularism, in Muslims view, destroys the transcendence of all moral values. In Qur'anic words "those who forget God eventually forget themselves" (59:19) and their individual and corporate personalities disintegrate. Thus, Islam is considered the way of life in which, through voluntary submission to God, human beings find peace with themselves and their environment. A Muslim seeks God's guidance in all matters all the time. There are no contradictions between the divine rights of the individual anchored in the Qur'an and the core rights as embodied in the Universal Human Rights declarations. Muslims support fundamental human rights, rule of law, and division of power with accountability and checks and balances, universal suffrage and eligibility, and freedom of speech and conscience. It is the duty of an Islamic society to establish a just social order based on principles of harmony, respect, freedom and dignity where all human beings are accepted with all of their differences. Diversity is not only recognised but also appreciated in Islamic Society. Muslims can discharge this responsibility collectively by establishing an Islamic State with power to command (**amr**) and prohibit (**nahy**). Thus Islamic State is an indispensable condition of Islamic life in the true sense of the word "**Islam**". However, Muslims living in minority situations have no duty to establish an Islamic State. Muslims are part of Global community (**Ummah**). Muslims living as a majority have religious duty to establish an Islamic State to establish Peace and Justice with an authority to enjoin good and prohibit evil "**Amar bil Maroof and Nahi a'nil Munkar**" (The Qur'an 3:104; 110; 9:71).

Continuity of Message:

The Qur'an repeatedly points out that its core message is not new and the relations between Muslims and "the followers of earlier revelations" are one of the same in essence. Islam is the same religion from the same God, the creator of Adam and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "Say: We believe in God and that which God revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the other prophets from their Lord; We make no distinction between them, and we have surrendered ourselves to the will of God." (The Qur'an 3:85). Muslims believe in God whom, like Arab Christians, they call "Allah" – the God of Abraham and of all other prophets – is considered One and Unique, not limited by time or space. Allah is the uncaused caused of all beings, defeating any attempt at definition: transcendent and immanent, just and merciful. It is Allah who in his Omnipotence created the Universe and shall maintain it until doomsday, the day of Last judgment. Every Muslim believes that man, since he enjoys free will, is responsible for his actions and accountable for them on the Day of Judgement. Muslims, male and female alike, share the same task in life: To recognise God, to serve God and obey his commands. This will also help to assure equality, freedom, justice, compassion, and prosperity on earth. In my humble opinion religion should build bridges not erect walls between human beings.

Relationship between God and Human:

The human, like all of Allah's creations, is in a state of total submission (Islam) to the will of Allah. The difference between humans and other creations, however, is that we have been given the ability to choose. When our minds submit to Allah, then we would have completely submitted to Allah, and we would be referred to as "Muslims." At this level of total and complete submission, the relationship between Allah and the human is one of a complete peace. It is an Islamic characteristic to have complete obedience to Allah and acceptance of His will and commands. It is also an Islamic characteristic to acquire a unique feeling of satisfaction, fulfilment, and content as a result of this obedience and acceptance. The relationship between Allah and us humans in Islam is a direct one, with no mediators. In this direct relationship, we recognise that there is no other party that can help, give, take, support, provide, or grant forgiveness but Allah. In such a direct relationship, we do not associate any other deities with Allah. Moreover, our faith and submission to Allah become complete and pure.

Islam teaches that all humans are born sinless. We are only responsible for the sins we commit intentionally. Recognising our human nature, Allah the Most Merciful, accepts our sincere repentance and forgives our sins. Islam also teaches that true belief and righteous deeds are two key elements for one to attain Allah's pleasure and satisfaction. It takes both elements to establish health individuals and healthy societies.

Muslims believe the life on this earth is only a transition period that precedes the latter life. Winning the latter life is the goal of every Muslim. This is achieved through gaining Allah's satisfaction through believing in Him and following His commands and prescriptions. The reward for those who gain Allah's satisfaction and forgiveness is Heaven, and that for those who strayed is Hell. Muslims are advised by Prophet Muhammad to work for this life as if we are living forever, and work for the latter life as if we are dying tomorrow. This saying highlights the balance that Muslims are to work towards achieving in their life on earth.

Death:

For the Muslim, the whole of this life constitutes a trial and a test for the human by means of which his final destiny is determined. For him, death is the return of the soul to its Creator, God, and the inevitability of death and the Hereafter is never far from his consciousness. This serves to keep all of his life and deeds in perspective as he tries to live in preparedness for what is to come. For Muslims, the concept of death and the afterlife in Islam is derived from the Qur'an the final revealed message from God. Death is a great mystery to most people. Not so for the students of the Quran.

We learn that death is exactly like sleeping; complete with dreams (6:60, 40:46). The period between death and resurrection passes like one night of sleep (2:259; 6:60; 10:45; 16:21; 18:11, 19, 25; 30:55). At the moment of death, everyone knows his or her destiny; Heaven or Hell. For the disbelievers, death is a horrible event; the angels beat them on the faces and rear ends as they snatch away their souls (8:50, 47:27, 79:1). Consistently, the Quran talks about two deaths; the first death took place when we failed to make a stand with God's absolute authority. That first death lasted until we were born into this world. The second death terminates our life in this world (2:28, 22:66, 40:11).

The Holy Qur'an, contains various death themes that add significantly to our insight into the meaning of death, the concept is left undefined and always portrayed in close relationship with the concepts of life, creation, and resurrection. The Qur'an seems to be more concerned to determine the nature of death. Thus, in speaking about the agonies of death suffered by the wicked ones it uses the crucial term *nafs*, which means 'person' and not simply a thing or an existing entity. To quote the Qur'an:

Every person (nafs) shall taste of death; and We try you with evil and good for a testing, then unto Us you shall be returned. (Q.21:35-6)

Allah says in the Quran: "**Everyone shall taste death. And only on the day of resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away from the fire and admitted to paradise, this person is indeed successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception:**" (Quran 3:185), "**Every soul shall have the taste of death**" (Quran 29:57).

In an authentic Hadith Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said : "*Remember the destroyer of pleasures-death, for not a day passes upon the grave except it says ' I am the house of*

remoteness; I am the house of loneliness; I am the house of soil; I am the house of worms' " (Authentic-Thermithi).

The knowledge of the reality of death helps people understand it and prepare themselves for its coming.

Death is simply a transition state from one world to another, as birth is. No one knows when and where he will die or knows how.

In this respect Allah says in the Quran in Surat (Chapter) Luqman: **" Nor does anyone know what it is that he will earn tomorrow: Nor does anyone know in what land he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and Allah is acquainted with all things "** (Quran 31: 34).

Islam is the only religion that explains death in full detail, how it happens, and what Muslims should do before, during, and after the death of a Muslim.

Allah has assigned angels responsible for taking our souls out of our bodies. In the Quran Allah mentioned the Archangel name "Angel of Death".

Allah says in the Quran : **" Say The Angel of Death put in charge of you, will (Duly) take your souls, then you shall be brought back to your Lord "** (Quran 32:11).

Death involves agony and hardship as mentioned in an authentic Hadith : *" When Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was dying, he put his hands in a large cup of water which was close to him and wipe his face with it, saying : 'O Allah help me over the hardship and agony of death '"*(Authentic –Termidi).

For the faithful believers Allah says in the Quran: **" Those who have said 'Our Lord is Allah', and then have become upright, the angels will descend upon them saying ' Do not fear nor be sad, but receive good news of the paradise which you have been promised. We are your protectors in this life and in the hereafter: therein you shall have all that you desire; therein you shall have all that you ask for "**(Quran 41:30-31).

Allah also says : **" When the angels take the lives of the righteous, the angels say to them : ' Salaamun Alikum, enter paradise, because of the good deeds that you used to do (during your life) ' "** (Quran 6:32).

In other words, the Qur'an says that it is a person who has to taste death, and not his physical existence separate from his soul. It is a person who ceases to exist when death occurs. Death is the termination of an individual comprehensive being, capable of believing and disbelieving, and not simply a living organism. Even though later orthodox Islam came to accept the mind- body dualism, the Qur'an by using the term nafs, seems to be rejecting the idea that some entity, like the soul, leaves the body at the time of death. Life does not end with death. In the same way that a person does not cease to exist in sleep, so also he does not cease to exist in death. And in the same way that a person comes back to life when waking from sleep, so also will he be revived at the great awakening on the Day of Judgement. Hence, Islam views death merely as a stage in human existence. Physical death should not be feared as an evil. One should, however, worry about the agonies of spiritual death caused by living a life of moral corruption. That sinful life is not worth living.

The mystery of life and death is resolved in the Qur'an by linking it to the working of human conscience and its ability to maintain a healthy status of human spiritual-moral existence with faith in God. Once that necessary equilibrium between faith and work in life is lost, then a state of human being's death has set in. It is this death that should cause anxiety in human beings. Human efforts should be concerned with the revival of human conscience, which will lead to a meaningful life. Does it mean that human body should be simply neglected? No, not at all. It simply means that human death must be viewed as secondary to the spiritual and moral quality of life. This religious evaluation of death is reflected in Muslim cultural attitudes to life and death. In general, Muslim public does not view, for instance, a persistent vegetative state of an individual as life. Life in Muslim culture has a set of criteria, which must be fulfilled in order for the patients, their families and society in general to regard a person living. These include a person's ability to make decisions and execute them through his own conscious and cognitive competence. In the absence of such competence close family members or religious and lay leaders in the community assume the guardianship to protect the person's rights.

The principle of equity and public good for society in Islam allow the leaders of community act as surrogate decision makers in cases when the person due to mental or any related incompetence is unable to assume that responsibility. Significantly, in the case of a patient in the vegetative state ethical deliberations in Islam are not only concerned with determining the value of the patient's life. The principle of public good (**maslaha Amma**) demands that an individual's life must be weighed in the scale of general well estate of those who are horizontally related to the patient. End of life decisions require to take into consideration an individual's interpersonal relationship with his own family and society in general. If active medical intervention in the case of a severely brain-damaged patient leads to further suffering of the patient and those related to him in society, then the ethical judgement cannot ignore the ensuing general harm, including the rising cost of prolonging such life for the entire society. It is for this reason that Muslim jurists, the **Ulema** (Muslim Scholars), have adopted the view that it is permissible for the patient in an irreversible vegetative state, either through a prior living will or his immediate family or supreme legal authority (**hakim al-shari'**), to refuse any treatment that simply prolongs the patient's miserable condition. The point is explicitly made clear that in the eyes of Muslim public it is pointless and even degrading to intervene medically in the nature's course towards an imminent death. On the basis of the religious and moral duty of rejection of harm, if it is reasonably determined, at least by three consultant physicians that pursuing a particular course of treatment is proportionally more harmful than allowing the nature to take its course, then it is obligatory to stop the treatment.

Death is divinely willed and when it arrives it should be readily accepted. There should therefore be no reasoning by the bereaved as to why they have lost their loved one. Islamic scholars such as the twelfth century theologian, Al Ghazali stress that death is unpredictable and can happen at any time and as such Muslims should always be prepared for the inevitable and for what is about to occur. It is but a gateway from this short but mortal existence to a life of immortality in the afterlife. Muslims are always buried, never cremated. Cremation and other modes of disposal are considered to be strictly forbidden. It is a religious requirement that the body be ritually washed and draped before burial, which should be as soon as possible after death. The dying person is encouraged to recite and declare his or her faith. When a Muslim dies his/her should be turned right facing towards Makkah (127 South-east from United Kingdom). The arms and legs should be straightened and the mouth and eyes closed; and the body covered with a

sheet. A baby dying at or before birth has to have a name. When a Muslim patient dies it is a religious requirement that the corpse be ritually bathed before burial.

WHEN A MUSLIM IS AT THE POINT OF DEATH

Family members of the dying person and his most pious friends should be informed and should be present at his side to help him turn his thoughts to Allah, encourage him very gently to repent, remind him about all the good deeds that he did, about Allah's mercy, and Allah's forgiveness so that he may anticipate Allah's mercy and Allah's favors.

Allah in the Quran said: **"And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, but those who are misguided"** (Quran 15:56).

Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said: *" Let no Muslim die except expecting and hoping the best from Allah"* (Muslim

Death: A Form of Rest

Bukhari and Muslim reported from Abu Qatadah that once, when the Prophet passed by a funeral, he said: "He is (now) in peace secure from others and others are in peace secure from him." The people asked: "O Allah's Messenger! Who is in peace and from whom are others in peace?" He said: "A believing servant (of Allah) is relieved from afflictions of this world upon his death, while upon the death of a wicked person, other people, land, trees, and animals are rid of his evil."

Burial

The Muslim has been taught to treat the dead body with gentleness and respect. Cremation is forbidden. Rather, the body is cleaned "washed or bathed", scented, and covered with a clean cloth for burial. It is very important that the body is released from the hospital, with all the necessary papers. The body should be buried by Muslims as soon as possible

Visiting the Sick

Visiting the sick is a basic duty one Muslim has for another, and is not reserved only for close friends and family. Consequently, the Muslim patient will often have many visitors. For the Muslim, visiting a sick brother or sister in faith is a basic form of worship to bring one closer to God. It is Islamic etiquette to visit a sick Muslim, to provide him moral support, and to make sure that he or she is well taken care of.

Ibn 'Abbas said: "The first visit to a sick person is sunnah, while any subsequent visit is a voluntary act (a good deed)." Abu Musa reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Feed the hungry, visit the sick, and free the captives."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "A Muslim has six obligations to another Muslim." "What are these?" they asked. He replied: "To greet another Muslim when you meet him; to respond when he invites you; to give him your (sincerest) advice when he seeks it; to say 'may Allah have mercy upon you' when he sneezes and says ' may Allah be praised '; to visit him when he falls ill; and when he dies, to attend his funeral."

Reward for Visiting the Sick

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "A caller from heaven calls out to the person who visits a sick person, 'You are good and your path is good. May you enter your residence in Paradise'."

Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "Verily, Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Judgement: 'O Son of Adam! I fell ill, but you did not visit Me.' The human will ask, 'O my Sustainer! How could I visit You when You are the Sustainer of the Worlds? And how can You fall sick?' He, the Almighty, will say, 'Did you not know that such and such a servant of Mine was sick. But you did not visit him. Did you not know that, had you visited him, you would have found Me by his side? O Son of Adam! I asked you for food, but you fed Me not?' The man will say, 'O my Sustainer! How could I feed You when You are the Sustainer of the Worlds? And You are free from hunger?' He, the Almighty, will say: 'Such and such a servant of Mine asked you for food, but you refused to give him any. Did you not know that, had you fed him, you would have found it recorded here with Me? O Son of Adam! I asked you for a drink, but you did not give Me any.' The man will say, 'O my Sustainer! How could I give You a drink while You are the Sustainer of the Worlds and are free from thirst?' He, the Almighty will say, ' Such and such a servant of Mine asked you for a drink, but you did not give him any. Had you given him a drink, you would have surely found that recorded with Me.'"

Thawban reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Verily, when a Muslim visits his sick Muslim brother, he is, as it were, in one of the gardens of Paradise (enjoying its ripe fruits) until he returns to his home."

Ali said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, saying: 'When a Muslim visits a sick Muslim in the morning, seventy thousand angels pray for him, and they continue praying for him until that evening. When one visits the sick in the evening, the angels pray for him and continue praying for him until the next morning. Moreover, he will be rewarded with the choicest fruits of Paradise.'"

Etiquette of Visiting the Sick

It is recommended that the visitor pray for the recovery and health of the patient and that he should urge him to endure his trouble patiently. He should say nice words to cheer him up and keep his spirits high. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "When you visit a sick person, give him hope for a long life. This will not avert anything, but will please the patient and give him comfort." When the Prophet, peace be upon him, visited a sick person he used to say to him: "Do not worry! It is a means of cleansing (you) of sins, Allah willing." It is preferred to shorten the visits and to make them less frequent as far as possible, lest they should become burdensome for the patient, except when the patient himself desires longer and more frequent visits.

Muslim Visiting a Non-Muslim Patient

It is permissible for a Muslim to visit a sick non-Muslim person. In the chapter, "Visiting a Sick Polytheist," Bukhari says: It is narrated on the authority of Anas that "a Jewish boy, who used to serve the Prophet, peace be upon him, once fell ill. The Prophet, peace be upon him, visited him and invited him to Islam, saying: 'Submit to Allah's will.' So he accepted Islam." Similarly Bukhari narrates from Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab that he reported from his father that "when Abu Talib (the Prophet's uncle and an idolater) was on his deathbed, the Prophet, peace be upon him, visited him."

Asking the Sick for a Prayer

Ibn Majah narrates on the authority of Umar that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "When you visit a sick person, ask him to pray for you. Indeed, the prayer of a sick person is like the prayer of angels." According to the author of Az-Zawa'id, the chain

of narrators of this hadith is broken, yet it is sound and trustworthy, because otherwise it is authentic and narrators are trustworthy.

Seeking Medical Treatment

There are many hadith which encourage the Muslims to seek medical treatment.

Usamah ibn Shuraik narrated: "I came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and found him with his companions. They were calm and serene as if there were birds over their heads. I greeted them and sat down. Then some bedouins came from various places. They asked him: 'O Allah's Messenger! Should we seek medical treatment for our illnesses?' He replied: 'Yes, you should seek medical treatment, because Allah, the Exalted, has let no disease exist without providing for its cure, except for one ailment, namely, old age.'" (Reported by Ahmad and the six sunnan. Tirmizhi considers it a sound hadith.)

Anas ibn Mas'ud reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Verily, Allah has not let any malady occur without providing its remedy.

Therefore seek medical treatment for your illnesses." (Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and al-Hakim.)

Jabir narrated that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "There is a cure for every disease. Whenever an illness is treated with its right remedy, it will, by Allah's permission, be cured." (Muslim)

CONTEMPLATION OF DEATH AND PREPARATION FOR IT BY GOOD DEEDS

Allah and His Messenger, peace be upon him, encourage us to contemplate death and be ready for it with good deeds. This is regarded as a sign of goodness. Ibn ' Umar reports: "I came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and I was the tenth of the first ten people (who embraced Islam). A man from among the Ansar got up and said: "O Prophet of Allah, who is the most sagacious and the most prudent among the people?" He replied: "Those who are most aware of death and prepare themselves for it. They are the wisest of people and will have honor in this world and a generous reward in the Hereafter." Ibn 'Umar also said that Allah's Messenger, peace be upon him, said: "You should remember the reality that brings an end to all worldly joys and pleasures, namely, death." (Both hadith are narrated by At-Tabarani with a sound chain of narrators)

Ibn Mas'ud narrated that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, explained the following words of Allah, the Exalted: "The hearts of those whom Allah wills to guide, He opens to Islam." (Qur'an 6.125) This means, the Messenger explained, that, "When the light (of truth) enters the heart it expands and opens up." The Companions asked: "Is there any evidence of this (in the life of a Muslim)?" He replied: "Being ever mindful of the eternal life of the Hereafter, and remaining at guard in this life of delusion, and preparing oneself for death before it comes." This is reported by Ibn Jarir through different chains each of which strengthens the other.

Spiritual Comfort at the time of death

In times of distress or illness, the Muslim finds the greatest solace and comfort in the remembrance of God. The severely ill person, who might be distracted by his pain, greatly appreciates a companion who can read the Qur'an to him and remind him of God.

Your assistance in notifying the nearest Islamic Centre or Mosque so that someone could

come would be greatly appreciated. When a Muslim patient is dying or has died he/she should be lying in the direction of the Ka'aba (facing head 127 degree towards South east by turning face right. facing towards Ka'aba). The dead patient's eyes should be closed; hands and legs should be straightened, tying the face to prevent the lower jaw from drooping and covering the body with a sheet. Those who are present near a dying Muslim should do the following:

They should be kind and patient.

They should never leave him alone.

They should give him hope, not allowing him to collapse out of pain or panic.

They should prompt him **very gently (Encouragement without insistence)** every now and then to say the Shahada: "**La ilaha ella Allah**", which means '**There is no God but Allah,**' in a very kind and sincere manner as these may be his last words.

Abu-Saeed Al-Khuduri reported that Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said : "*Help Muslims who are dying to say: 'La ilaha ella Allah'*" (Muslim).

They should make Dua' (Supplicate) to Allah to help him go through situation easy, and forgive him.

Upon death, the eyelids are to be closed, the body should be covered, and preparation for burial takes place as soon as possible. he whole body is washed and wrapped in a shroud. Muslims gather and a prayer is performed for the dead. The body is to be buried soon after the prayer. The wrapped body is to be laid directly at the bottom of the dug grave. The body is to be laid on its right side facing the direction of Makkah. A ceiling is attached to the grave and then covered with dirt. The grave is to be marked by raising its top level of dirt above surrounding grounds. A stone may be used to mark its location, but no writings are allowed. Buildings or other forms of structures are not allowed on top of the grave.

It is not proper for a Person to Wish for Death

It is makruh or "disliked" to wish for one's death, or pray to Allah for it, due to poverty, distress, illness, or the like. The six canonical compilers of hadith narrate on the authority of Anas that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Let no one among you wish for death due to any hardship that may befall him. But if one has no other choice, but to do so, one should say: "O Allah! Grant me life as long as life is good for me, and cause me to die when death is better for me."

The wisdom in the prohibition against wishing for death becomes obvious from a hadith narrated by Umm al-Fadl: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, went to see Al-'Abbas. He found him wishing for death. Thereupon the Prophet said: 'O Abbas! O Uncle of Allah's Messenger! Do not wish for death. If you do good and live long, your good deeds will multiply. Then that is better for you. If you are not good and your death is delayed, you may seek Allah's forgiveness. That is better for you. So do not wish for death.'" (Narrated by Ahmad and Al-Hakim, who says it is sound according to Muslim's criteria)

It is permissible, however, to wish for death, and there is no harm in doing so, when one fears persecution that puts one's faith at risk, as is indicated by the following supplication of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him: **Allahumma inni as'aluka fi'lal khairat wa tarkal munkarat wa hubbal masakin wa an taghfirali wa tarhamani wa izha aradata fitnatan fi qaumi fatawafani ghaira maftunin wa as'aluka hubbaka wa hubba man yuhibbuka wa hubba 'amalin yuqaribu ila hubbika** "O Allah! I ask You for the means to

do good, to avoid evil, and to love the poor, and I beseech You to forgive me and have mercy on me. When You subject my people to a trial, cause me to die without being affected by it. O Allah! I ask Your love, the love of those who love You, and the love of all such actions that bring one closer to Your Love."(Narrated by Tirmizhi who said it is a good and sound hadith)

'Umar used to pray in these words: **Allahumma kabirat sinni wa da'ufat quwwati wa anshrat ra'i-atifaqidni ilaika ghaira mudayi' wa la mufaratti** "O Allah! I have grown old, I have become weak, and my flock has spread far and wide. Therefore, O Allah, take me to You before I fall short of doing my duties or transgress my limits." Malik reports this hadith.

Excellence of a Long Life Enriched with Good Deeds

It is reported by Abdurrahman ibn Abu Bakrah on the authority of his father that a man asked: "O Messenger of Allah ! Who is the best of all people?" He replied, "He who lives long and does good deeds." The man asked, "And who is the worst of men?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "He who lives long but commits evil." (Narrated by Ahmad and at-Tirmizhi, who says it is a sound hadith) Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Shall I tell you who is the best among you?" The Companions said, "Yes, O Allah's Messenger." Thereupon he said, "The best among you are those who live long and are best in deeds." (Narrated by Ahmad and others with a sound chain)

Good Deeds Prior to Death: An Indication of a Good End

Anas reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "When Allah intends good for a servant of His, He uses him for good." They asked: "How does Allah use him?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "He enables him to do good deeds and makes it easy for him before his death and then causes him to die while he is in that state of goodness." (Ahmad, Tirmizhi, Al-Hakim, and Ibn Hibban)

Desirability of Having a Good Opinion about Allah

The patient should remember the boundless mercy of Allah and have a good opinion about his Sustainer. Jabir reported: "I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, saying, three nights before his death, 'Let none of you die unless he has a good opinion of Allah'." (Muslim) This hadith encourages the triumph of hope and expectation of forgiveness when one meets Allah, the Exalted. One should be in the state most loved by Allah, since He is the most Gracious, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent, and the most Generous. He loves to forgive those with hope. In the words of a hadith: "Everyone will be raised on the Resurrection Day in the condition in which he died."

It is reported by Anas that "the Prophet, peace be upon him, went to see a young man who was on his deathbed. The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him: 'How are you?' The young man said: 'I hope for Allah's pardon, but I am fearful because of my sins. ' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'These two things never gather in the heart of a person at such a time without Allah granting him what he hopes for and sheltering him from what he dreads'." (Ibn Majah and Tirmizhi)

Desirability of Supplications and Remembrance of Allah for Those Visiting Someone on his Deathbed

It is desirable that righteous people visit patients on their deathbeds and remember Allah.

Umm Salamah reported: "Allah's Messenger, peace be upon him, said, 'When you visit someone who is ill or is dying, say good things about him. Indeed, the angels (present there) say "amen" to whatever you utter.'" She added: "When Abu Salamah passed away, I went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah! Indeed, Abu Salamah has died.' The Prophet said: 'Say: "O Allah! Forgive me and him. Give me in his place a better substitute".' So, I did so and Allah gave me someone better than he. He gave me Muhammad, peace be upon him." (Recorded by Ahmad, Muslim, and the five compilers of the sunan)

In another report she said: "The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, came to see Abu Salamah when his sight had become fixed (he had passed away). So the Prophet, peace be upon him, closed his eyes and said: 'When the soul is seized and it leaves the body, the sight follows it.' Some of Abu Salamah's family wept and wailed, whereupon the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Supplicate to Allah only to seek good for yourselves, because the angels (who are present) say "amen" to whatever you utter.' Then he said: 'O Allah! Forgive Abu Salamah; raise his station among (Your) rightly guided servants; and take good care of his family that he has left behind. O Lord of the Worlds! Forgive him and us, make his grave spacious, and put light therein for him.'" (Muslim)

Funerals

Muslims are always buried, never cremated.⁸ Often the members of a funeral committee collect death certificates and make arrangements for funerals in order to take the worry off the immediate family members. The caskets in which the burials are to be carried out are kept by the community and are simple wooden boxes with no decorations. Many purpose built mosques in the United Kingdom have a "cold storage" room to preserve the body. Short term storage may be in the home of the deceased where the relatives pray, seated around the coffin, which faces Mecca. Though burial in the United Kingdom is usually in a wooden coffin, according to religion, Muslims prefer to bury their dead without this. Some local authorities in the United Kingdom (Batley and Dewsbury, for example) allow this practice.

Religious law does not allow Muslim women to attend burials,⁹ and they do not in practice, even if a female relative or a baby has died. This is as a result of the belief that women are of "faint heart" and will easily break down. Some visit the grave at other times in spite of this practice being religiously "reprehensible. Although graves are dug by gravediggers, the filling in with earth is carried out by the relatives. Graves are dug in such a way that the face of the deceased faces Makkah.

As the body is sacred members of the dead person's family should not abandon it and therefore it is rare for undertakers to be involved in Muslim funerals. Usually a family car or van is used to carry the body to the cemetery. Shiites, though a small minority compared with Sunni Muslims in Britain, are well organised and have their own "hearse" (and have negotiated burials over weekends in Birmingham). Religious customs surrounding death are similar in Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

As it is not always possible in Britain to comply strictly with all the Islamic rules for burial, some families (particularly Pakistanis) take the dead back to their homelands, in which case the bodies are embalmed by funeral directors. This practice is deprecated by religious leaders in Britain and Muslims are encouraged to bury the dead locally. Sending bodies entails much bureaucratic delay, which adds further distress to the relatives. If local authorities in Britain would allow compliance with Islamic rules (for example, burial without the box) burial in Muslim homelands would certainly diminish.

Attendants at funerals cover their heads with a cap or hat as a mark of respect. Muslims are buried in a separate area designated for them in the common cemetery of a town or city in the United Kingdom. Those attending the funeral form a double line facing each other and the bier is passed on the shoulders along this line towards the grave. In the case of a child, the bier is carried in the arms of a relative. After the funeral, a "wake" is held for both the men and the women, usually on the same day, in the form of a meal for all those attending the funeral.

If Muslims die in circumstances where they do not have relatives or friends, the elders of the Muslim community of the town will arrange for the ritual washing and also the funeral at their own expense.

What should be Done When Someone Dies

It is sunnah to do the following when a person dies:

1 Advise the dying person to say: "La ilaha illa-Allah" (there is no god but Allah). It is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Prompt your dying people to say: 'La ilaha illa-Allah'." (Muslim, Abu Daw'ud, Tirmizhi) Another report on the authority of Mu'azh ibn Jabal states that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "He whose last words are 'La ilaha illa- Allah' shall enter Paradise." (Narrated by Abu Daw'ud; Al-Hakim considers it a sound hadith)

This prompting (talqin) is necessary only when the dying person is unable to utter the shahadah (La ilaha illa- Allah . . .). If such a person is able to utter these words then there is no need for prompting, but he should rather be advised to do so. Such advice is useful in cases of persons who are in possession of their faculties of reason and speech. If one is already mentally impaired such advice cannot be of benefit. But one who is unable to speak might say these words in his heart. The scholars are of the opinion that no pressure should be put on the dying person. So one should not say to him, "Say, 'La ilaha ill-Allah'," lest he should become annoyed and utter something improper. One may say the shahadah, however, in such a way that the dying person might be able to hear it and repeat it. If he utters it once, he should not be asked to repeat it unless he says some words after it. In such a case he should be asked to repeat shahadah to ensure that it be his last utterance.

Most scholars are of the opinion that one attending a dying person may repeat only the words: "La ilaha ill-Allah," according to the apparent meaning of the hadith. Others are of the opinion that the dying person should be prompted to utter the two testimonies (that is, "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger"). The purpose is to remind him of the Oneness of Allah, which includes both of the two testimonies.

2 Lay the dying person so that the qibla is on his right side. To this effect it is recorded that Abu Qatadah said: "Upon arrival in Madinah, the Prophet, peace be upon him, enquired about a person called al-Bara ibn Ma'rur. The people told the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he had died, and had willed one-third of his property to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and that his face be turned toward the Ka'bah at the time of his death. Hearing this, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'He has been true to his innate nature. I return the one-third of his property to his children.' Then the Prophet, peace be upon him, left and offered a prayer for him and prayed, saying: 'O Allah! Forgive him, have mercy on him, and cause him to enter Your Paradise. Indeed, You have accepted this prayer'." (Narrated by Al-Baihaqi and Al-Hakim, who observes: "I know of no hadith, other than this one, with regard to turning the face of a dying person toward Ka'bah.")

Ahmad reported that Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet, peace be upon him, at the time of her death, turned toward the Ka'bah and placed her right hand under her head. This is the sleeping position recommended by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and in a grave, a dead body should also be placed in the same position. A report recorded from Ash-Shafi'i says: The body of the deceased should be laid flat on his back with his feet toward the Ka'bah, and his face raised a little, facing it. The majority of scholars, however favor the first position and hold it to be preferable.

3 Recite Surah Ya Sin from the Qur'an. (Surah 36 of the Qur'an) This is reported by Ahmad, Abu Daw'ud, Nasa'i, Al-Hakim, and Ibn Hibban, and the last two of them grade it as a sound hadith. They report also on the authority of M'aqil ibn Yasar, that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Ya Sin is the heart of the Qur'an. Whoever recites it seeking the pleasure of Allah and the hereafter will receive Allah's forgiveness. So recite it to your dead." (Ibn al-Qattan considers this hadith weak and manifests some confusion, doubt, and even ignorance about some of its narrators. Ad-Dar al-Qutni is reported to have said: "In the chain of narrators of this hadith there is confusion. Its text is obscure and is not correct.")

Ibn Hibban observes: This hadith refers to the recitation of Ya Sin for those on the eve of death and not for those already dead. This interpretation is supported by Ahmad, who recorded in his Al-Musnad that Safwan states: "The most eminent scholars say: 'The recitation of Surah Ya Sin at the time of a person's death makes death easy for him'. "The compiler of Musnad al-Firdaus attributes this hadith to Abu ad-Darda and Abu Zharr. They both narrated: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'If any person is on his deathbed and Ya Sin is recited to him, Allah makes his suffering easier'."

4 Close the eyes of the deceased. It is narrated by Muslim that the Prophet, peace be upon him, went to visit Abu Salmah. He saw that his eyes were wide open and blank with the stare of death. So the Prophet, peace be upon him, closed his eyes and said: "Verily, when a soul is seized, the eyesight follows it."

5 Cover the deceased: 'Aishah said: "When the Messenger of Allah died, he was covered with a piece of cloth that had some designs on it." This is reported by Bukhari and Muslim. The objective here is clearly to safeguard the respect and dignity of the deceased in death against prying eyes and against the exposure of his or her body to the idle curiosity of those looking for changes in its physical condition and features.

There is a consensus among scholars regarding the permissibility of kissing a dead person. The Prophet, peace be upon him, kissed 'Uthman ibn Maz'un after his death. Similarly, when the Prophet died, Abu Bakr leaned over him and kissed him between his eyes saying: "O my Prophet! O my best friend! !"

6 Prepare the body for burial without delay, as soon as death is confirmed (by specialists i. e., a qualified physician or the like).

The guardian of the deceased should wash, wrap, and arrange for the burial of the body soon after the funeral prayer for the deceased, because the body might deteriorate if burial is delayed. This is based on a report, recorded by Abu Daw'ud from al-Husayn ibn Wujuh that when Talhah ibn al-Bara fell ill, the Prophet, peace upon him, said: "I see that Talhah is on the verge of death. Inform me about him (when he passes away) and make immediate preparations for his burial, for a Muslim's remains should not be left long with his family after his death."

The burial may be delayed only for the guardian, provided no physical deterioration in the condition of the body is feared from such delay. Ahmad and Tirmizhi report on the authority of Ali ibn Abu Talib that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "O Ali, never delay three things: prayer when its time approaches, the funeral when death is confirmed, and marrying a widow or a divorcee when a suitable match is found for her."

7 Settle the debt of the deceased. Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Tirmizhi have recorded a hadith on the authority of Abu Hurairah that the Messenger of Allah said: "A believer's soul remains in suspense until all his debts are paid off." Tirmizhi considers this a sound hadith.

This means that the judgement regarding a soul's salvation or perdition or its entry into Paradise is held in abeyance until its debts are fully paid off and settled. This applies to a person who leaves some property upon his death. His debt should be paid out of the property that he leaves behind. In the case of a person who dies in debt which he sincerely intended to pay, but has no property (nor leaves any behind to pay his debt), according to a confirmed report, his debt will be settled by Allah, the Exalted. Concerning a person who dies in debt with sufficient means to pay it and was willing to do so, but his heirs do not pay it, Bukhari records on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet, peace be upon him, 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, Allah will pay the debt on his behalf. And if anyone takes money or property (of others) with the intention of destroying it, Allah will destroy him."

A hadith recorded by Ahmad, Abu Nu'aym, Al-Bazzar, and At-Tabarani from the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "The debtor will be summoned before Allah on the Day of Judgement. Then Allah will ask him: 'O Son of Adam ! Why did you incur debt and infringe on others ' rights? ' The man would reply: 'My Lord! You know I took it, but I neither abused nor lost it. It was stolen or burned in a fire or lost its value.' Allah, the Almighty and Exalted, will say: 'My slave has told the truth, and I am more entitled (than anyone else) to settle his debt. Then Allah will issue a command and something will be placed on his scales causing his good deeds to outweigh his bad ones. And so, by Allah's Grace, he will enter Paradise'."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not perform funeral prayers for those who had died in debt. When, however, Allah the Almighty, granted him certain lands as a result of conquests, and the community's wealth increased, he offered funeral prayer for them and settled their debts.

Bukhari reports that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "I am nearer to the believers than their own selves. So if someone dies leaving behind debt, but no wherewithal to settle it, we shall pay his debt, and if someone dies and leaves some estate behind him, it is for his heirs (to pay his debt)."

This hadith shows that the debt of a deceased Muslim may be paid from the public exchequer out of the zakah funds specified as the portion for the people in debt. This is one of the prescribed categories of zakah recipients. Death by itself does not annul one's debt or other responsibilities to the living.

On invoking Allah upon witnessing Death

Saying: "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un" (We belong to Allah and truly to Him we shall Return)

A believer should, at the death of a relative or a friend, invoke Allah and say: "Verily we belong to Allah, and truly to Him shall we return." The following reports show that to do so is commendable.

Ahmad and Muslim reported from Umm Salmah that she said: "I heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "If a servant of Allah is afflicted with a misfortune and says: *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un, Allahumma ajirni fi musibati wa akhlif li khairan minha* 'Verily we belong to Allah and truly to Him shall we return. O Allah! Protect me in this calamity that has befallen me and replace it with something better,'

Allah will accept his prayer, grant him reward for his affliction, and replace it with something better." She added: "When Abu Salmah (her husband) died, I invoked Allah in the words taught to me by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and Allah did grant me someone better than he, i.e., (He gave me) the Messenger of Allah (as a husband)."

Tirmizhi reports from Abu Musa al-Ash'ari that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "When a child of a servant of Allah passes away, Allah says to the angels: 'Did you take the soul of My servant's child?' They say: 'Yes.' He, the Almighty, says: 'Did you take away the apple of my servant's eye?' They say: 'Yes.' He, the Almighty says: 'What did My servant say at this?' They say: 'He praised You and said: "*Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'a un* (Verily we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return)." At this Allah says: ' Build for My servant a mansion in Paradise and call it the House of Praise (*bayt al-hamd*)'." Tirmizhi says this is a sound hadith.

Bukhari has reported from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Allah, the Exalted and Glorious says: 'I have no better reward than Paradise for a believing servant of Mine who is patient and resigned when I take away one of his beloved, one among those he most cherishes in the world.'"

"Those who say, when afflicted with calamity, 'To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return,' are those on whom descend blessings from Allah, and mercy, and they are the ones who receive guidance." 55 Commenting on these verses of the Qur'an, Ibn Abbas said: "Allah, the Almighty and the Exalted, informs us that when a believer is patient and resigned after a misfortune visits him and invokes Allah, Allah will grant him three (good) merits: blessings, mercy, and guidance to the right path."

Informing the Deceased's Family and Friends

The scholars consider it desirable that the deceased's family, friends, and other good people be informed about his death, so that they may share in the reward of participating in his funeral. It is reported in *Sihah Sittah* on the authority of Abu Hurairah that the Prophet, peace be upon him, informed his companions about the death of Negus (Najashi), the King of Abyssinia, the day that he passed away. And then the Prophet, peace be upon him, led them to the prayer ground where he lined them up and offered funeral prayer (for him) with four takbirs.

Ahmad and Bukhari narrate from Anas that the Prophet, peace be upon him, informed the people about the death of his companions, Zaid, J'afar, and Ibn Rawahah, commanders of the Muslim army in the Battle of Mu' tah, before they received any news from the battlefield. Tirmizhi observes that there is no harm in informing the family and close relations of the deceased person about his death. Al-Baihaqi says he was told that Malik ibn Anas disliked announcing someone's death at the gates of the mosque, but found nothing wrong with going around inside the mosque to the various groups of students there and informing them of someone's death.

A report, recorded by Ahmad and Tirmizhi on the authority of Huzhaifah, says that Huzhaifah said: "When I pass away, let no one vex me, for I am afraid (my death will be announced) and it may be regarded (as an invitation to) mourning. And I heard that the Prophet, peace be upon him, forbade announcing the death of a person as an invitation to mourning. This refers to a practice of the pre-Islamic period. In those days when a noble died they would send a horseman to various tribes to inform them about his death saying: 'The people are devastated on account of the death of so and so.' Such an announcement was (always) accompanied by crying and weeping."

Condolences

It is a Muslim's duty to offer condolences, comfort, and sympathy to the family and the relatives of the deceased. This strengthens the relationships within the Muslim community.

When offering condolences, words should be chosen carefully and said gently to convey sympathy and to encourage the family and the relatives of the deceased to accept Allah's will and to help them to get back to their normal life.

Condolences may be offered to the family and to the relatives of the deceased before, during or after burial for up to three days, but it may be offered even at later time if someone did not hear about it or he was far away.

It is recommended to leave after offering condolences to give the family time to take care of their other affairs, assistance may be offered for anything the family may need, and one may stay to help, if asked.

Some families hold gatherings for three days or more, and hire people to recite Quran loudly. While the Qur'an is recited, others eat, drink or talk, disregarding the rules of listening to the Qu'an, and inflicting the family with high expenses.

It is Sunnah that friends, neighbours and relatives prepare food for the family of the deceased, for the loss of the loved one occupies the family's whole attention.

Weeping Over the Dead

Muslim scholars are agreed that weeping for the dead is permissible, whereas crying and wailing are not. It is reported in a sound hadith that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Allah does not punish a person for shedding tears or feeling pain in his heart. But He does punish, though he may show mercy, because of (what he utters with) this," and then he pointed to his tongue.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, wept on the death of his son, Ibrahim, and said: "The eyes shed tears and the heart feels pain, but we utter only what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim! We are aggrieved at your demise." He also wept when his grand daughter, Umaymah, daughter of Zainab, died. At this Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah said: "O Messenger of

Allah! Are you weeping? Did you not forbid Zainab from weeping?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "This (weeping) is the mercy that Allah has placed in the hearts of His servants. And surely Allah bestows mercy upon those who are merciful among His servants." A report is transmitted by At-Tabarani on the authority of Abdullah ibn Zaid to the effect that weeping without wailing is permitted.

Weeping aloud and wailing cause pain and suffering to the dead person. It is reported from Ibn 'Umar that when 'Umar was stabbed and he became unconscious the people around him began crying loudly. When he regained consciousness he said to them: "Don't you know that the Messenger of Allah said: 'A dead person is tormented by the wailing of the living'."

Abu Musa reports that when 'Umar was wounded Suhaib cried: "O my dear brother!" At this 'Umar said: "O Suhaib! Don't you know that the Messenger of Allah said: 'A dead person is tormented by the wailing of the living people'."

Al-Mughirah ibn Sh'ubah reports that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "The one who is wailed for is tortured on account of it." The above hadith are reported by Bukhari and Muslim.

These hadith mean that a dead person feels pain and displeasure when his family wails over him, for he hears their wailing and their deeds are shown to him. This does not mean that the dead are actually punished and tormented because of the wailing of their families for them, because the Qur'an says that a person is not accountable for the actions of others.

Ibn Jarir reported from Abu Hurairah that he said: "Your deeds are shown to your dead relatives. So if these are good, they are pleased, and if these are bad, they despise them."

Ahmad and Tirmizhi reported on the authority of Anas that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Your deeds are shown to your dead relatives and kinsfolk. So if these are good they are pleased, and if these are bad they say: 'O Allah! Let them not die until You have guided them to the right path as You guided us before'."

An-N'uman ibn Bashir reports: "Abdullah ibn Rawahah fainted and his sister, 'Amrah, started wailing: 'O my monumental loss!' 'O, my this and that!' When he regained consciousness, he said to her: 'Every time you said something (about me) i was asked, "Are you really what she said?"'." This is narrated by Bukhari.

Wailing over the Dead

Wailing refers to mourning in a loud voice and crying in a high pitch, which was prohibited by the Prophet, peace be upon him, . Abu Malik alAsh'ari reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Four practices of the pre-Islamic days of Ignorance will continue to be practiced by my ummah: taking pride in one's parentage, giving a person a father other than his own genealogical father, believing that rain is caused by some stars, and wailing over the dead." He further said: "A (professional) mourner, unless she repents before her death, will be raised on the Day of Judgement wearing a garment of tar and an armor of blistering puss." This is narrated by Ahmad and Muslim.

Umm 'Atiyah reports: "The Messenger of Allah made us pledge that we will not wail over (the dead)" (Bukhari and Muslim). Al-Bazzar has transmitted, through a sound chain of authorities the report that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Two sounds are accursed

in this world and in the hereafter: the sound of wind instruments (to celebrate) good fortune, and of moaning aloud when afflicted with a misfortune."

Abu Musa is reported to have said: 'I declare my disavowal of all that Allah's Messenger disavowed. The Messenger of Allah disavowed publically a woman who mourns loudly, one who shaves her head, and one who tears her clothes in mourning' (Bukhari and Muslim).

Ahmad narrates from Anas that he said: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, made the women pledge, while giving their allegiance to him, not to mourn loudly for the dead. Thereupon they asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah, some women helped us (in mourning our dead) during the pre-Islamic days. Should we (also in return) help them (in mourning their dead) now that we are Muslims?' He replied: 'There is no such thing in Islam (i. e., helping each other to mourn the dead loudly)'."

Mourning for a Deceased

It is permissible for a woman to mourn for a period of three days on the death of a near relative, provided that her husband does not object to her doing so. It is not permissible for her to mourn for more than three days, except in the case of her husband's death, when she is to mourn for four months and ten days, which is a legally prescribed period of waiting or "iddah". This is reported by the group, (The compilers of the six most reliable hadith books generally known as Sihah Sitta) except Tirmizhi. They report from Umm 'Atiyyah, that the Messenger of Allah said: "A woman should not mourn for any deceased person for more than three days, except in the case of her husband's death, which she may mourn for a period of four months and ten days. Such a woman (in mourning) is not to wear any (brightly) colored dress. She may wear only plain dress. During this period she should not use any adornment or eye makeup, nor wear any perfume, nor dye her hands and feet with henna, nor comb her hair, except at the end of her menstruation period, when she may use some cleaning or refreshing agents (such as perfume, etc.) to get rid of any offensive smell left over from her period." Accordingly, when a widow mourns, she must not use any adornment, such as jewelry, kohl, silk, perfume, or henna dye on her hands and feet. A widow must observe this waiting period in deference to her late husband's memory and to fulfill her obligations toward him.

Preparing Food for the Bereaved Family is encouraged

Abdullah ibn Ja'far reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "Prepare some food for the family of Ja'far, for what has befallen them is keeping them preoccupied." This is narrated by Abu Daw'ud, Ibn Majah and Tirmizhi, who grades it as a sound hadith.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, recommended this practice for it is an act of virtue and kindness and brings friends and neighbors closer to each other.

Ash-Shafi'i said: "It is recommended that the relatives of the deceased prepare enough food to feed all the deceased's family for one day and night, for it is the sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and a practice of good people."

The scholars hold it commendable to urge the deceased's family to eat so that their sorrow or excessive grief will not cause them to avoid food and thereby become weak. These scholars also hold that to offer food to the women while they are mourning loudly is not permissible, for it would be helping them in something sinful.

All the schools of Islamic law disapprove of the deceased's family preparing food for the people coming to pay their condolences, for it adds to their grief and further encumbers them unnecessarily. Such a practice would also resemble the custom of the Arabs before Islam. Referring to this practice, Jarir says: "(In those days) we considered it a part of mourning to assemble at the deceased's house and prepare food after burial for those gathered there." Some scholars consider this to be absolutely forbidden (haram).

Ibn Qudamah observes: 'It is permissible, however, when there is genuine need for it, since sometimes people attending the funeral may be from distant places, and they have to stay with the family of the deceased, in which case the family has to host such guests.'

Preparing the Kafan (Shroud) and Grave Before Death

Bukhari deals with this subject in a chapter entitled: "Those Who Prepared the Kafan in the Prophet's Days without him objecting to it. Reporting on the authority of Sahl, Bukhari says: "A woman came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, with a woven piece of cloth that had two seams on its edges. She said: 'I wove it with my own hands in order to wear it.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, took it because he needed it. He wrapped it around his waist so that it covered the lower half of his body, and he came toward us. A man praised it, saying: 'This is a very nice cloth! Why don't you give it to me to wear?' Some of the people present there reproached the man for they knew that the Prophet needed that cloth and that he never denied anyone's request. The man replied: 'By Allah, I asked him for it not to wear it, but to save it and use it as my kafan.'" Sahl continues: "And (later when he died) that same piece of cloth was used as his kafan."

Commenting on the above chapter of Bukhari, Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar says: "Bukhari phrased it so as to show that though (initially) the companions disliked the man's request for the cloth from the Prophet, they did not disapprove of it when he explained to them the reason for his request. This proves that it is permissible for a person to arrange during his lifetime for the things he will need after his death, such as a kafan or a grave." He cites Ibn Battal who said it is permissible to arrange for something before it is actually needed. Furthermore Al-Hafiz observes: "Some righteous people did indeed have their graves dug and prepared for them during their lifetime." Al-Zain ibn al-Munir criticized him, saying that the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not do so, and that if doing so (preparing one's grave during one's lifetime) were desirable most of them would have done so.

Commenting on this Al-'Aini says: "The fact that it was not done by the companions of the Prophet does not imply that doing so is not permissible, for if an act is deemed good by Muslims, then it is also good in the sight of Allah, especially when it is practiced by some of the most pious scholars."

Ahmad said: "There is nothing wrong if a person purchases a site for his burial and makes a will to the effect that he is to be buried there. 'Uthman, 'Aishah, and 'Umar ibn Abd al-'Aziz, all did so."

The Desire to Die in the Haramain (Sacred precincts around the Ka'aba in Makkah and the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah)

The desire to die in either of the sanctuaries in Makkah and Madinah is commendable. Bukhari has reported on the authority of Hafsa that 'Umar said: "O Allah ! Grant me martyrdom in Your cause, and cause me to die in the city of Your Prophet, peace be upon him." Thereupon Hafsa asked him: "Why do you pray for such a thing?" He said: "Allah willing, I shall get what I have prayed for."

At-Tabarani reported on the authority of Jabir that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "He who dies in one of the two sanctuaries will be raised in peace on the Day of Resurrection." Among the narrators of this hadith are Musa ibn Abdul al-Rahman, who is mentioned as trustworthy by Ibn Hibban and Abdullah ibn al-Mu'amil. Ahmad regards the hadith as weak, while Ibn Hibban considers it sound.

Sudden Death

Abu Daw'ud reported from 'Ubaid ibn Khalid al-Sullami, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that once he narrated from ' Ubaid and another time from the Prophet himself, peace be upon him, saying: "Being caught unawares by a sudden death is a grievous misfortune." This hadith has been reported by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Anas ibn Malik, Abu Hurairah and 'Aishah, but all these narrations are weak for one or another reason. Al-Azdi says: This hadith has been reported through diverse chains of narrators, but none are reported on sound authority from the Prophet, peace be upon him.

The Reward of a Person Losing a Child

Bukhari reported from Anas that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "A Muslim who loses three of his children before they come of age will be brought to Paradise by Allah as a mercy to him for losing them."

Bukhari and Muslim reported from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri that he said: "Some women asked the Prophet, peace be upon him: 'Appoint a (separate) day to (admonish) us.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, told them: 'If a (Muslim) woman's three children die, they will be a protection for her from Hell.' A woman asked him, 'And what if two of her children die?' He replied: 'And (even) if two of her children die'."

JUST AFTER DEATH HAS BEEN DETERMINED

When the person is confirmed dead, family members or those who are present should :

Close the eyes of the deceased.

Um Salma reported that : *" When her husband died, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) closed his eyes"* (Muslim)

They should bind his lower jaw to his head so that it does not sag.

They should cover all his body completely with a clean sheet.

Aisha reported that : *" Muslims covered the body of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) when he died"* (Bukhari & Muslim)

They should make Dua' (Supplicate) to Allah to forgive him.

They should hasten to prepare the body for washing, shrouding and burial.

Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said: *" You should hasten with his burial"* (Bukhari & Muslim).

They should pay his debts from his money, or if there is not enough, then from any family member or any relative, this matter is important since the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) encouraged Muslims to pay the debts of the deceased.

MOURNING THE DEAD

Mourning over the dead is allowed in Islam, but there is a great difference between what is allowed Islamically and the practice of some Muslims at the present time. Grief at the death of a beloved person is normal, and weeping for the dead is allowed in Islam.

What is prohibited is to express grief by wailing

Bewailing refers to mourning in a loud voice), **shrieking, beating the chest and cheeks, tearing hair or clothes, breaking things or scratching faces or saying phrases that makes a Muslim lose faith.**

What the Health Care Providers Can Do For Their Muslim Patients

- * Respect their modesty and privacy. Some examinations can be done over a gown.
- * Provide Muslim or Kosher meals.
- * Allow them to pray if they can and read the Qur'an.
- * Inform them of their rights as patients and encourage a living will.
- * Take time to explain tests, procedures and treatment. Many Muslims are new immigrants and may have a language problem.
- * Allow their Imam to visit them.
- * Allow the family to bring food if there are no restrictions.
- * Do not insist on autopsy or organ donation.
- * Always examine a female patient in the presence of another female.
- * Allow the family and Imam to follow Islamic guidelines for preparing the dead body for an Islamic funeral. The female body should be given the same respect and privacy as she was living.
- * Identify Muslim patients with word Muslim in the chart, name tag or bracelet.
- * Provide same sex health care person (MD or RN) if possible.
- * Preferable no male in the delivery room except the husband.

Additional Islamic Health Practices

- * Regard for the sanctity of life is an injunction.
- * Circumcision of the male infants is recommended.
- * Blood transfusions are allowed after proper screening.

- * Assisted suicide and euthanasia are not permitted.
- * Autopsy is not permitted unless required by law.
- * Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged.
- * Abortion is not allowed except to save the mother's life.
- * Transplantation in general is allowed with some restrictions.
- * Artificial reproductive technology is permitted between husband and wife only during the span of intact marriage.
- * While Islam opposes homosexuality, it does not prohibit Muslim physicians from caring for AIDS patients.
- * Muslims can have a living will or a case manager.
- * Genetic engineering to cure a disease is acceptable but not cloning.

Preparation of The Deceased and The Janazah (Funeral)Prayers

There are five main points for the preparation of a Muslim's body for burial; here is a brief on the procedure involved in each one of them:

(1) Body Washing or Ghusul:

Washing the deceased's body is obligatory on Muslims; it is a Fard Kifaya,i.e. if some members take the responsibility of doing it the need is fulfilled, but if no one fulfills it then all Muslims will be accountable.

1. A man's body should be washed by men and a woman's body by women, but a child's body can be washed by either sex. A husband may wash his wife's body and vice versa if the need arises.
 2. Only one person is needed for washing with someone to help him or her out.
 3. It is better to choose for this task a person who knows best how to perform the cleansing (ghusul).
 4. Place the body on a high place.e.g., a table or something similar.
 5. Remove the deceased's clothes(garments) leaving the private parts covered.
 6. Press the stomach gently and clean whatever comes out.
 7. For washing, use a piece of cloth or on your hands.
 8. Only clean water may be used ; add some scented oils(non alcoholic) in the final wash.It is preferable to use warm water.
 9. Perform ablution (wudu) for the body, cleaning the teeth and nose from the outside only.
 10. Wash three times, but if the body is not yet cleaned, continue washing five or seven times-it must be odd numbers.
- Turn the body on its left side and begin washing the right side , then turn it on its right side and wash the left side. This is done in each wash.The first and second

washes are done with water and soap, while the last one with water and scented oils.

(2) Wrapping (kafan)

1. It must be a clean piece of cloth (preferably white) to cover the whole body.
2. Put the body in front of the Imam
3. The Imam should stand by the middle of the body if the deceased is a man and by the shoulder if the deceased is a woman.
4. Use three pieces of cloth for men and five for women,(but each must cover the whole body).
5. Tie the front and the rear with the piece of cloth (from the same kafan) in such away that one can differentiate the head from the legs.

(3) Prayers (salat):

1. It is better that those praying divide themselves into three rows facing the qibla with the Imam in front.
2. Put the body in front of the Imam.
3. The Imam should stand by the middle of the body if the deceased is a man , and by the shoulder id the deceased is a woman.
4. If there is more than one body, then they should be put one in front of the other, those of the men nearst to the Imam and those of the women furthiest from him.
5. Having the appropriate neeyat in your heart, raise your hands in the usual manner and say , "Allahu Akber".
6. Then fold and hold your hands on your chest in the usual manner, the right hand on the left.
7. Read the Fathiha quietly.
8. Say "Allahu Akber" (without raising your hands).
9. Pray for the prophet (peace be upon him) in the same manner as you do in the tashahud.
10. Say " Allahu Akber" (without raising your hands)
11. Make Dua'a for the deceased.
- 12.Say "Assalaam Aleukum" , thus finishing the prayer.

It is clear from this description that all this prayer is done while one is standing- there is no ruku or sujood in it. An example of such a Dua'a is the following authentic prophetic Dua'a:

"Allahuma Ighfir Lihayana wa mayetna wa saghirana wa kabirina wa thakirina wa anaathina wa shaahidina wa ghaaibina, Allahuma men ahyetehu mina fa ahyethi ala al islam wa men tawefetahu fatawafehu ala al iman, Allahuma La tahrimina ajerhu wa la tadlna ba'duh"

(4) Funeral:

1. Procession; Mourners should walk in front or beside the bier. Those who are riding or driving should follow it.
2. Silence is recommended.
3. It is forbidden to accompany the body with music or crying.

(5) Burial:

1. The grave should be deep, wide and well made. It is recommended that it consist of two excavations, one inside the other. It is recommended that the smaller one called "lahdd" be dug on the side of the larger one facing the qibla.
2. It is this one that the body is put.
3. The deceased's body should be laid on the ground with the face toward the qibla, the direction of the ka'ba.
4. While laying it say : " Bismallah wa ala milat rasool allah"
5. It is not recommended to use a casket unless there is a need for it .,e.g the soil is wet or loose. A stone or bricks or soil should be placed under the deceased's head to raise it up.
6. Do not use a pillow or put anything with the deceased inside the grave.
7. Cover the "lahd" with bricks so that they form a roof over the deceased. Pour three handfuls of soil on it.
8. Fill the larger pit with soil. It is preferable that each one of those present should share in this by pouring three handfuls of soil. Raise the level of the grave a little less than one foot in a sloping way.

It is of the utmost importance that the grave should be very simple and not too showy or exurbanite, such as marble or fancy masonry, because to do so is Bida'a and is strongly against the teachings of the religion and the prophet (peace be upon him).

Bereavement

The initial bereavement period lasts for three days, during which prayers in the home are recited almost continuously. Public rites are for men only. According to religious laws a Muslim wife is expected to stay in her home for up to 4 1/2 months after the death of her husband or, if she is pregnant, until pregnancy ends. This is important in establishing that pregnancy was progressing before death of the husband. Most Muslim women in the United Kingdom follow this unless they are, or have now become, breadwinners, in which case there is a religious dispensation.

Shoes are taken off before entering the house of the bereaved, and it is customary to cover one's head when talking about the person who has died. People often sit on the carpet to pass on their condolences. Traditionally, black clothes or veils are not worn during bereavement - most people wear plain simple clothes with no make up or jewellery. It is not customary to send wreaths or flowers. No collection is made or donations given.

The extended family network provides a great deal of support for the bereaved. Because of the physical proximity of family members and the custom of talking through the experience a feeling of loneliness and isolation is less common. Most Muslims have religious explanations for a person's death, particularly that of a child. Guilt is a common component of bereavement and is incorporated into the grieving process, which is dealt with openly. Religion encourages sharing of grief and provides the means for absolving it. This should be appreciated before any counselling is attempted.

Organ transplantation

As organ transplantation has not been explicitly dealt with in the Koran or the Hadith, there is a difference of opinion among the ulamas. Those from Arab countries consider it

permissible, but those from the Indian subcontinent¹¹ believe that organ transplantation is not permissible because human life is sacred; the human body is entrusted to an individual and thus does not belong to him or her; and transplantation can lead to illegal trade in organs and the poor would suffer.

In 1967, when Dr Fazlur Rahman was director of the Islamic Research Institute of Pakistan, he sanctioned "eye" transplants on the principle that "the needs of living humans have priority over dead ones. Leading ulamas questioned this and did not agree. The Muslim community in general, however, has had a positive attitude despite the ulamas' disapproval.

Although, in the words of the prophet Mohammed, "the breaking of a bone of a dead person is equal in sin to doing this while he was alive, as far back as 1952 the supreme head of the Islamic School of Jurisprudence in Egypt stated that if anything was of "good" for mankind then "necessity allows what is prohibited." Such rulings allow transplants of organs as long as the following conditions are satisfied¹¹: a transplant is the only form of treatment available; the likelihood of success of the transplant is high; the consent of the donor or next of kin is obtained; death of the donor has been fully established by a Muslim doctor of repute, or there is no imminent danger to the life of a living donor; and the recipient has been informed of the operation and its implications. Donation to a Muslim should only be to save his or her life and organs are accepted from a non-Muslim only if not available from a Muslim.

Donation of organs is a theoretical issue in Muslim countries as they generally have a very basic medical service, with transplants taking a very low priority. High ranking Muslim jurists in Pakistan have advised that donation of organs is not allowed (M Y Sacha, personal communication). With sympathetic and informed counselling, however, the objections can often be overcome - "no organs" are donated during a bone marrow transplant, for example.

Discussions concerning organ transplantation should be initiated by the transplant team: other professionals have in the past relayed conflicting advice to parents and this has resulted in the patient not being treated. This team should include a liaison officer who works in the Asian community providing advice and support to families of patients needing organ transplantation and also those families whose children have undergone a transplant operation. In Birmingham, parents of children who have had an organ transplant help the team in discussions with prospective transplant families. Islamic law allows emergency blood transfusions.

Summary

I have highlighted some events surrounding death of Muslim patients who in the United Kingdom predominantly come from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. There will be some differences with Muslims from other parts of the world, largely concerning bereavement and organ transplantation; the other issues are strictly adhered to throughout the Muslim world.

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20 May 2003