

Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19

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Fiqh Council of North America

All praise is due to Allah, and may peace and salutations be upon the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ

During this time of crisis, we remind all Muslims of their duty towards their Lord. We believe every calamity that occurs has benefits in this world and the next, and that a believer has the potential to always come out a winner no matter what the circumstances, if our intentions and frame of mind and faith is correct.

Given the extenuating circumstances surround the coronavirus crisis, the Fiqh Council of North America convened online and has unanimously issued the following statements:

Regarding ghusl and funeral prayers, the Fiqh Council, after discussion, felt that our earlier jurists have given pertinent guidelines for the situation we are currently facing, and there is no need to step outside of their boundaries. In deciding which of the following options to follow, the advice of medical experts, the laws of the land, and the skill level of those entrusted with the burial, will all play a role. If for whatever reason one option is problematic, those in charge of the funeral may move down to the next option, and to err on the side of caution is allowed. One of the maxims of Islamic law states, "As matters become more constrained, the Shari'ah becomes more easy (إذا ضاق الأمر اتسع)," and we remind everyone of this reality of Islamic Law. Hence, we remind Muslims that:

- The default is that washing of the corpse is farḍ kifāya (communal obligation), and if we are allowed to do so without harm to the lives of those who perform the ghusl, it should be done. [As of the writing of this fatwa, the Center for Disease Control in America has advised that extra precaution be done when washing the body (by wearing appropriate PPE), but that in and of itself the washing of the body should not cause any danger as long as standard protocols are followed.]
- In case the body cannot be washed in the traditional manner, it is allowed to pour water over the body without scrubbing and without even changing the clothes of the deceased.
- In case even this cannot be done and there is a genuine danger or reasonable doubt regarding harming the health of those around the corpse, tayammum can be done, in which case the one in charge of the corpse may, even while wearing gloves, wipe the face and hands of the deceased after touching some sandy surface. Tayammum takes the place of ghusl in dire circumstances, and this applies to both the living and the dead.
- And in case even tayammum is not able to be performed and the corpse is required to be wrapped up in a special sealed body bag, the obligation of both ghusl and tayammum is lifted, and it would not be considered sinful if the body is laid to rest as is.
- Cremation is not allowed in Islam, and this should be avoided in all circumstances. In case it is made mandatory by law, the community, after consulting with health experts and legal experts, should try their best to get an exemption for the Muslim community.
- The funeral prayer (ṣalat al-janāzah) can be performed anywhere, including in the graveyard itself, and there is no minimum that is required. Hence, in case larger congregations are not possible, even one person can pray if need be, and it will constitute a valid funeral prayer.
- It is permissible in normal circumstances according to two of the schools of law to perform the funeral prayer in absentia (ṣalat 'ala al-ghā'ib); hence in these extenuating circumstances we would encourage this as an alternative for those who are not able to attend the prayer in person of a family member or friend.
- There is no sin in broadcasting the janāzah procedure (the procession and burial) live to family members, as long as Islamic decorum and dignity is observed.

And Allah the Exalted knows best.