

Ghusl and Janazah Procedures for COVID-19

Ghusl, Shrouding and Janazah are Rights of the Deceased

Bathing and burying the deceased is a hallmark of Islam. It is an honor and right of the deceased, and an obligation upon the entire community (fardh kifayah). If a minimum of one person fulfills this obligation of bathing, everyone in the community is absolved of the duty. Otherwise, the entire community will be liable.¹ Shrouding the dead body properly is also a right of the deceased and must be done. Similarly, the Janazah salah is a communal obligation which at least some members of the community, or at least one person², must fulfill. It is necessary to undertake this obligation and fulfill it seriously as a final right of the deceased, regardless of the cause of death. The scholars unanimously agree that the body cannot be buried without ghusl and janazah.³ Cremation is also impermissible in all circumstances and a major sin.⁴

Precautions While Bathing the Body

We cannot abandon our religious responsibilities and push impermissible methods of dealing with the remains of the deceased, especially considering we are afforded such religious freedoms in this great nation. We have to uphold these liberties and defend them. Current guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) explicitly allow the proper bathing and shrouding method taught in Islam. It is important however to take all necessary precautions required by local authorities while bathing the body. It is recommended that all washers be provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and trained on how to fit them properly, such as face masks, goggles, gloves, disposable gowns, and other such protective gear. While touching the body is not the main concern, as per CDC guidelines, fluids, discharge, blood and other liquids which touched the body or came out of it are the main concern in the spreading of the virus. The number of people washing the body should be limited. If any fluids get on the hands or body of a washer, it should be disinfected appropriately and should not enter the washer's nose, mouth eyes, etc.⁵ Further, one who died of plague or similar infectious diseases, is indeed a shahid; but

¹ الموسوعة الفقهية الكويتية 50/13، بدائع الصنائع في ترتيب الشرائع 299/1 | الحنفية: الغسل فرض على المسلمين على الكفاية وفي فتح القدير أنه بالإجماع (البحر الرائق 68/1) اعلم بأن غسل الميت واجب وهو حق المسلم على المسلم (المبسوط 58/2) المالكية: غسل الميت المسلم واجب (حاشية الدسوقي على الشرح الكبير 94/4) حاشية العدوي على كفاية الطالب (425/7) الشافعية: حق على الناس غسل الميت والصلاة عليه ودفنه (كتاب الأم للإمام الشافعي رحمه الله 312/1) الحنابلة: غسل الميت ودفنه وتكفينه والصلاة عليه فرض كفاية

(الإنصاف في معرفة الراجح من الخلاف للمرداوي 470/2) الشرح الكبير لابن قدامة (309/2)

² لا تُشترط الجماعة في صلاة الجنازة، ويسقط فرضها بواحد الموسوعة الفقهية (18/16)

³ الشهيد بغير المعركة كالمبطون والمطعون والغريق ومن مات تحت الهدم والنفساء ونحوهم يغسلون ويكفنون ويصلي عليهم بلا خلاف (موسوعة الإجماع في الفقه الإسلامي 2160) فأما الشهيد بغير قتل كالمبطون والمطعون والغرق وصاحب الهدم والنفساء فإنهم يغسلون ويصلي عليهم لا تعلم فيه خلافا (المغني لابن قدامة 399/2)، الفقه الإسلامي وأدلته (159/2)

⁴ ولقد كرمنا بني آدم (الإسراء:70) كسر عظم الميت ككسره حيا (ابن ماجه، أبو داود، ابن حبان)

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "COVID-19 and Funerals". [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777). 22 March 2020.

that honor is in the Hereafter. As far as the worldly obligations, he will be treated as a normal deceased. Thus, it is necessary to bathe the deceased and give them their full rights and honor as victims.¹

Precautions for the Janazah Salah

As the janazah is a right of the deceased and an act of great reward for the participants, all efforts should be made to give the parting soul its due respect and honor. There is a lot of misinformation and hysteria regarding this matter. It is necessary to separate facts from rumors and fulfill this right properly. The CDC writes, “There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.”² Restrictions regarding gatherings in respective localities should be complied with while still keeping the rights of the deceased in mind. If it is not possible to pray the Janazah at a masjid center, it may be held near the cemetery.

Many masajid with funeral facilities are turning away dead bodies due to a COVID-19 related death. This is not acceptable. There is already a lack of facilities where Muslims can properly fulfill the rights of the deceased in terms of washing, shrouding, and Janazah salah. It is an undue burden on the family of the deceased if they are put through any more difficulty than they are in. Currently, there are no specific requirements for Janazah facilities from the CDC or other authorities.³ The regular facilities available at many masajid are sufficient for governmental requirements.

Trust in Allah and Fulfill Obligations

As the situation unfolds and undue panic is spreading disproportionately, it is important to remember that Allah, the Most Great, has kept a set time for every soul to return to Him. When that time comes, it is irrelevant as to what situation leads to the ultimate parting. This set time will not change regardless of all the precautions or treatments one undertakes. Those left behind the parting soul have obligations toward the deceased to fulfill. They should fulfill these obligations with courage while taking necessary precautions, but most importantly, trust in Allah, the Almighty, that nothing can harm unless He decrees so. Every death should be a clear reminder to everyone left behind about how temporary this life is and how short the term can be in this world.

These general instructions are based on consultations regarding the current situation with various authorities, medical professionals and muftis. We have also consulted some of the Muslim funeral homes who are already bravely serving the community in this difficult situation by washing and preparing COVID-19 deceased bodies. For specific inquiries related to the ghusl or janazah, please contact SBNY or a local alim/mufti.

May Allah, the Most Kind, protect all of mankind from this and all calamities and give the family members of the deceased ones, complete patience to cope with their loss.

And Only Allah Knows Best.

¹ الموطأ للإمام مالك : ٣٦، مسند احمد ٢٣٧٥٣، ابو داود ٣١١١، فأما الشهيد بغير قتل كالمبطون والمطعون والغرق وصاحب الهدم والنفساء فإنهم يغسلون ويصلي عليهم لا نعلم فيه خلافا للمعني لابن قدامة (٣٩٩/٢)

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “COVID-19 and Funerals”. [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777). 22 March 2020.

³ National Funeral Directors Association. “CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral Directors”. [nfda.org/covid-19](https://www.nfda.org/covid-19). 22 March 2020.