

SNMC-5 Washing a Dead Body

V5 October 16, 2015

5.0 Washing a Dead Body

The body of the deceased person must be washed, shrouded, and a funeral prayer offered, then buried.

5.1 Process of Washing a Dead Body

The entire body must be washed with water, at least once, regardless of whether the deceased is a male and needed a ritual bath, or a female who was menstruating. The body be placed on an elevated table or board.

The common practice has been to cover the 'awra and wash the body. At the washing, only people whose presence is needed may stay. The washer, male or female, must be a trustworthy and pious person who will not disclose what he or she might see except what is good. Ibn Majah reports that the Prophet,(PBUH) said: "Trustworthy persons should wash your dead."

- A washer must utter his or her intention to wash the body of a specific person. Then he should begin by lightly pressing the stomach of the deceased so as to expel, if possible, any remnants from it, and then wash the body of all impurities. The washer should use a wash cloth or wrap his or her hand with it, because touching the private parts of the dead is forbidden.
- The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Begin washing the dead by washing organs on the right, and those parts that are washed in ablution." This is in order to crystalize the mark of the believer's parts of the body always washed during wudu that will shine forth brightly on the Day of Judgement.
- Then beginning from the right side, the body should be washed with soap and water, three times. If soap is not available, then washing with ordinary water will suffice. If the washer feels that three washes are not enough to cleanse the body properly, then he may wash it five or seven times. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Wash the dead body an odd number of times, that is, three, five, or seven, or more if you feel it is necessary."
- If the deceased is a female, then her hair should be loosened, washed, redone, and placed behind her back. According to a hadith narrated by Umm 'Atiyyah the hair of the Prophet's daughter was done in three plaits. I asked: 'Did they loosen her hair and then redo them in three braids?' She said: 'Yes'." Muslim reports this in these words: "We braided her hair in three braids, on both sides and in front (of her)." In his Sahih, Ibn Hibban says: "They did so in compliance with the order of the Prophet: 'Do her hair in three plaits'."

- After having washed the body, it should be dried with a clean cloth lest the shroud should get wet. Then some perfume should be applied to it. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "When you apply perfume (to the dead), apply it an odd number of times after washing it."
- The majority of scholars are of the opinion that clipping a deceased's finger nails, trimming his mustache, shaving the hair under his arms or from his private parts is makruh (disliked). Ibn Hazm, however, considers it permissible.
- The scholars are agreed that the body of the deceased be rewashed if the stomach excrete something (i.e., urine or stool) after it had been washed and prior to being shrouded. Some hold that the body must be washed again in such a case. Others are of the opinion that there is no need to wash the whole body again, while still others hold that at least wudu (ablution) must be repeated in such a case.
- The reason for using camphor is its pleasant smell, since burial is a time when angels are present. Besides, it is cool and has a soothing effect, especially when the body stiffens, and helps keep various insects away from the body, thus preventing its early decomposition. In case camphor is not available, any other substance that has these or some of these properties may be used instead.

5.2 Cleaning the Body by Tayammum When Water is Unavailable

If there is no water to wash the dead body, then it may be cleaned with tayammum. Allah says in the Qur'an: "If you do not find water, then perform tayammum " And the Prophet said: "The entire earth has been made pure and a mosque for me."

If it is feared that the body might deteriorate, if washed, then it may be given a tayammum. If a woman who passes away, when there is no other woman around to wash her, or if a man dies and there are only women but no man to wash him, then the body of the dead person may be given a tayammum.

5.3 One Spouse Washing the Other

The jurists are agreed on the permissibility of a wife washing the body of her dead husband. 'Aishah said: "Had I known then what I know now, I would not have allowed anyone, except his wives, to wash the body of the Prophet." (Ahmad and Abu Daw'ud).

There is a difference of opinion, however, on the permissibility of the husband washing the body of his dead wife. The majority of scholars, nonetheless, consider it permissible. Ad-Daraqutni and Al-Baihaqi reported, that Ali ® washed the body of Fatimah on her death. The Prophet (PBUH), said to 'Aishah: "If you die before me, I will myself wash you and enshroud you." Ibn Majah.

The Hanafi School holds that it is not permissible for a husband to wash his wife's dead body, and if there is no other woman available then he should give her tayammum.