

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Ma'idah, 5:31

فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ

لِيُرِيَهُ كَيْفَ يُوَارِي سَوْءَةَ أَخِيهِ

Then Allah sent a crow, exploring in the ground, to show him how to bury the corpse of his brother.

Learning Objectives

- To explain how *salat al-mayyit* is recited
- To describe three features of an Islamic funeral
- To compare and contrast an Islamic burial with that of other religions

Key Words

دَفَنٌ Dafn
burial

Burial

Hasan and his dad are sitting in the *masjid* reciting Qur'an for the benefit of Hasan's grandmother who has passed away and is being given *ghusl* and *kafan*.

Hasan: What's happening dad? Why is everyone getting up and standing in lines? It looks like everyone is getting ready to pray but it's not *salah* time.

Father: You are correct Hasan. People are getting ready to pray. It will shortly be time for *salat al-mayyit*. Your mum and the other ladies have finished giving *ghusl* and *kafan* to your grandmother. Your grandmother's body will soon be brought here and *salat al-mayyit* will be recited for her.

Hasan: But why is everyone getting up to pray? I thought Mum had said that everything to do with the burial is *wajib al-kifa'i*. Doesn't that mean that if one person does it then the rest don't have to?

Father: That's right. It is *wajib al-kifa'i*, but praying *salat al-mayyit* is highly recommended, and there is great spiritual reward for it. This is why lots of people try and recite it in *jama'ah*. Your mum and sister and other ladies will also be joining the *salat al-mayyit* through the partition like they do for normal *salat al-jama'ah*.

Hasan: But why are the *salah* lines so much closer together than normal? The people are not leaving enough space between the rows to do *ruku* and *sajdah*?

Father: *Salat al-mayyit* is different to other *salahs*. It does not have *ruku* or *sajdah*. Instead, after making the *niyyah* of offering *salat al-mayyit* for your grandmother, *qurbatan ilallah*, the *imam* will do five *takbirs*, with four *du'as* in between the *takbirs*. The *imam* will read the *du'a* aloud and each of us who are praying the *salah* in *jama'ah* must repeat the *du'a* quietly – we cannot just remain quiet and listen otherwise we are not participating in the *salah*. The fifth *takbir* ends the *salah*.

Hasan: OK cool, I get it. I better go and do *wudhu*. I don't want to miss this important *salah*, especially if it is going to benefit grandma so much.

Father: It's an excellent habit to be in *wudhu* all the time, but just so you know, it is not necessary to perform *wudhu* before this *salah*, or for your clothes or body to be *tahir*.



FIQH FACTS

Ruling 582

It is *wajib* to perform *salat al-mayyit* for a Muslim who has died, and for every child who is considered to be a Muslim and who has completed six years of age.



FIQH FACTS

Ruling 600

If a woman in *haydh* wants to perform *salat al-mayyit* in *jama'ah*, she should stand alone and not in the rows with other people who are performing the *salah*.

Salat al-mayyit du'as

Hasan: Dad, why have they placed grandma's body like that in front of the *imam*? When grandma was in hospital, you made a point of turning her bed so that her feet faced *qiblah*? Why haven't they done that now?

Father: You are very observant Hasan, *mashallah*. You are right, when someone is dying and also when they are being given *ghusl*, it is *wajib* to place them such that their feet face *qiblah*. But after *ghusl*, when being given *kafan* and during *salat al-mayyit*, the *mayyit* should be placed on its back with its right shoulder facing *qiblah*. Then, when grandma will be buried, she will be laid on her right side, with her face facing *qiblah*. Her head will be placed on a pillow of earth.

Now come and stand next to me; you can hear the *mu'adhdhin* is calling out *as-salah* three times. That signals that *salat al-mayyit* is about to start. There is no *adhan* or *iqamah* for this *salah*.

Hasan and his dad join the *jama'ah* and pray *salat al-mayyit*.

DID YOU KNOW?

When our Sunni brothers recite *salat al-mayyit*, they recite only four *takbirs* instead of five. When Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) was asked about this difference, he replied: 'Since Islam is built on five strong pillars which are *salah*, *zakat*, fasting, hajj, and the *wilayah* of us, the Ahlul Bayt, Allah designated that one *takbir* be recited for each of these pillars, and our Shi'as have confirmed their belief in each of these five pillars of Islam, while those who are opposed to us do not believe in our *wilayah*, the fifth pillar; thus, they only recite four *takbirs*, and the Shi'as recite five.'

These are translations of the recommended *du'as* to be recited after each *takbir*:

After the first takbir	I testify that there is no god but Allah, He alone, for whom there is no partner; and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger, whom He sent with the truth as a giver of glad tidings and a warner before the advent of the hour [i.e. the Day of Judgement].
After the second takbir	O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad, and bestow Your bounty upon Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad, and have mercy on Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad, with the best blessing, bestowal of bounty, and mercy that You showered upon Ibrahim and the progeny of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are the All-Laudable, All-Glorious. Bless all the prophets and messengers and witnesses and the truthful, and all Allah's righteous servants.
After the third takbir	O Allah! Forgive the <i>mu'minin</i> , men and women alike, and the Muslims, men and women alike, the living among them and the dead. Shower us and them with blessings. Indeed, You are the answerer of supplications. Indeed, You are powerful over everything.
After the fourth takbir	O Allah! Indeed this is Your servant, son of Your servant, and son of Your maidservant. He has taken abode with You and You are the best of those who are taken abode with. O Allah! We do not know from him anything but good, and You are more knowing of him than we. O Allah! If he was benevolent then increase his benevolent deeds, and if he was sinful then overlook him [without punishing him] and forgive him. O Allah! Place him near You in the highest of the high ranks, and be his replacement for his family while they remain, and have mercy on him; by Your mercy, O most merciful!

The fifth *takbir* then finishes the *salah*.

Hasan and his dad, together with the rest of the *mu'minin* in the *masjid*, finish reciting the *salah*.

Hasan: Dad, what's happening now?

Father: We are taking grandma to the graveyard to be buried. This is called *dafn* or *tadfin* in Arabic. We will be going to the Muslim graveyard in the north of town. It is not permitted to bury a Muslim in a non-Muslim graveyard, nor to bury a non-Muslim in a Muslim graveyard.

Hasan: Will Mum and Maryam be coming as well?

Father: Women are allowed to come to the graveyard but it is *makruh*. They normally wait here at the *masjid*.

Make sure you stay by my side, Hasan. I will be helping to carry the coffin so please stay with me and continue reciting *du'as* for her.

Hasan and his father head to the graveyard along with the congregation. In the car on the way to the graveyard, Hasan's father explains:

Father: When we get to the graveyard, I will remove my shoes and socks before I go in the grave to put the *mayyit* in it. You should do the same.

Hasan: Why is that dad? Won't the ground be hot and sandy?

Father: Yes it will be, but it is *mustahabb* that the persons who lower the *mayyit* into the grave should be *tahir*, bare-headed, and bare-footed. I am sure with all that you have learned at *madrasah* you can figure out why. However, taking off the shoes is only recommended, not *wajib*. And so if it is winter time where in some places the ground is very cold or even frozen, this recommendation is no more applicable.



ACTIVITY...

List the ways that *salat al-mayyit* is different from a daily *wajib salah*.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are many *ahadith* stressing the importance of attending funerals. It gives honour to the Muslim who has passed away, comforts the family and loved ones, reminds us of the next world, reminds us of our own mortality, and how we too will one day be washed, shrouded, prayed over, and buried by others. There is great *thawab* in attending a Muslim funeral.



REFLECTION

Can you help Hasan recall why the persons who lower the *mayyit* into the grave should be *tahir*, bare-headed and bare-footed?

Father: When we get to the graveyard, I and a few others will carry your grandma's coffin to the grave. It is *mustahabb* that the coffin is first placed a short distance away from the dug up grave and moved slowly to the grave by pausing and putting the coffin back on the ground and lifting it up again, three times.

Hasan: Why?

Father: Your grandma's soul still maintains some closeness with her body. We do this so that the dead person does not become frightened, and so that it gets ready to enter the grave. At the fourth time, we will finally lower grandma's body into the grave.

Hasan: Will grandma be buried in her coffin?

Father: No; we will remove her body from the coffin and place her in the grave with just her *kafan*. This is the recommendation in Islam. Some countries do not allow this. In those cases, the body is buried in a simple wooden coffin. We will also spread a piece of cloth over the grave while lowering her so that the bystanders are not able to see her. We will recite this *du'a* at the time of lowering the body, and you should recite it as well:

"O Allah! Make the ground spacious for her on both of her sides, and elevate her soul to You, and direct Your proof to her. O Allah! Bestow Your pardon! Bestow Your pardon!"

Hasan: Why do we bury people who die? I know other religions do other things to their dead.

Father: That's correct. We will discuss this after the funeral. In the meantime, I want you to be sure you understand what is going to happen at the graveyard. Is that ok?

Hasan: Of course. So what happens once grandma's body is put in the grave? Is it covered up?

Father: Yes it is, but before that I will get into the grave, and I will gently hold grandma's shoulders and very gently shake them and recite the *talqin* very close to her ear. Do you remember what that is? Grandma used to recite it before she went to bed and she would make you and Maryam recite it occasionally as well.

Hasan: Yeah, I remember grandma explaining to us.

Talqin is like a statement of our beliefs. We also studied it in *madrasah* a few years ago. The *talqin* contains all our beliefs like who is our Lord, what is our book, and the names of the *a'immah* (a), etc.

Father: Exactly. Once that is done, then all the people present will begin to push soil into the grave to cover it. Me, you, and our other near relatives should not do this as it is *makruh*. The people will push the soil in with the back of their hands and say:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we surely return.

Enough soil will cover the grave so that its height is about four fingers off the ground. Then some water will be poured on the grave. It is narrated that so long as the mud of the grave remains wet, the dead person remains safe from the punishment in the grave.

Hasan: I will be sure to pour loads of water. What else can we do to help grandma?

Father: After pouring water, we will all put our fingers in the soil in a way that it leaves finger marks, and recite *Surat al-Fatihah* and *Surat al-Ikhlās* once, followed by *Surat al-Qadr* seven times. We will also all ask Allah to forgive your grandma and give her a special place next to the Ahlul Bayt (a). Once everyone has gone, because I am grandma's closest relative, I will recite the *talqin* again.





To recite *Surat al-Mulk* at a grave is an act which saves the dead person from the punishment in the grave. Once, a person pitched a tent on a ground not knowing that there was a grave beneath. He then started reciting *Surat al-Mulk*. Suddenly, he heard a voice saying that the *surah* gives salvation. He related this incident to Rasulullah (s), who replied: 'Indeed this *surah* frees a person from the punishment in the grave.'

After the funeral, Hasan and his father are returning to the *masjid*.

Father: Hasan, you asked me before as to why we bury our dead. Well, do you remember the story of Habil and Qabil?

Hasan: Yes! Allah asked them both to offer a sacrifice. Habil chose his best sheep, whereas Qabil chose some rotten wheat. Habil's sacrifice was accepted and Qabil's was not. Qabil got very jealous and killed his brother. It was the first murder ever in the whole history of the world!

Father: That's right. Shaytan always looks for every opportunity to misguide people and lead them astray. What happened after that?

Hasan: I am not sure. I think Qabil felt very bad.

Father: He did. Do you have your phone with you? Open your Qur'an app and look at 5:27-32. Have a read and tell me what happens.



ACTIVITY...

Have a look at the *ayat* on the story of Habil and Qabil. How did Allah teach Qabil what to do with the body of Habil?

Hasan: That was really interesting and clever. But not all religions do the same, do they?

Father: Well, all the Abrahamic religions – Judaism and Christianity – also bury the dead. The Jews, like the Muslims, try and bury their dead as soon as possible once a person has died, preferably within 48 hours of someone dying. In Christianity, however, there is no required time frame and sometimes a funeral can take place weeks after a person has died. In both religions there is usually a funeral service before the burial.

Hasan: But doesn't the body rot if it is not buried?

Father: In these cases the body is often kept in very cold storage and embalmed in order to delay decomposition. Embalming means that the body is treated with chemicals to preserve it and keep it suitable for public display at the funeral. The ancient Egyptians would do a similar thing to their dead as part of their mummification process. This is not permitted in Islam or even Judaism because we believe this is tampering with the body.

Hasan: Do you remember my friend John? He is a Christian and he told me his grandparents were cremated when they died. How is that possible? I thought it was only the Hindus that cremated their dead?

Father: Unfortunately, these days, most Christian churches permit cremations – that means that the body is burned once someone dies. This practice was certainly not practiced during the time of Nabi Isa. Cremation wasn't even legal in the UK until the late nineteenth-century. It is sad really – remember our bodies are an *amanah* from Allah. It is not ours to destroy. We believe our souls can feel the pain if we mistreat our bodies after death. Even autopsies are not permitted in Islam unless the life of another Muslim depended on it or if another important factor was at play, for example in order to determine someone's innocence in the case of a murder.

Hasan: How is the body burned? I am not sure I could watch that.

Father: I know what you mean. These days there are purpose built crematoriums which have a machine with enclosed furnaces designed to burn the body in an energy efficient manner while minimising the emission of smoke and smells, so you don't actually see or smell what is happening. Prior to these, cremations took place outdoors or on an open pyre – a bed of wood or sometimes coal, and this still happens in some countries around the world like India. Cremation is the norm in Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism. In Buddhism, cremation is permitted but not compulsory. In Hinduism, prayers and hymns are sung before cremation and then afterwards the ashes of the deceased are sprinkled on water. Some Hindus take the ashes to India to put on the waters of the River Ganges.

Hasan: I am glad we are buried when we die. I remember what they taught us in *madrassah* – we are made from the earth and to the earth we will return.



FIQH FACTS

Question: What is preferable: burying a dead Muslim in an Islamic cemetery in a non-Muslim city in which he died or transferring the dead body to a Muslim city which entails exorbitant expenses?

Answer: It is preferable to transfer the dead to any holy shrines or other recommended places if there is a donor who can bear the expenses – from the heirs or others – or if the one-third of his estate which he has endowed for religious charity would suffice for that purpose. If it involves a lot of hardship and is costly, it is not preferred.



ACTIVITY...

Complete the following table describing the similarities and differences in the funeral ceremonies in other religions.

	Islam	Judaism	Christianity	Hinduism
Is there a time limit for the burial of the body after death?	Body should be buried as soon as practically possible after death has occurred			
What happens to the body after death?	Washed (<i>ghusl al-mayyit</i>) and buried. <i>Salat al-mayyit</i> is recited before burial			
Is embalming permitted?	No			



Faith in Action

Rasulullah (s) has said: 'If a person accompanies a corpse, each of his steps, from when he goes there until when he goes back home, will be rewarded like 100,000 good deeds, and 100,000 of his sins will be forgiven, and he will be given 100,000 [increase of] degrees by Allah. And if he also says prayers on the corpse, 100,000 angels will accompany his corpse when he dies, while asking Allah to forgive him. And if he also attends the burial of the corpse, Allah will commission 100,000 angels to ask for his forgiveness until the Day of Judgement.'

During this *madrasah* term, listen out for funeral announcements from your *masjid*. Try and attend one funeral and take part in the *salat al-mayyit*. Boys should try and attend the funeral as well.



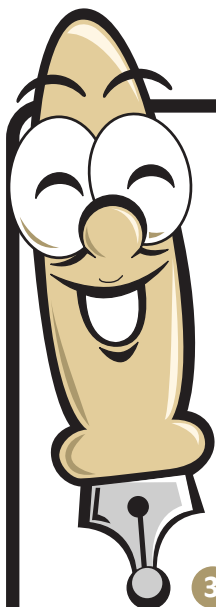
- 1 Name three ways *salat al-mayyit* is different to daily *wajib salahs*?

- 2 How should a *mayyit* be placed in the grave?

- 3 What is *talqin*?

- 4 What does Islam say about cremating the dead?

- 5 Write a short essay to compare an Islamic burial with that of any one other religion.



KEY POINTS

- 1 *Salat al-mayyit* consists of five *takbirs*, with a *du'a* after each of the first four *takbirs*. The last *takbir* ends the *salah*.
- 2 *Wudhu* or *taharah* is not required for *salat al-mayyit*.
- 3 A *mayyit* should be placed on its right side in the grave, with its face facing *qiblah*.
- 4 The *talqin* should then be recited whilst holding the shoulders of the *mayyit*.
- 5 After the grave is covered with soil, those present should put their fingers into the soil and recite the recommended parts of the Qur'an and *du'as*.
- 6 In Islam, cremation is forbidden.