

T E X A S

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Faith and the Funeral Islamic

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By Qadeer Qazi

Qadeer Qazi, 45, is originally from Pakistan, came to this country 14 years ago to earn graduate degrees in physics and electrical engineering. Married with four children, he worked as a network engineer before starting his own business in 1999 in Dallas.

A devout Muslim, Qadeer said there are no funeral homes or funeral directors in his native country as well as all Muslim countries.

“Decent burial of a deceased is a community duty. So when someone dies, there are volunteers from the community who wash the bodies at Mosque or at the home of the deceased,” he said.

So, why would Qadeer want to earn his funeral director’s license?

“To provide a community service for the close to 100,000 Muslims and the 30 mosques in the Dallas-Fort Worth area,” said Qadeer, who graduated from the Dallas Institute in May, 2004. “We don’t have a licensed funeral director working in the community of 250,000 Muslims currently living in the state of Texas.” He can do Ghushl, shroud the body, lead the prayer and do a graveside service. So in all he is a funeral director, a counselor and a priest.

“We opened the doors of our funeral home recently because there was a need in the Muslim community for someone who knows the culture, knows the traditions and speaks the language to serve Muslim families when death occurs,” Qadeer said.

Because he had not lived in a culture where funeral directors and funeral homes were a part of everyday life, Qadeer said he had many lessons to learn when he started classes at the Dallas Institute of Funeral Service.

“When I began training, I didn’t know what the word ‘cremation’ meant,” he confessed, “because Muslims do not allow cremation.”

The new director found that everything was new as he continued his classes. “I had to learn the parts of the casket and everything about funeral directing was new – but I think I learned well and earned all A’s in my work at the Dallas Institute.”

Now a provisional funeral director, Qadeer works with a licensed funeral director in charge at the only Muslim funeral home in Texas which serves all the faiths.

The Islamic Faith

Islam is not a new religion. It has roots to Prophet Abraham and back to Prophet Adam, they all believed in one



God—Allah. The name of the religion is Islam. Members are called Muslim. The prophet is Muhammad and Holy Book is Quran. If a Muslim does not believe all the prophets including Prophet Jesus and Moses, his or her faith is not complete.

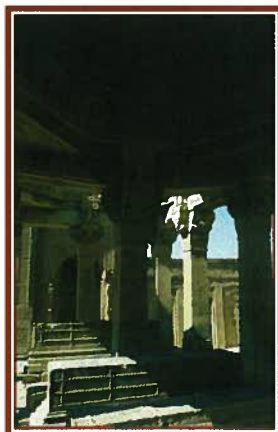
In the Islamic faith, there are seven articles: (1) a belief in Allah (The God), (2) a belief in all previous prophets, (3) a belief in all divine books, (4) a belief in all angels, (5) a belief that there will be a Day of Judgment, (6) a belief in resurrection after death and (7) a belief in destiny or fate.

Also there are five duties: (1) believe in one God Allah and the last Prophet Muhammad, (2) pray five times a day, (3) fast from dawn to dusk during the whole month of Ramadan, (4) give 2.5 percent charity on the annual savings and (5) perform pilgrimage once a life, provided he or she has good health and enough expenses.

“In the Islamic faith, death is seen as the way to meet Allah,” Qadeer explained. “We believe each of us is on the earth for a specific purpose, and when death comes, that is the signal that each person has finished their task. It is a time of graduation.”

Muslims believe that the present life is a trial in preparation for the next realm of existence. When a Muslim dies, he or she is washed and wrapped in a clean, white cloth (usually by a family member) and buried after a special prayer, preferably the same day. Muslims consider this a final service they can perform for their relatives and an opportunity to remember that their own existence here on earth is brief.

“We believe that when death occurs, the soul goes out of body and goes first to Allah. Then it goes to a different world, a temporary world between this world and the day of judgment. On that day, we believe the decomposed body will assemble again and the



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soul will go back to same body. It is easy for Allah to do this," Qadeer explained. "On day of judgment, everyone is responsible for his or her own deeds. In this world, we are all accountable to Allah for our own deeds. This provides a good incentive to live a good life," he added.

At The Time Of Death

Most of the time, the signs of death becomes clear, like: footsteps begin to stagger, the nose is curved, pits appear on the temples, and skin of face becomes stiff. At this point, the person should be laid down on ground or on a bed facing to Holy K'abba (almost North-East in the U.S.). Holy Kabah was first built by Prophet Adam and then was rebuilt by the Prophet Abraham and his son, the Prophet Ishmael.

One person among those surrounding

the dying individual should recite Shahada: "I declare that there is no God but Allah, and I declare that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger (Prophet)" without compelling the ailing individual to utter the same.

When the person is dead, his/her eyes are softly closed. Then, a volunteer ties the chin and head with a piece of white cloth so that mouth remains closed.

The hands and feet should be put straight and the big toes tied together with a piece of white cloth. The next step is to cover the whole body with a long sheet and pray for his/her forgiveness.

Once these steps are complete, it's then time to inform the family, relatives and the community of the death. Any debt should be cleared before the burial, either by the decedent's estate or by someone who will take the responsibility to do.

Once this is accomplished, there is a rush for Janazah preparation.

The Islamic Funeral

Unlike most American funerals, which are usually for the benefit of the living, the Muslim funeral is for the dead. "That's why we rush the person to the grave as soon as possible," Qadeer said. "We don't embalm and, much like the Jewish faith, we don't cut the body (such as an autopsy) unless required by law.

"Burial is usually within
24 hours of the death,"

"Our faith believes every person has the right to an honorable burial, and we take care to treat the dead with the highest respect. When someone has died, we han-

dle the body gently,” Qadeer continued. “While we perform washing, we cover men from navel to knee. Women are covered from neck to toe. Men wash men’s body and ladies wash the woman’s body. The washing is performed without removing the cover.”

Once the body has been cleansed, men are covered in a three-piece shroud and women are covered in a shroud consisting of five pieces. The two extra pieces are used to cover the chest and head. Many Mosques provide these shrouds at no charge.

Once the body is shrouded, it is placed in wood box or in the least expensive casket available to carry, then it is

carried to the Mosque for prayers and then to the cemetery or directly to the cemetery.

Qadeer said some funeral homes use cremation caskets or biers to transport the body.

“Mostly, the funeral prayer is held at the Mosque after any daily congregational prayer. In congregational prayer, men pray with men and ladies pray with ladies in separate rooms,” Qadeer explained.

After congregational prayer, everyone gathers in big room with rows for the men in front, then space and separate rows for the ladies. The Imam stands between the box and the rows. When prayers are over, some of the men then take the box on their shoulders to the hearse. Everyone takes a turn, providing a shoulder to carry the box. When the body is being transported, it is always carried with the head first. Once the box is placed in the hearse, then all the family and friends follow behind the hearse to make the journey to the cemetery.

On a recent morning, Qadeer received a First Call at 7:30 a.m. Preparing the body during the morning, it was then transported to the Mosque for funeral prayers and was buried by 3 p.m.

On another occasion, he received a death call at 6 a.m. and the body was

released at 12:30 that afternoon. After washing and shrouding, the body was taken to the local Mosque at 2 p.m. and buried in a distant cemetery by 4 p.m. that same day.

“Burial is usually within 24 hours of the death,” Qadeer said. “If someone dies in the evening, we wait until morning and use a cooler overnight. If situation permits, it is certainly possible to prepare the body for a night time burial.”

Qadeer said fees for a Muslim funeral run \$1,625 and include First Call, preparation of the body and direct burial, using a concrete box at the cemetery and wood box for transportation. The direct burial is priced at \$1,225 and include First Call, preparation and documentation but doesn’t include the casket or outer burial container.

At the Cemetery

In the Dallas/Fort Worth area, there are two Muslim cemeteries, and at Restland there is a large section for people of the Islamic faith.

All graves are dug in a certain direction so that when the body is placed in the grave, the right side of the body is towards K’abba in Mekkah, Saudi Arabia (which is a northeast direction in the U.S.). Hence, all over the world all Muslims are resting in the grave, facing in the same direction.

A bottomless concrete box is in place by the cemetery.

Upon arriving at the cemetery, the men carry the box to the grave on the shoulder. At the grave the shrouded body is taken out of the box for the burial.

“Women are discouraged from coming to cemetery,” Qadeer said, “but if they do come, they don’t take part in burial service. They stand on the side.

“Two or three people step down into the grave and several others pass the body to those people, who then lay it gently on the ground, tilting the body slightly to the right and turning the face toward Mekkah,” he said. The body is tilted by placing enough dirt under the left shoulder and side. Once the body is positioned, the lid is placed on the concrete box.

The Imam comes to cemetery, goes to gravesite and offers more individual prayers at grave.

“In the Islamic faith, there is a pile of earth nearby and family members sprinkle

dirt into the grave by saying that we are created from dust, will go into dust and will resurrect from dust,” Qadeer said. “In some Mosques, there are burial committees or other members of the community who hold the bucket of dirt and allow those in attendance to pass and sprinkle earth into the grave.

“We stay there, saying prayers, until the grave is filled,” Qadeer said. “There is no limit on saying prayers.

“Generally, flowers are not used in a service in the Mosque, but few people do put flowers on the grave. If someone wants to send flowers to the funeral home, we will take them to the cemetery but we do not take them into the Mosque,” the funeral director pointed out.

“Like many other faiths, the family then returns to the cemetery as frequently as possible,” Qadeer said. “When I go to Pakistan, I still return to visit my father’s grave and those of other relatives. We also have two festivals and on those nights, we go to visit the graves.”

Mourning

It is not permissible for Muslims to cry loudly and mourn the death after three days, the funeral director said. “The only exception is for the widow. Then, it is permissible for her to mourn the death of her husband until her Iddat, which is four months and 10 days after the death. If she is pregnant, then the Iddat ends at the birth of the child.”

For non-Muslim funeral directors called upon to conduct Islamic funerals, Qadeer offered these suggestions:

- First, they need to know to handle the body with respect, especially a woman’s body, there is to be no skin



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contact. Gloves must be worn in every phase of the First Call.

- In the Muslim tradition, women cover themselves for life and there is no skin contact with others (like shake-hand), outside their families or their husband. So, if possible, explain to the family how to wrap the body in the sheet and leave the room. Once it is wrapped then come back and move the body to the cot.
- In the funeral home, the woman should be covered from face to toes at all times and men should be covered from navel to knees at all times. They should not be naked at any time. This is very important.

- At the cemetery, if at all possible, only family members should be allowed to handle the body of a female decedent.
- Washing the body of the deceased is not like taking a daily shower. There is a procedure and a sequence. Even in remote areas, try to find someone who knows how to perform the washing. The washing should always be done by a Muslim.
- Each body should be covered with a shroud. These shrouds may be obtained from a local Mosque and are usually free of charge.
- Once properly shrouded, the body is then placed in a box or bier or the least expensive casket available to carry the body to the cemetery.

- Only men carry the box on their shoulders. Men also handle the body when it is placed into grave. In lady's case, the preference is to have a family member handle the body. If there is no one, then the nearest relative is preferred...the belief requires no other man touches the body, even though it is shrouded.
- If the body is taken to a Mosque, the congregational funeral prayers usually last five minutes. Then, there are individual prayers, asking Allah for forgiveness for the deceased in particular and everyone in general.
- Music or eulogy is not allowed at any time.
- Non-Muslims are more than welcomed at the Mosque.
- Unlike other funerals, people stay till grave is covered with dirt. Then they say individual prayers. Some stay longer and read verses from Holy Quran.

Qadeer said he is available to speak with funeral directors who want information about conducting Islamic funerals. He can be reached at 877-526-2924. The funeral home's number is 972-386-0383.