

What to do When the Signs of Death become Apparent

When the signs of death manifest on a person it is laudable (but not necessary) to lay the person on his right side with the limbs straightened and facing the *qibla*. The Prophet Muḥammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) instructed regarding the Ka'ba, "It is your *qibla* alive or dead" (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, 2875). It is important that those who are present try to provide as much comfort as they can to the dying. There are a few religious rites that can be performed.

Talqin

Talqin means to encourage the dying to recite the Islamic formula of faith. When the signs of death are manifest, the people around the dying person should gently encourage him or her to recite the formula "*Lā ilāha illa 'Llāhu Muḥammadu 'r-Rasūlullāh*" (There is no god but Allāh, and Muḥammad is His Messenger).

It is related that the Prophet Muḥammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Instruct the dying to say *Lā ilāha illa 'Llāh* (There is no god but Allāh) because it will eliminate previous sins" (*Muslim*, 2123). The *talqin* should be done gently, without annoying or forcing the dying during the very last phase of his life. Once the person recites the formula it is better to leave him rather than constantly requesting him to repeat it.

The vast majority of scholars maintain that reciting Sura Yasin to the dying is permissible.

The Immediate Tasks After Death

When the inevitable appointed time has arrived and the soul has left the body, the people present, and in particular the heir, should speak well of the deceased. It is related that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Speak well of the dead, because the angels pronounce "*Amin*" (O Allāh, accept) upon what the family of the deceased say" (*Musnad Ahmad*, 4:125).

Then one should:

- Close the eyes of the deceased and pronounce, "*Bismi 'Llāhi wa 'alā millati Rasūli 'Llāh*" (In the Name of Allāh and upon the religion of the Messenger of Allāh);
- Close the jaws. Use a bandage if necessary to hold the jaws closed;
- Straighten the limbs if possible, if not, then they should be left alone;
- Remove any jewellery; and
- If there is any fear of the stomach bloating, then place something heavy on the abdomen.

Adapted from What the Living Can Do for the Dead,

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Published by White Thread Press

<https://www.whitethreadpress.com/what-living-can-do-for-the-dead/>