

What the
Living
Can do for the
Dead

According to the Qur'an and Sunna and the
Opinions of the Classical Scholars of Islam

S H A H R U L H U S S A I N



White Thread
P R E S S

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INTRODUCTION

All praise is due to Allāh, who is unique in the majesty of His essence and the perfection of His attributes, and who is free from all blemishes and defects. Peace and blessing be upon Muḥammad, the final Prophet of Allāh and upon his family and Companions.

Exalted is He who holds all control in His hands; who has power over all things; who created death and life to test you and reveal which of you does best (Q 67:1-2).

The spread of Islam into non-Muslim territories and the subsequent conversion to Islam by the populace created a phenomenon perhaps not anticipated by the early Muslims who had come to the new territories to teach Islam. The phenomenon we are talking about is the inadvertent fusion of culture with religion. It is reasonable to argue that without design culture naturally found itself creeping into aspects of religion. It is not that Islam opposes culture, but it is difficult to envisage that the new Muslims would have completely left the culture of their birth and adopted a completely new set of cultural practices from the very day of their conversion to Islam.

Although there are areas that allow scholastic *ijtihād* (or reasoning), the teachings of Islam regarding what is lawful and what is unlawful are crystal clear. What is unclear is the stage at which cultural practices start to be dressed as religious rites. Hence, sometimes cultural practices are validated according to certain scholarly opinions. For example, the practice of celebrating the birth or death anniversary of a saint (*walī*) is sometimes justified by citing the validity of celebrating the Prophet's birthday ﷺ (*marwīd*). It is well established that the early generations of Muslims did not celebrate

the Prophet's birthday. It was introduced later into Muslim societies and was subsequently endorsed by many scholars. Some have then gone on to use these endorsements to justify celebrating the birthdays of other Prophets and religious figures too. Therefore, it is such cultural practices that are justified based on an over-extension of scholarly opinion that are witnessed during and after funerals.

The loss of a family member is most definitely an emotional affair. When emotions are high and tensions are elevated it is very difficult to control the environment, especially when this is coupled with a dearth of Islamic knowledge. It is usually at this time that un-Islamic activities are most likely to occur. However, the intention behind these un-Islamic activities is not entirely blameworthy. The living friends and relatives, through their misguided love, really want to do something beneficial for the deceased. Motivated by their desire to help their departed loved ones, it often leads them to engage in unsanctioned activities, which help neither the dead, nor the living.

The aim of this book is to help and guide the reader in performing rituals that are not only beneficial to the deceased, but more importantly, concordant with the teachings of Islam. According to some jurists, there are also certain mandatory duties that heirs must perform on behalf of their deceased. This small treatise is a practical guide to help heirs understand what they can do to help their departed loved ones based on the teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunna as elucidated by the qualified opinions of the classical jurists.

There are three main parts to this treatise. The first section deals with what heirs should do for the deceased immediately after death. It discusses the rites of preparing the body for burial and the procedure of the funeral prayer according to all four Sunnī schools of thought. It also discusses other important issues related to burial, such as transporting the body abroad, placing a headstone on the grave and the like. The second part discusses what the heirs can do after burial. It discusses, among many things, the rites of visiting the grave and posthumous donation of reward (*iṣāl al-thawāb*). The third and final part deals with what heirs can do if the deceased has

any outstanding mandatory acts of worship, such as unperformed *ṣalāt*, *zakāt* and *ḥajj*, and unpaid debts.

Each section of this book is amply illustrated by quotations from the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, and further explanations as conveyed in the statements of the classical jurists of Islam. I have discussed the issues in this book in a simple and easy manner. Each topic is discussed in such a way that it shares the opinions of the four schools of thought. It is highly advised that readers follow their own school of thought, if they have one.

It should be noted that meticulous care was taken in referencing this work. I started to work on it while in Egypt and Morocco and finally completed it in the UK. This meant that as I revised the work and added to it, some of the source references I used in Egypt and Morocco were not available to me in the UK. As a result, more than one edition of the same book have sometimes been cited. I apologise for any frustration this may cause.

Finally, it would be incomplete and disingenuous for me to pretend that this work was a result of my sole endeavour. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those who helped me with the research for this book. First and foremost, to my mother and father, for their encouragement and continuous support, and to my son Sami and daughter Omaymah for their patience and understanding of my not spending more time with them. To all my teachers, all my friends and librarians, too numerous to mention by name, for their invaluable help, assistance and patience. To the ordinary members of the public for sharing their cultural funeral practices. To the scholars for their consultation, discussion and feedback. And to those who allowed me to use their personal libraries. Special thanks to Dr. Abu Nasr Mohammed Abdul Matin and Shaykh Nadmi Al Shatwi for their help in ḥadīth research, and to Sr. Asseel Alalusi for her help with the Arabic typing. My heart felt thanks to Dr. Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera for his editorial work, advice and feedback. This publication would not be possible without his help, for which I am eternally indebted to him. And a very special

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