



BAHÁ'Í FUNERALS: INFORMATION FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Introduction

The key principles of the Bahá'í Faith include the oneness of humanity, the oneness of religion and the oneness of God. The Bahá'í Faith is a comparatively new religion, originating in 1844 in Persia (now Iran) and there are an estimated 5-6 million Bahá'ís in more than 311 countries and territories. There are now Bahá'ís in more than 400 cities and shires in Australia, following the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia in 1920.

Life of the spirit

Bahá'u'lláh's revelation affirms that the purpose of our lives is to know God and to contribute to an ever-advancing civilisation. Our true identity is our rational soul, whose free will and powers of understanding enable us to continually better ourselves and our society. Walking a path of service to God and to humanity gives life meaning and prepares us for the moment the soul separates from the body and continues on its eternal journey towards its Maker.

Life after death

Bahá'ís believe in life after death, that the soul progresses to an eternal realm after the death of the body, that life on earth will be remembered and that the soul will recognize and associate with loved ones and others known during this earthly span of life.

Funeral service

The relatives of the deceased and/or the executor of the will are responsible for organizing the burial service. The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for ensuring that this is done according to Bahá'í law. It is desirable, therefore, that there be cooperation between the family and the relevant Local Spiritual Assembly.

The Local Spiritual Assembly is the elected governing body for the Bahá'í community in the locality.

Bahá'ís have the option of either an open or closed casket. Since there are no professional clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, any Bahá'í or group of Bahá'ís may conduct the service.

No rites or rituals are permitted in Bahá'í funerals. Services are usually quite simple, featuring readings of Bahá'í prayers and other passages from the Bahá'í sacred scriptures. A specific "prayer for the dead" is recited by one person before burial while all present stand. This prayer can be found in most standard Bahá'í prayer books.

There are certain Bahá'í laws regarding burial that should be known to funeral directors:

- ❖ The body is not to be embalmed (unless required by state law);
- ❖ Interment must take place within an hour's travel time from the city or town where death occurs;

- ❖ Cremation is forbidden;
- ❖ Calcination or other means of speeding the process of natural decomposition should not be used;
- ❖ Bahá'ís are permitted to donate their bodies for medical research and restorative purposes. In such cases, provisions must be made to treat the remains with dignity and to bury them within one hour's travel from the place of death.

Bahá'ís from the Middle East are required to observe certain procedures for the preparation of the body. Bahá'ís from other parts of the world may choose to follow these requirements (and increasingly do) but they are not obliged to do so.

These procedures are:

- ❖ the body should be washed carefully and wrapped in a shroud of white silk or cotton;
- ❖ a Bahá'í burial ring is placed on the finger;
- ❖ the body is to be placed in a coffin of stone or a fine hard wood;
- ❖ the grave to be sited in such a way that the feet of the deceased will face towards the Qiblah i.e. Akka in the Holy Land.

There is no requirement for Bahá'ís to be buried in Bahá'í cemeteries or in sections of cemeteries that are specifically designated for Bahá'ís.

There is also no objection to a Bahá'í being buried in the general section of a cemetery. However, there may be a preference among some Bahá'ís to be buried in Bahá'í cemeteries or close to other Bahá'ís.

The dignified, spiritual and simple nature of Bahá'í funeral laws is evident in descriptions such as these:

“Just as the Bahá'í teachings address how a Bahá'í is to live his or her life, so do they address how we approach death and the preparations for a Bahá'í funeral and burial.

Bahá'u'lláh has encouraged us to regard death as a **‘Messenger of Joy’** for the deceased one, regardless of our own pain at the loss of a loved one.”

Further details

The following links may be useful to funeral directors in sourcing further information about the Bahá'í teachings on life after death:

<https://bahaibooks.com.au/>

<http://www.bahai.org/>

A detailed compilation, *Bahá'í Burial and Related Laws* is available from the Bahá'í National Office upon request.

The Spirit lives on

The Bahá'í Writings relate:

“To hold that the spirit is annihilated upon the death of the body is to imagine that a bird imprisoned in a cage would perish if the cage were to be broken, though the bird has nothing to fear from the breaking of the cage.”

The Human Soul Life and Death

○ Son of Man! Ascend unto My heaven, that thou mayest obtain the joy of reunion, and from the chalice of imperishable glory quaff the peerless wine.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 18.

The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest, and the lover hath no desire save union with his beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God. Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 7.

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