

What Should a Dying Patient and Family Members do?

The following are the most essential things a dying person may do while on the deathbed:

- 1) **Repentance:** The time of death is a time of repentance. The Prophet of God, Muhammad (pbuh) informed us that God accepts His servants' repentance anytime even minutes before one is overtaken by death, as long as the spirit does not reach the throat. One must turn to God with utmost sincerity and beg for forgiveness.
- 2) **Charity:** In addition to asking God to forgive past sins, one must give in charity, for charity expiates sins. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reminds us, "*Charity extinguishes sinful deeds just as water extinguishes fire.*"
- 3) **Supplication:** The best way to depart from this world is the way Joseph (Yusuf, pbuh) did. He supplicated, "*[O God] You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die as one who has surrendered to You and join me with the righteous*" (Quran, 12:101).
- 4) **Declare the *shahadah* (Testimony of faith):** The dying person who is going through the agony of death and is able to speak is advised to recite the *shahadah*, or the declaration of faith, "I bear witness that there is no god except Allah (God) and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah (God.)" A dying person who can hardly speak may be assisted by someone to frequently say, "*La ilaha illal-lah*" there is no god but Allah (God). Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) reminds us, "He whose last words are: *La ilaha illal-lah*, enters Paradise." This method is called *talqeen*. The Prophet (pbuh) advised, "Prompt your dying people to say, '*Lailaha illal-lah*'."
- 5) **Pray for the dying person:** Relatives among other visitors should pray for the departing soul. They supplicate, "O Allah (God)! Forgive him/her, have mercy on him/her, and cause him/her to enter Your Paradise. Indeed, You are the acceptor of prayers."
- 6) **Recite surah Ya Seen (chapter 36 of the Quran):** The Prophet (pbuh) informed the believers, "Ya Seen is the heart of the Quran. Whoever recites it seeking the pleasure of God and the hereafter will receive God's forgiveness. So recite it to your dying person." He also said, "If any person is on his deathbed and Ya Seen is recited to him, God makes his suffering easier." This can be done by immediate family members. If they are unable to recite it in Arabic, they may ask someone close to the deceased who can, otherwise one may ask a Muslim Chaplain or an Imam.
- 7) **Will and Testament:** Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) instructed the believers, "It is not permissible for any Muslim, who has something to bequeath, to stay for two nights without having his last will and testament written and kept ready with him." Family members should urge the dying person to prepare a written will and testament if he/she hasn't done so already. Civil courts **will not** divide the inheritance of the deceased among the heirs according to Islamic guidelines. Civil courts, however, will honor wills that are prepared according to Islamic guidelines. The court will not interfere with the deceased's

decision regarding the distribution of his/her wealth or property as long as it is specified in the will. It is best and fair for the beneficiaries to divide the shares according to the divine law of inheritance. For assistance and guidance in this matter one may contact a Muslim Chaplain or an Imam of an Islamic Center or Mosque.

- 8) **Allowable Charity:** According to the established prophetic tradition, the departing soul may not exceed one-third of his/her property to be given to charitable causes. He/she may assign a certain percentage of the one-third amount to different charitable organizations or individuals. This should be included in the will and testament.
- 9) **Debts:** It is the duty of family members to ensure that the dying person is debt free. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "A believer's soul remains in suspense until all his debts are paid off." The debt should be paid out of the property that he/she leaves behind. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "If anyone takes other people's money with the intention to repay it and then he or she should die without settling the debt (unable to pay it), God will pay the debt on his behalf. And if anyone takes money or property (of others) with the intention of destroying it (intending not to pay), God will destroy him." Death by itself does not annul one's debt or other responsibilities to the living. The survivors may pay the debt of their deceased from their own pocket and if they are poor the debt may be paid by the public out of the *zakah* (compulsory charity) funds specified as the portion for people in debt. This is one of the prescribed categories of *zakah* recipients.
- 10) **Forgiveness:** If the dying person wronged anyone, he/she must ask for their forgiveness before departing this world, otherwise those who were wronged will demand justice on the Day of Judgment and the dying person may be setting himself up for disaster.