



# A GUIDE FOR BAHÁ'Í FUNERALS AND BURIAL IN CANADA

O SON OF THE SUPREME!

*I have made death a messenger of joy to thee.*

*Wherefore dost thou grieve?*

*I made the light to shed on thee its splendor.*

*Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?*

— Bahá'u'lláh

Cover quotation: *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Arabic No. 32



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FOR BAHÁ'Í  
FUNERALS  
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IN CANADA

COMPILED WITH COMMENTARY  
BY DIANA AND DON DAINTY

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This book is a revision of the March 2009 2nd printing of the 2nd edition of *From the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith – A Reference Guide for Use in the Event of a Death in the Family*, approved by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ottawa.

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*We dedicate our collaborative efforts and resulting publication to Marjorie Merrick, our family matriarch, whose soul continues to inspire us and warm our hearts.*

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## **PART I — A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE BAHÁ’Í TEACHINGS ON THE BODY, SOUL, MIND, AND SPIRIT, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH**

When a loved one passes away, it is natural to examine and ponder the reality of one’s being, the purpose of our earthly lives, and the nature of life after death. The writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith include an abundance of answers to these and other fundamental questions, some of which are included in this booklet.

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, affirms that the pre-eminent realm of existence is the spiritual one. However, the physical realm provides the vehicle for the spiritual development of the human being and the hoped-for triumph over life’s challenges and adversities. Thus, through constant striving and the grace of God, we can acquire the necessary spiritual qualities and virtues that will spiritually empower the soul through all the worlds of God, or, as Jesus expressed it, through the many mansions of the Father.

This primary truth is revealed by Revelators, those Divine Beings such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Bahá’u’lláh and others sent by God, all of Whom reveal the Words of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This agency of the Creator is manifested, for example, as the Descending Dove anointing Jesus, or the Maid of Heaven glorifying Bahá’u’lláh. Thus, we are provided the essential material and spiritual principles from the Creator Himself for the guidance of the individual and society.

The Bahá’í Writings declare that there are a number of levels of spirit taking on different features in the various planes of existence.

Julio Savi’s *The Eternal Quest for God*<sup>1</sup> offers us this summary:

*In the mineral kingdom, spirit appears as the ‘power of attraction’<sup>1a</sup>; in the vegetable kingdom it appears as the ‘power of growth’<sup>1b</sup>; in the animal kingdom it appears as ‘power of sense perception’<sup>1c</sup>. In the human kingdom, says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it ‘is given different names, according to the different conditions wherein it is manifested. Because of its relation to matter and the phenomenal world, when it governs the physical functions of the body, it is called the human soul; when it manifests itself as the thinker, the comprehender, it is called mind. And when it soars into the atmosphere of God and travels in the spiritual world, it becomes designated as spirit.’<sup>1d</sup>*

The soul is the motive power of the human body; the spiritual mind, connected to the brain through what is called the common faculty, is the driver of the soul. In this way, the spiritual and physical planes interact, and the spiritual powers of imagination, thought, comprehension and memory are manifested in one’s physical life.

The human spirit, also understood as the rational soul, is unique, immortal and capable of unending progression through the worlds of God. Before death, its progress is determined by making right choices, according to the standards of God, freely—hence the importance of voluntarily adhering to the Revelator’s guidance—a fundamental aspect to passing the divine judgment and attaining salvation.

In this respect, Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us in the following terms:

*O OFFSPRING OF DUST! Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself of everlasting rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the dust heap of a mortal world. Up from thy prison ascend unto the glorious meads above, and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless.<sup>2</sup>*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá teaches us how our soul can continue to progress after death:

*Question: Through what means will the spirit of man—that is to say, the rational soul—after departing from this mortal world, make progress?*

*Answer: The progress of man's spirit in the divine world, after the severance of its connection with the body of dust, is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone, or through the intercession and sincere prayers of other human souls, or through the charities and important good works which are performed in its name.<sup>3</sup>*

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, we read:

*... Man is destined by God to undergo a spiritual development that extends throughout eternity. His life upon this earth is only the first stage of that development. When we outgrow our physical form, and are considered by God ready to reap the fruit of our spiritual development, we proceed to the other world....<sup>4</sup>*

The nature of the soul and its relation to the body, mind and spirit, as well as the nature of life after death, can be further explored by referring to the list of topics provided in Appendix I and more generally in Appendix II.

## Part II — PREPARATIONS FOR BAHÁ’Í BURIAL

### Preface

The burial of the dead is an occasion of great solemnity, a sacred act that requires reverence. While the content of the funeral service and arrangements for the interment are generally made by the family of the deceased, the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Bahá’í burial laws. A summary<sup>5</sup> of these requirements follows.

### Writing a will and burial instructions

In His Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh wrote: “*Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will.*”<sup>6</sup>

The Universal House of Justice reiterates this as follows: “*According to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, the making of a will is essentially an obligation of the individual Bahá’í....*”<sup>7</sup>

Because statutory laws vary between provincial and territorial jurisdictions, it is recommended that legal advice be sought in the province or territory where the individual preparing the will resides in order to ensure that they are fully informed on what constitutes a will and whether it is legal and enforceable.

The Universal House of Justice states:

... *There are several ways a believer can leave instructions regarding his burial; there is no objection for such instructions to be included in the will, if the law permits, and the believer so wishes.*<sup>7</sup>

In Canada, Bahá’í burial instructions should go into the will to be legally binding or in a codicil that is signed and witnessed.<sup>8</sup>

[Bahá’ís] *should make this [the burial instructions] known both to the Local Spiritual Assembly and to their own relatives, while*

*they are still alive. In this way it is quite possible that agreements may be reached with non-Bahá’í relatives before death takes place.<sup>9</sup>*

A copy of the burial instructions should be given to a family member and the executor of the will, so that the instructions are available at the time of death. It is also recommended that a copy be filed with the nearest Local Spiritual Assembly.

### **Bahá’í burial for non-Bahá’ís**

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, we read:

*Concerning the question whether a Bahá’í Burial Service can be conducted for non-Bahá’ís if requested by them: if non-Bahá’ís desire that the believers should conduct such a service there is no objection at all.<sup>10</sup>*

*An official Bahá’í funeral service should only be given for a believer, but there is no objection to the reading of Bahá’í prayers, or indeed to a Bahá’í conducting the funeral service of a non-Bahá’í, if this has been requested.<sup>11</sup>*

In light of the above, since a non-Bahá’í may have a Bahá’í funeral service, it follows from the Guardian’s guidance that the Prayer for the Dead could be recited.

### **Requirements binding on Bahá’ís in the West**

Every Bahá’í should ensure that s/he will be buried according to Bahá’í law. The following guidance is current as of the date of publication.

*For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour’s journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased is a believer over the age of 15 [i.e. 15 years or over].<sup>12</sup>*

*The laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Aqdas are, whenever practicable and not in direct conflict with the Civil Law of the land, absolutely binding on every believer or Bahá'í institution whether in the East or in the West. Certain ... laws should be regarded by all believers as universally and vitally applicable at the present time. Others have been formulated in anticipation of a state of society destined to emerge from the chaotic conditions that prevail today...<sup>13</sup>*

### **Donation of body parts to science**

Donation of body parts to science is permissible but, after removal of the parts in question, the remainder of the body is to be treated according to the requirements concerning conveyance and interment<sup>14</sup> in accordance with other Bahá'í burial practices as outlined further below in “Preparation of the body for burial.”

### **Transporting the body**

The body may be transported by any means to a distance of not more than one hour's journey from the place of death to the place of interment. Concerning calculation of the one-hour journey:

*The Universal House of Justice advises that the place of death may be taken to be the city or town in which the believer passes away, and therefore the hour's journey may be calculated from the city limits to the place of burial. However, it should be borne in mind that the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's law is to be buried near where one dies.<sup>15</sup>*

### **Arrangements for interment**

In accord with the transportation requirement, the gravesite must then be obtained from a nearby cemetery. Many Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world own cemeteries, or sections of larger cemeteries. However, in Canada, most Bahá'í localities use available cemetery facilities which are not restricted by race, religion or nationality.

## Preparation of the body for burial

The body is to be treated with respect, since it was once the temple of the spirit and exalted by the immortal soul. It is to be carefully washed<sup>16</sup> with dignity and reverence; while this is generally performed by Bahá'ís with Bahá'í prayers being said, others can also perform this task. Though not required, rosewater is often sprinkled on the body. A Bahá'í burial ring<sup>17</sup> is placed on the finger of the deceased. Then the body is wrapped in white<sup>16</sup> cloth using "... five sheets of silk or cotton. For those whose means are limited a single sheet of either fabric will suffice...."<sup>18</sup> Consultation with the funeral director will determine how best to accomplish these procedures. Bahá'ís in the community may also have experience with washing and wrapping the body. See Appendix III for examples of how to prepare the burial shroud.

- **Burial ring:** A burial ring should be provided for Bahá'ís 15 years or older.<sup>19</sup>

*The inscription for men should read: "Unto God belongeth all that is the heavens and on the earth and whatsoever is between them, and He, in truth, hath knowledge of all things"; and for women: "Unto God belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, and He, in truth, is potent over all things."*<sup>20</sup>

However, in the same passage, Bahá'u'lláh also says:

*... If the following verse, ..., be engraved upon the burial rings of both men and women, it shall be better for them; ...: "I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate."*<sup>20</sup>

Burial rings (in English or Arabic) are available from: Bahá'í Distribution Service, Toronto at Tel: 416-609-9900, Toll-free: 1-800-465-3287, <http://www.bds-canada.com/> or consult the nearest Local Spiritual Assembly.

- **Cremation:** Bahá'í burial law forbids cremation.<sup>19</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

... *The body of man, which has been formed gradually, must similarly be decomposed gradually. This is according to the real and natural order and Divine Law....*<sup>21</sup>

If a Bahá'í wills their body, or any part thereof, to medical science in service to humanity, the remainder must be respectfully buried as described above.<sup>14</sup>

- **Embalming:** "...*The body should not be subjected to an embalming process ....*"<sup>22</sup> (For this reason, a closed casket is recommended.) The Universal House of Justice adds the following exceptions:

...*When circumstances do not permit interment of the body to occur very soon after passing, or when it is a requirement of civil law, the body may be embalmed, provided that the process used has the effect of temporarily retarding the natural decomposition for a period of short duration....*<sup>22</sup>

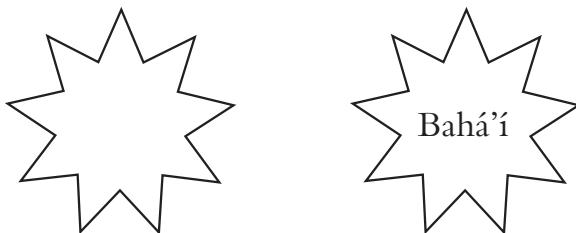
### **Casket and grave marker requirements**

- **Coffin/casket:** Bahá'u'lláh says that the coffin should be "made of crystal, of hard, resistant stone, or of wood that is both fine and durable, ...."<sup>17</sup> Also "... *there is no objection to using the hardest wood available or concrete for the casket....*"<sup>23</sup>
- **Grave marker and symbols:** The Universal House of Justice says: "Normally the building of structures or headstones on graves should be left to the family of the deceased, ...."<sup>24</sup>

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, we read:

*The placing of the burial stone on the dead has no other significance than to emphasize our profound conviction that our souls come from our Creator and to Him they return, and in Him we believe and trust.*<sup>25</sup>

Appropriate symbols for use on the grave marker for a Bahá'í are varying sizes of a nine-pointed star<sup>26</sup> or a nine-pointed star with the word “Bahá’í” in the centre<sup>27</sup> (see sample below<sup>28</sup>). Quotations from Bahá'í sacred scripture on grave markers are also acceptable.<sup>24</sup>



A letter written on behalf of the Guardian states that “... *the ring-stone emblem should not be used, nor the Greatest Name*” on grave markers/stones.<sup>27</sup>

## Burial procedure

- **Time span:** Although no time limit is set between death and interment<sup>16</sup>, “*Bahá'u'lláh has advised that it is preferable for burial to take place as soon after death as possible....*”<sup>22</sup>
- **Position of the body:** “...*The position of the body in the grave should be with the feet pointing toward the Qiblih, which is Bahjí in 'Akká.*”<sup>24</sup> In public cemeteries, pre-determined plot positions may preclude this requirement.
- **Burial at sea:** Burial at sea is governed by maritime law, however: “*it is preferable that Bahá'í burial should take place on land whenever this is possible.*”<sup>29</sup> “*This command [of an hour's journey] applieth to distances by sea as well ....*”<sup>30</sup>

## **PART III** —THE FUNERAL SERVICE OR GRAVESIDE CEREMONY

Guidance written on behalf of the Guardian states that the essence of a Bahá'í funeral service is the Prayer for the Dead: “*Regarding the Bahá'í funeral service: It is extremely simple, as it consists only of a congregational prayer to be read before burial....*”<sup>31</sup> Bahá'í funeral services are dignified and each service for a deceased Bahá'í is unique. There is no rigid ritual or practice. The service itself can take place in a hall or chapel, at the graveside, or both. As there is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, the program of prayers and Sacred Writings that form the service, and the arrangements for interment, may be left to the family of the deceased in consultation with the nearest Local Spiritual Assembly or its representative task force, committee or individual.

### **Prayer for the Dead**

The Prayer for the Dead<sup>32</sup>, which was revealed by the Báb and added to by Bahá'u'lláh<sup>33</sup>, is as stated above, the only essential element of a Bahá'í funeral service and is used for those aged 15 years and older. It can be recited during the funeral service in a chapel or at the graveside before interment<sup>34</sup>.

This Prayer for the Dead “*is to be recited by one believer while all present stand in silence.... There is no requirement to face the Qiblah when saying this prayer.*”<sup>35</sup> Prayer beads or other methods may be used by the reader/chanter to assist with the counting.

The version for men is below: the version for women follows it.

*O my God! This is Thy servant and the son of Thy servant who hath believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set his face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee. Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.*

*Deal with him, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and conceal-  
est their faults, as beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounty and the  
ocean of Thy grace. Grant him admission within the precincts of  
Thy transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and  
heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most  
Generous.*

Let him [the believer reciting the prayer], then, repeat six times the greeting “Alláh-u-Abhá,” and then repeat nineteen times each of the following verses★★:

*We all, verily, worship God.*

*We all, verily, bow down before God.*

*We all, verily, are devoted unto God.*

*We all, verily, give praise unto God.*

*We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.*

*We all, verily, are patient in God.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

★★ This is to be understood as: Say “Alláh'u'Abhá” once. Then repeat the first verse nineteen times. Again, say “Alláh'u'Abhá” once. Then repeat the second verse nineteen times, and so on. Alláh'u'Abhá means “God is the All-Glorious.”<sup>33</sup>

For women:<sup>36</sup>

*O my God! This is Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden who hath believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set her face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee. Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.*

*Deal with her, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and conceal-  
est their faults, as beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounty and the  
ocean of Thy grace. Grant her admission within the precincts of*

*Thy transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.*

Let him [the believer reciting the prayer], then, repeat six times the greeting “Alláh-u-Abhá,” and then repeat nineteen times each of the following verses\*\*:

*We all, verily, worship God.*

*We all, verily, bow down before God.*

*We all, verily, are devoted unto God.*

*We all, verily, give praise unto God.*

*We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.*

*We all, verily, are patient in God.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

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While the Prayer for the Dead is obligatory and allows for a change in gender, Shoghi Effendi has specified that other Bahá'í “*prayers for the dead are optional, but if used they are to be used as revealed.*”<sup>37</sup>

## **Memorial services**

Bahá'ís often choose to have additional memorial services. Such gatherings are planned by close family, other relatives of the deceased or by Bahá'í communities, and usually consist of prayers and readings from the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith along with other selections.

In addition, time can be set aside for praise of the soul who has passed on. Friends in attendance may be invited to share with the gathering precious memories and thoughts of their relationship with the deceased.

Those in attendance may wish to donate to a favourite charity in memory of the deceased. Bahá'ís may wish to make a donation to a Bahá'í fund.

*The Master has told us that gifts and good deeds done in memory of those who have passed on, are most helpful to the development of their souls in the realms beyond ....<sup>38</sup>*

### **A selection of prayers and readings for the funeral service**

Close family members, relatives, friends or community members usually choose the prayers and readings for the service. The following compilation of prayers and readings by the Central Figures of the Faith may assist in assembling a program for a funeral service. Members of other faiths may be invited to recite from their own faith traditions. The purpose of the prayers is for the progress of the soul and for the comfort of family and friends.

Additional references can be found in Appendices I and II. These materials can be ordered from the Bahá'í Distribution Service website: <http://www.bds-canada.com> or found at <http://www.bahaiprayers.org>.

From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh:

- 1) *Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! Abase not him whom Thou hast exalted through the power of Thine everlasting sovereignty, and remove not far from Thee him whom Thou hast caused to enter the tabernacle of Thine eternity. Wilt Thou cast away, O my God, him whom Thou hast overshadowed with Thy Lordship, and wilt Thou turn away from Thee, O my Desire, him to whom Thou hast been a refuge? Canst Thou degrade him whom Thou hast uplifted, or forget him whom Thou didst enable to remember Thee?*

*Glorified, immensely glorified art Thou! Thou art He Who from everlasting hath been the King of the entire creation and its Prime Mover, and Thou wilt to everlasting remain the Lord of all created things and their*

Ordainer. Glorified art Thou, O my God! If Thou ceasest to be merciful unto Thy servants, who, then, will show mercy unto them; and if Thou refusest to succor Thy loved ones, who is there that can succor them?

Glorified, immeasurably glorified art Thou! Thou art adored in Thy truth, and Thee do we all, verily, worship; and Thou art manifest in Thy justice, and to Thee do we all, verily, bear witness. Thou art, in truth, beloved in Thy grace. No God is there but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.<sup>39</sup>

- 2) O SON OF THE SUPREME! *I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?*<sup>40</sup>
- 3) O SON OF SPIRIT! *With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice! To the court of holiness I summon thee; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore.*<sup>41</sup>
- 4) O SON OF SPIRIT! *The spirit of holiness beareth unto thee the joyful tidings of reunion; wherefore dost thou grieve? The spirit of power confirmeth thee in His cause; why dost thou veil thyself? The light of His countenance doth lead thee; how canst thou go astray?*<sup>42</sup>
- 5) O SON OF MAN! *Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us.*<sup>43</sup>
- 6) O SON OF MAN! *Rejoice in the gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to meet Me and to mirror forth My beauty.*<sup>44</sup>
- 7) O SON OF BEING! *If thine heart be set upon this eternal, imperishable dominion, and this ancient, everlasting life, forsake this mortal and fleeting sovereignty.*<sup>45</sup>
- 8) O SON OF LOVE! *Thou art but one step away from the glorious heights above and from the celestial tree of love. Take thou one pace and with the next advance into the immortal realm and enter the pavilion of eternity. Give ear then to that which hath been revealed by the pen of glory.*<sup>46</sup>

- 9) *O FRIENDS! Abandon not the everlasting beauty for a beauty that must die, and set not your affections on this mortal world of dust.*<sup>47</sup>
- 10) *From the sweet-scented streams of Thine eternity give me to drink, O my God, and of the fruits of the tree of Thy being enable me to taste, O my Hope! From the crystal springs of Thy love suffer me to quaff, O my Glory, and beneath the shadow of Thine everlasting providence let me abide, O my Light! Within the meadows of Thy nearness, before Thy presence, make me able to roam, O my Beloved, and at the right hand of the throne of Thy mercy, seat me, O my Desire! From the fragrant breezes of Thy joy let a breath pass over me, O my Goal, and into the heights of the paradise of Thy reality let me gain admission, O my Adored One! To the melodies of the dove of Thy oneness suffer me to hearken, O Resplendent One, and through the spirit of Thy power and Thy might quicken me, O my Provider! In the spirit of Thy love keep me steadfast, O my Succorer, and in the path of Thy good-pleasure set firm my steps, O my Maker! Within the garden of Thine immortality, before Thy countenance, let me abide forever, O Thou Who art merciful unto me, and upon the seat of Thy glory stablish me, O Thou Who art my Possessor! To the heaven of Thy loving-kindness lift me up, O my Quickener, and unto the Daystar of Thy guidance lead me, O Thou my Attractor! Before the revelations of Thine invisible spirit summon me to be present, O Thou Who art my Origin and my Highest Wish, and unto the essence of the fragrance of Thy beauty, which Thou wilt manifest, cause me to return, O Thou Who art my God!*

*Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou art, verily, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious, the All-Highest.*<sup>48</sup>

From the Pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

- 11) *O God, my God! This is thy radiant servant, Thy spiritual thrall, who hath drawn nigh unto Thee and approached Thy presence. He hath turned his face unto Thine, acknowledging Thy oneness, confessing Thy singleness, and he hath called out in Thy name among the nations, and led the people to the streaming waters of Thy mercy, O Thou Most*

*generous Lord! To those who asked He hath given to drink from the cup of guidance that brimmeth over with the wine of Thy measureless grace.*

*O Lord, assist him under all conditions, cause him to learn Thy well-guarded mysteries, and shower down upon him Thy hidden pearls. Make of him a banner rippling from castle summits in the winds of Thy heavenly aid, make of him a wellspring of crystal waters.*

*O my forgiving Lord! Light up the hearts with the rays of a lamp that sheddeth abroad its beams, disclosing to those among Thy people whom Thou hast bounteously favoured, the realities of all things.*

*Verily, Thou art the Mighty, the Powerful, the Protector, the Strong, the Beneficent! Verily, Thou art the Lord of all mercies!*<sup>49</sup>

12) *O Thou Kind Lord! This dearly cherished maidservant was attracted to Thee, and through reflection and discernment longed to attain Thy presence and enter Thy realms. With tearful eyes she fixed her gaze on the Kingdom of Mysteries. Many a night she spent in deep communion with Thee, and many a day she lived in intimate remembrance of Thee. At every morn she was mindful of Thee, and at every eve she centered her thoughts upon Thee. Like unto a singing nightingale she chanted Thy sacred verses, and like unto a mirror she sought to reflect Thy light.*

*O Thou Forgiver of sins! Open Thou the way for this awakened soul to enter Thy Kingdom, and enable this bird, trained by Thy hand, to soar in the eternal rose garden. She is afire with longing to draw nigh unto Thee; enable her to attain Thy presence. She is distraught and distressed in separation from Thee; cause her to be admitted into Thy Heavenly Mansion.*

*O Lord! We are sinners, but Thou art the Forgiver. We are submerged in the ocean of shortcomings, but Thou art the Pardoner, the Kind. Forgive our sins and bless us with Thine abundant grace. Grant us the privilege of beholding Thy Countenance, and give us the chalice of joy and bliss....*<sup>50</sup>

13) *O my God! O Thou forgiver of sins, bestower of gifts, dispeller of afflictions!*

*Verily, I beseech Thee to forgive the sins of such as have abandoned the physical garment and have ascended to the spiritual world.*

*O my Lord! Purify them from trespasses, dispel their sorrows, and change their darkness into light. Cause them to enter the garden of happiness, cleanse them with the most pure water, and grant them to behold Thy splendors on the loftiest mount.<sup>51</sup>*

14) *O my God! O my God! Verily, Thy servant, humble before the majesty of Thy divine supremacy, lowly at the door of Thy oneness, hath believed in Thee and in Thy verses, hath testified to Thy word, hath been enkindled with the fire of Thy love, hath been immersed in the depths of the ocean of Thy knowledge, hath been attracted by Thy breezes, hath relied upon Thee, hath turned his face to Thee, hath offered his supplications to Thee, and hath been assured of Thy pardon and forgiveness. He hath abandoned this mortal life and hath flown to the kingdom of immortality, yearning for the favour of meeting Thee.*

*O Lord, glorify his station, shelter him under the pavilion of Thy supreme mercy, cause him to enter Thy glorious paradise, and perpetuate his existence in Thine exalted rose garden, that he may plunge into the sea of light in the world of mysteries.*

*Verily, Thou art the Generous, the Powerful, the Forgiver and the Bestower.<sup>52</sup>*

15) *O thou assured soul, thou maidservant of God ...! Be not grieved at the death of thy respected husband. He hath, verily, attained the meeting of His Lord at the seat of Truth in the presence of the potent King. Do not suppose that thou hast lost him. The veil shall be lifted and thou shalt behold his face illumined in the Supreme Concourse. Just as God, the Exalted, hath said, 'Him will we surely quicken to a happy life.' Supreme importance should be attached, therefore, not to this first creation but rather to the future life.<sup>53</sup>*

## References

1. Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God*. 1989. George Ronald: Oxford, United Kingdom, p. 40. The references in this quotation are as follows: a) *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 268; b) *Some Answered Questions*, p. 143 c) *Promulgation ...*, p. 29; d) ‘Survival and Salvation,’ *Star of the West*, VII, p. 190. See Savi’s footnote for further explanation of the quoted terms and text.
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*. 1998 Seventh edition. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: New Delhi, India, Persian Hidden Words, No. 39.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*. 1984 First pocket-size edition. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois, p. 240.
4. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 9, 1931 in Helen Bassett Hornby, comp., *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í reference file*. 1997. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: New Delhi, India, Selection 678.
5. For details, consult *Lights of Guidance* Selections 630 to 673 under the headings of: Wills, Burial Laws, Bahá’í Cemeteries, Funeral Services and Cremation.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. 1993. The Universal House of Justice: Bahá’í Publications Australia, para 109.
7. Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, October 1, 1980, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 631.
8. Advice from the Legal Department, Canadian Bahá’í National Centre received by phone, April 23, 2009. See also *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 633.
9. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of France, August 18, 1972, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 633.

10. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, April 19, 1941. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 38 in Bahá'í International Community - Bahá'í Reference Library - The Works of Shoghi Effendi: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LANZ/lanz-30.html>. Accessed April 25, 2011.
11. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, July 20, 1946, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 657.
12. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, June 9, 1974, *Bahá'í Burial and the Bahá'í Funeral Service*. 2001. Bahá'í Publications Australia: Maryborough, p. 6.
13. *Aqdas*, p. 6.
14. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 22, 1957, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 667.
15. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, February 20, 1978, *Bahá'í Burial*, pp. 6-7.
16. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 2, 1955, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 639.
17. *Aqdas*, para 128.
18. *Ibid.*, para 130.
19. *Ibid.*, Note 149 to para 128.
20. *Ibid.*, para 129.
21. Letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 6, 1971, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 669.
22. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, June 17, 1988, *Bahá'í Burial*, p. 7.

23. *Aqdas*, Note 149 to para 128.
24. Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda, May 4, 1972, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 656.
25. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, July 29, 1942, *Ibid.*, Selection 649.
26. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly, August 20, 1955, *Bahá'í Burial*, pp. 5-6.
27. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual, September 30, 1955, *Ibid.*, p. 6.
28. Natalie M. Reyes, *A Guide to Bahá'í Funeral and Burial Practices*. 2007. Elegant Impressions: [no city or country], p. 9.
29. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 23, 1985, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 643.
30. *Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, No. 16.
31. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*. India/Hawaii, 1973 Edition: pp. 32-33 in Bahá'í International Community - Bahá'í Reference Library: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/DG/dg-85.html.utf8?query=funeral|service&action=highlight#gr1>. Accessed April 25, 2011.
32. *Bahá'í Prayers*, 2002, Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois, pp. 35-36, and *Aqdas*, Supplementary Text, pp. 101-102.
33. *Aqdas*, Note 11 to para 8.
34. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, August 16, 1993, *Bahá'í Burial*, p. 12.
35. *Aqdas*, Note 10 to para 8.
36. *Ibid.*, Supplementary Text, p. 102.
37. Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National

Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 17, 1967, *Lights of Guidance*, Selection 660.

38. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, December 10, 1952, *Ibid.*, Selection 679.
39. *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 37-38.
40. *Arabic Hidden Words*, No. 32.
41. *Ibid.*, No. 33.
42. *Ibid.*, No. 34.
43. *Ibid.*, No. 35.
44. *Ibid.*, No. 36.
45. *Ibid.*, No. 54.
46. *Persian Hidden Words*, No. 7.
47. *Ibid.*, No. 14.
48. *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 163-164.
49. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. 1997. Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois, Selection 19, para 15-18.
50. *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 45-46.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections ...*, Selection 165, para 1-3.
53. *Ibid.*, Selection 165, para 4.

## **Appendix I— BAHÁ’Í REFERENCES ON THE BODY, SOUL, MIND, AND SPIRIT, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH**

ABL—‘*Abdu’l-Bahá in London*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. 1982 Reprint. UK Bahá’í Publishing Trust in Bahá’í International Community - Bahá’í Reference Library: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/ABL/#> – Accessed April 25, 2011.

BP—*Bahá’í Prayers* (See No. 32 in References above).

GL—*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Bahá’u’lláh. 1990 Pocket-size edition. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois.

HWA—Arabic *Hidden Words* (See No. 2 in References above).

HWP—Persian *Hidden Words* (“ “ “).

PT—*Paris Talks*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. 1972 Eleventh edition reprint. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: London, United Kingdom in Bahá’í International Community - Bahá’í Reference Library: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PT/> – Accessed April 25, 2011.

ROM—*Reality of Man: Excerpts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. 1962. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois.

SWB—*Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. The Báb. 1982 Lightweight edition. Bahá’í World Centre: Haifa, Israel in Bahá’í International Community - Bahá’í Reference Library: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/tb/> – Accessed April 25, 2011.

SAQ—*Some Answered Questions* (See No. 3 in References above).

TAB—*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. 1909 Edition. Bahá’í Publishing Committee in Bahá’í International Community

- Bahá'í Reference Library:  
<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/> – Accessed April 25, 2011.

## 1. TIME, SPACE IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

sanctified from time and place . . . . . ABL, p. 96  
in sleep, the spirit can traverse the East and West  
. . . . . SAQ, p. 227

## 2. REALITY OF PHYSICAL DEATH

death a messenger of joy. . . . . HWA, No. 32  
look forward to death with expectation . . . ABL, pp. 95-96

## 3. JUDGEMENT OF EARTHLY LIFE

deeds engraved on tablets of chrysolite . . . GL, pp. 209-210  
soul will recount that which it endured . . . GL, p. 156  
all shall appear before Him for judgement . . . SWB, p. 157  
estimate worth of deeds . . . . . GL, p. 171  
realize all that their hands have wrought . . . GL, p. 171

## 4. HEAVEN AND HELL

paradise and hell found in all the worlds . . . . SAQ, p. 223  
the unbelieving bemoan their plight . . . . GL, p. 170-171  
reward includes meeting God . . . . . SAQ, pp. 224-225

## 5. GLORY, JOY AND EXALTATION IN THE KINGDOM

it bestoweth joy. . . . . . . . . GL, p. 345  
soul's station of utmost perfection and glory  
. . . . . BP, p. 42, GL, pp. 155-156, SAQ, p. 198

## 6. COMMUNICATION

prayers of intercession are reciprocal . . . . . SAQ, p. 232

prayer is a mingling of stations. . . . . ABL, p. 96  
spiritual communication between man and higher worlds  
. . . . . PT, p. 179

## 7. STATION

soul remains at degree of purity attained . . . . ROM, p. 27  
but progress is at mercy of God . . . . ROM, p. 27  
nature of station indescribable . . . . GL, p. 156

## 8. NATURE OF AFTERLIFE

soul assumes best befitting form . . . . GL, p. 157  
soul will not forget the life before . . . . TAB, pp. 205-206  
soul will endure as long as the Kingdom of God  
. . . . . GL, pp. 155-156  
individuality of soul remains . . . . ROM, p. 26  
soul freed from many disabilities of earthly life  
. . . . . ABL, p. 96, GL, pp. 154-155  
souls are informed of mysteries . . . . TAB, p. 205  
sanctified and faithful souls possess power . . GL, p. 154, 161  
will know associates better. . . . . TAB, p. 205  
past and present friends of God in heavenly assemblage  
. . . . . TAB, p. 205  
beloved ones will recognize one another. . . . TAB, p. 206  
love for anyone not forgotten in the Kingdom  
. . . . . TAB, p. 206  
soul will freely converse with prophets. . . . GL, p. 156  
holy souls can witness reality of every great soul  
. . . . . TAB, p. 205  
progress until attaining presence of God . . . . GL, p. 155  
no reincarnation is possible . . SAQ, pp. 283-284, 286-287

## **Appendix II — OTHER BAHÁ’Í SOURCES ON THE BODY, SOUL, MIND, AND SPIRIT, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH**

- 1) John S. Hatcher, *The Journey of the Soul*. 1999. Bahá’í Canada Publications: Thornhill, Ontario.
- 2) Terrill G. Hayes, Betty J. Fisher, Richard A. Hill and Terry J. Cassidy, comp., *Life, Death and Immortality: The Journey of the Soul*. 1994. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois.
- 3) Hamish McIlwraith, *Coping with Bereavement*. 1998. One World: Oxford, United Kingdom.
- 4) Hushidar Motlagh, comp., *The Chalice of Immortality*. 1978. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: New Delhi, India.
- 5) Hushidar Motlagh, comp., *The Glorious Journey to God: Selections from Sacred Scripture on the Afterlife: Global perspectives*. 1994. Global Perspective Press: Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.
- 6 ) Hushidar Motlagh, comp., *Unto Him Shall We Return: Selections from the Bahá’í Writings on the Reality and the Immortality of the Human Soul*. 1985. Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois.

## Appendix III — BURIAL SHROUD EXAMPLES

*... There is nothing in the Bahá'í Writings to define how the wrapping is to be done, either when "five cloths" are used or "a single sheet". At present, the Bahá'ís are free to use their judgment in the matter. (Aqdas, Note 151 to para 30)*

It is recommended that a discussion about the shroud take place with the funeral director.

The examples below are merely suggestions and are provided by Nathalie Thirlwall (1 and 2) and Mehri Nasirai (3 and 4).

### 1. Example using a single sheet:

When a single cloth is used, it may be wrapped around the body sufficiently to cover the entire body, adjusting for length and width as needed. If desired, hand stitching may be done to keep the fabric in place.

### 2. Example using five cloths (sewn):

**Example of the amount of fabric needed:** A six foot male weighing 170 lbs./77 kg needs approximately seven yards/metres of fabric with a width of 45 or 54 in./114 or 137 cm).

Cut and sew four sleeves, one for each limb; a much larger, fifth piece is used to wrap the entire body including the head.

**Arm sleeves:** The length of these sleeves is approximately the length of the arms, including the hand. The width of the fabric is a bit more than the circumference of the widest part of the arm (generally the upper arm).

**Leg sleeves:** The length of these sleeves is approximately the length of the legs including the foot. The width of the fabric is a bit more than the circumference of the widest portion of the leg (either the

thickness of the thigh or the length of the foot, whichever is larger).

All of the sleeves can be seamed on the side and the bottom (so that the feet and hands are enclosed).

If the fabric is short, the fifth piece can be wrapped from the head to the upper legs only, since the legs will already be covered.

The edge of the fifth piece (if raw) can be hemmed for a better finish before wrapping.

The sewing can be done by sewing machine or basted by hand.

### **3. Second example using a single sheet:**

1. Use a cloth six (6) metres long and 150 cm wide.
2. Lay the body along the length in the middle of the cloth.
3. Fold the top of the cloth down over the head and upper body as far down as it will reach.
4. Fold the bottom of cloth up over the feet and lower body overlapping somewhat the edge of the upper cloth.
5. Tuck the lengths of the fabric at each side of the body under the body.
6. Four people then lift the wrapped body, holding it and placing it into the casket. The funeral home can be asked do this.

### **4. Second example using five cloths:**

1. Start with a cloth six (6) metres long (for a body of average height and size) or seven (7) metres long (if extra is needed) by 140 cm wide.
2. For a six-metre cloth, cut one length 210 cm long (#1). Cut the remaining 390 cm into four equal lengths (approx. 97 cm

each) (#2, #3, #4, #5). If you wish, in advance of use, hem each edge that was cut (with cotton or silk thread to match fabric).

3. Lay the long piece #1 down. One quarter of the way down from the top of the long piece #1, place #2 across #1, starting at the left edge of #1 and extending to the right. #3 will overlap #2, but it starts at the right edge of #1 and extends to the left.
4. Place #4 and #5 across #1 just below #2 and #3 so that it touches them, repeating the pattern as in step 3.
5. Fold #2 over the body and tuck the excess under it, covering the shoulders and neck but not the head. Repeat for #3. Fold #4 and #5 as above, covering the lower body including the feet. Ensure that #1 is always the outside layer.
6. Fold the bottom part of #1 lengthwise up as far as it will extend.
7. Fold the top part of #1 down as far as it will extend, covering the face. The two ends of #1 should overlap. If the family wishes, this last fold of #1 can be opened for viewing when the body is in the casket.
8. Please note that since the shroud is delicately wrapped, it will take at least four people to lift the body and place it in the casket without disrupting the shroud. The funeral home can be asked do this.

(Both **Examples 3** and **4** are done without tightly wrapping the body.)





# A GUIDE FOR BAHÁ'Í FUNERALS AND BURIAL IN CANADA

*A friend asked: “How should one look forward to death?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered: “How does one look forward to the end of any journey? With hope and with expectation. It is even so with the end of this earthly journey. In the next world, man will find himself freed from many of the disabilities under which he now suffers. Those who have passed on through death, have a sphere of their own. It is not removed from ours; their work, the work of the Kingdom, is ours; but it is sanctified from what we call ‘time and place.’ Time with us is measured by the sun. When there is no more sunrise, and no more sunset, that kind of time does not exist for man. Those who have ascended have different attributes from those who are still on earth, yet there is no real separation.*

*In prayer there is a mingling of station, a mingling of condition. Pray for them as they pray for you! ...”*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, pp. 95-96)*

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