
Panel Discussion

Muslim Perspectives on End-of-Life Issues

Moderator:

*Daniel Martin Varisco, PhD
Professor of Anthropology
Hofstra University
Long Island, New York*

Panelists:

*Gamal Badawi, PhD
Professor Emeritus of Management and Religious Studies
St. Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*

*Shahid Athar, MD, FACP, FACE
Department of Endocrinology and Medicine
St. Vincent Hospital and
Indiana University School of Medicine
Indianapolis, Indiana*



Discussion:

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Chaplain Lahaj: *Thanks to all the speakers for this wonderful information. I have one question that I have been asking forever. To people of all faiths I ask: "What is wrong with cremation when the planet is running out of space to bury people and when there is talk about dust-to-dust and how much better it is to be put into the ground where the body will disintegrate?"*

Dr. Badawi's response: The rites at the time of death or before death, what to recite, what to do, and how to dispose of the body are purely religious acts. That is the same, for example, as asking why Muslims pray five times a day, when four or even six would even be better. Do you see what I mean? The issues that are related to purely religious matters are ones that are not supposed to be tampered with. There is authentic evidence of how the Prophet told us what to do when a person is dying, what to recite, how to wash the body, and how to shroud it. Even in burial, the body is to face the *ka'ba* i.e. facing the *Qibla* to which Muslims direct their prayers. All these are

purely religious matters. If other people see it fit to cremate a dead person, that is fine, but we see it fit not to follow.

Dr. Athar's response: The first death in our tradition was when the two sons of Adam had a fight, and one of them died. The one who survived did not know what to do with the body. He saw a bird burying another bird, so that is probably the way he learned to dispose of the body. In addition, we are prohibited from burning humans; therefore, in wars, because of the way wars are taking place now with nuclear bombs, phosphorous bombs, and cluster bombs, the resulting burning of the bodies is un-Islamic. If one has to fight, it should be in a manly way, not by burning the enemy. Thank you.

Dr. Abdul Jamil Khan's comment: *Dr. Varisco in your field of cultural medical anthropology, you can determine that the rituals or traditions of disposing of the body were based on the ecology of the location. If you have soft land, you bury the body. If you have mountains — such as in the Iranian mountains, Azerbaijan, or Tibet — you leave the body to the birds. If you have plenty of wood, such as in India, you burn the body. Basically, it started with the ecology, continued with religions, and became a religious tradition.*