

BURIAL GUIDELINES FOR BAHÁ'ÍS IN JAPAN

*“Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world,
and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out.”*

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

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Preface

The laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas currently binding on Bahá'ís are a part of a believer's daily life. This, of course, includes the laws pertaining to burial, a number of which are found in the Aqdas and a portion of which have been promulgated as binding by the Universal House of Justice. The present document provides information for the Bahá'í community of Japan on those laws, associated requirements, and relevant civil procedures.

Although interment of the body of a deceased person was a common practice in Japan in former times, cremation has been the norm in modern times. This reality can create both conceptual and practical difficulties for the Bahá'í community. At the practical level, comparatively few cemeteries allow burial of uncremated remains. At the conceptual level, some persons may regard interment of the body as strange or less utilitarian than cremation.

The conceptual difficulties can be removed by considering the Bahá'í teachings on burial. Following are extracts from the Writings/letters of the infallible authorities that show how exalted yet natural is the Bahá'í conception of burial:

“The inner temple beholdeth its physical frame, which is its throne. Thus, if the latter is accorded respect, it is as if the former is the recipient. The converse is likewise true. Therefore, it hath been ordained that the dead body should be treated with the utmost honor and respect.” – The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 95.

“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. If it had been better for it to be burned after death, in its very creation it would have been so planned that the body would automatically become ignited after death, be consumed and turned into ashes.” – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. XI, No. 19, p. 317.

“[The law of no more than one hour's journey to the burial place] emphasizes the unity of the world and recognizes the importance of the spirit as compared with the body.” – Universal House of Justice secretariat, compilation “Bahá'í Burial and the Bahá'í Funeral Service”.

An individual's donation in 1958 of a burial lot in Ashiya, Hyōgo Prefecture, together with the acquisition since then by the National Spiritual Assembly of burial lots around Japan, has relieved the problem of access to the present; however, the need for such grounds is certain to increase in the future. In this regard, individual Bahá'ís or local communities may be able to play a helpful role by investigating the availability of cemeteries in their areas that allow burial according to Bahá'í law. It should be further mentioned in this regard that the funds raised from fees paid by Bahá'ís for use of burial plots at Bahá'í cemeteries (see under "Reservation of burial plot", below) have been and will be used by the National Spiritual Assembly to acquire more burial grounds.

While the basis of Bahá'í burial practice is the laws found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, elucidations of these laws as well as further burial-related requirements and guidance can be found in letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and by the secretariat of the Universal House of Justice. Thus the burial information herein is derived not only from the published Kitáb-i-Aqdas but also from references such as *Lights of Guidance*, compilations covering the Bahá'í funeral and burial, and letters from the Secretariat to a National Spiritual Assembly and to an individual believer. As such, the prescriptive content relating to burial contained in these guidelines has an authoritative basis.

The procedural information herein is derived from the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly of Japan, from material compiled by Mr. Yūzō Yamaguchi in the late 1980s and early '90s, and from practical experience. The sections about writing a will and Ḥuqúqu'lláh have been included because they pertain to the affairs of a deceased Bahá'í.

The endnotes expand or explain statements found in the main text of these guidelines, and are indicated in the main text by numerals enclosed in parentheses.

In addition to this general version of the English-language guidelines, two other documents have been created: a short, summary version (which may be suitable for relatives of the deceased who are not Bahá'ís), and a Burial Guidelines for the Ashiya Bahá'í Cemetery (which supersedes versions produced in 2010, 2013, and 2015 and distributed privately). A new Japanese-language version of the general guidelines has also been created, as have Japanese versions of the other documents.

The reader is welcome to submit updates, suggestions, and corrections for the guidelines; these may be submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly. If there are questions regarding matters mentioned herein, or if guidance is sought on issues not covered, the reader is urged to contact the National Spiritual Assembly. at:

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Finally, even as each individual Bahá'í has the responsibility of deepening in the laws of the Faith, including those of burial—“*Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words*” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas)—the Universal House of Justice has made clear that Spiritual Assemblies have a responsibility to the community in this regard:

“The burial of the dead is an occasion of great solemnity and importance, and while the conduct of the funeral service and the arrangements for the interment may be left to the relatives of the deceased, the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Bahá'í laws of burial as at present applied, and in courteously and tactfully drawing these requirements to the attention of the relatives if there is any indication that they may fail to observe them.” – *Messages 1963-1986*, p. 489.

“It is a vital and urgent duty of the Assemblies, both national and local, not only to apply the Laws of Bahá'u'lláh with justice and firmness, but to increase the believers' understanding of and devotion to these Laws.” – *Lights of Guidance*, p. 342.

These guidelines have been reviewed and approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of Japan. It is humbly hoped that they will serve as a helpful reference for the Bahá'í community.

Bahá'í Cemetery Committees
Bahá'í Funeral Desk
May 2017

BURIAL GUIDELINES FOR BAHÁ'ÍS IN JAPAN

Notification of the National Spiritual Assembly

The National Spiritual Assembly should be contacted upon death of a Bahá'í. After basic information such as the decedent's name, place of residence, and place of death is supplied, the following matters should be addressed.

- Place of burial – If the deceased has a reservation for a burial plot in a Bahá'í cemetery, this should be stated. If a burial plot has not been reserved, it should be stated whether or not the bereaved relatives wish to bury the deceased in a Bahá'í cemetery. (Concerning reservation, see under “Reservation of burial plot”, below.)

If the deceased will not be buried in a Bahá'í cemetery, it should be stated where burial will take place. Needless to say, in such a case the provisions of Bahá'í burial law must be adhered to. (1)

- Cemetery-use permit – Whether or not a reservation has been made, if the deceased is to be buried in a Bahá'í cemetery it is necessary to formally request permission from the National Spiritual Assembly by applying for a cemetery-use permit (bochi shiyō kyōka-sho).

If burial is to take place at a Bahá'í cemetery, the National Spiritual Assembly will inform the Bahá'í Cemetery Committee responsible for that cemetery as well as the Bahá'í Funeral Desk of the name of the deceased and the relatives' contact information. The National Spiritual Assembly will prepare the cemetery-use permit on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly and send it to the appropriate Cemetery Committee or directly to the bereaved family, who will submit it to the administrative authority overseeing the larger cemetery within which the Bahá'í burial lot is situated.

Notification of civil authorities

Civil authorities should be notified of the death. If the deceased was a foreign national, the appropriate embassy or consulate should also be contacted. The procedures for notifying civil authorities may vary slightly among towns, cities, city wards, and cemetery administrative authorities; those given below are typical. It

should be noted here that Japanese law allows for not only a relative (a person belonging to the nuclear family of the deceased or otherwise closely related by blood or marriage) but also a landlord or a guardian, among others, to make a notification of death to civil authorities. It is assumed for the purpose of these guidelines that the representative of the deceased in the procedures discussed herein is a relative.

- Official burial permit – An official burial permit (埋葬許可書 maisō kyokasho) should be obtained from the government office (city hall, city ward office, town hall, etc.) where the deceased person was registered, the person who reports the death lives or the deceased person lived. To obtain it, submit to the government office the hospital death certificate (死亡診断書 shibō shindan-sho) and a notification-of-death form (死亡届書 shibō todoke-sho) available at the government office. If the deceased was a foreigner, his/her residence card should also be submitted or at least shown. The filled-out notification-of-death form will function as an application for the burial permit. Japanese law requires that notification of civil authorities be made within seven days of a death.

It should be stated to the clerk handling the paperwork that the deceased was a member of the Bahá'í Faith and that the burial will be of an uncremated body (there may be a space on the form where this can be indicated). It will be necessary to provide the name and address of the cemetery where burial will occur, and identify the administrative authority of that cemetery—in the case of a public cemetery of which the Bahá'í burial lot forms a part, usually a department within the town hall, city hall, or city ward office governing the area where the cemetery is located. (For example, the Ashiya Bahá'í Cemetery is situated within Ashiya City Cemetery, which is administered by the Environment Department of Ashiya City Hall.) An official death certificate (死亡記載事項証明書 shibō kisai jikō shōmei-sho) will be issued by the clerk; this certificate should be used for any legal issues that may arise.

The burial permit, too, will ordinarily be issued on the spot, as soon as the clerk has confirmed that the identified cemetery allows burial of uncremated remains. The permit should then be submitted to the administrative authority overseeing the cemetery. If burial is to be in a Bahá'í cemetery, the permit can be presented to a member of the responsible Bahá'í Cemetery Committee or the Bahá'í Funeral Desk, who will submit the permit to the administrative authority overseeing the cemetery within which the Bahá'í burial lot is situated.

- Notification-of-burial form – A notification-of-burial form (埋葬届書 maisō todoke-sho) should be requested from the administrative authority overseeing the

cemetery where burial will take place (as mentioned above, commonly a department within a city hall or ward office), filled out, and submitted to that authority. If burial is to be in a Bahá'í cemetery, the form may also be available from the Bahá'í Cemetery Committee, and upon completion can be presented to a member of the Cemetery Committee or the Bahá'í Funeral Desk, who will submit it.

The above-mentioned paperwork will require the personal seal of the person submitting it. If the person is a foreigner who does not make use of a personal seal in civil matters, it should be made certain whether or not a signature will suffice. The relatives of the deceased should keep copies of the documents for their records.

There are sources on the Internet, including embassy websites, that provide useful, general information for foreigners in Japan on burial and related topics.

Bahá'í burial laws

Following is a synopsis of the burial laws revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Not all the laws are currently binding universally, i.e., on all Bahá'ís. The laws are identified as binding or not, and elaborated further below. (2)

- * Enfolding of the body in a silk or cotton shroud of five sheets or one sheet. -Not now binding-
- * Interment—i.e., burial in the ground—in a coffin of crystal, of hard, resistant stone, or of fine, durable wood. -Partly binding-
- * Burial at a location not more than one hour's journey from the place of death. -Binding-
- * Use of a burial ring, required for believers 15 years of age and older. -Not now binding-
- * Recitation of the Prayer for the Dead, preceding interment; required for believers 15 years of age and older. -Binding-

* Current as of January, 2018.

Burial

Burial of a Bahá'í should be in the ground, in a coffin. Concerning the coffin itself, see under “Coffin”, below. Concerning placement of the coffin in the grave, see under “Orientation of grave”, below.

Cremation is prohibited. There have been instances in the past in which a believer passed away without writing a will or otherwise specifying that he/she should be buried according to Bahá'í law, and who thus was cremated by non-Bahá'í relatives. It is the responsibility of each believer to inform the relatives that he/she wishes to be buried according to Bahá'í law. For further see under “Will”, below.(3)

Burial should be at a location not more than one hour's journey, by any means of transport, from the place of death. In the case the places of death and burial are far apart, the journey may be reckoned from the municipal limit of the place of death to the place of burial. In any instance in which it will be very difficult or impossible to comply with this particular law, guidance should be sought from the National Spiritual Assembly

Although there is no specified time limit for burial, in the Questions and Answers section of the published Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is stated by Bahá'u'lláh, “*The sooner the burial taketh place . . . the more fitting and acceptable will it be.*” (4)

Preparation of burial plot

In the case burial is to be in a Bahá'í cemetery, the responsible Bahá'í Cemetery Committee will contact a professional company to prepare a burial plot. The cost of plot preparation is included in the fee for use of a Bahá'í cemetery (see under “Reservation of burial plot”, below).

A date and time for the burial should be decided after consultation among the relatives of the deceased, the Cemetery Committee, and the company that will prepare the grave. It is preferable that the burial occur by the early afternoon, inasmuch as the workers must have sufficient time following it to restore the plot before the cemetery gates are closed. On the other hand, if the burial is scheduled too early the workers may not have enough time to make preparations.

Coffin

While burial in a coffin is binding, the provision concerning the material of the coffin is not now binding. In the Notes section of the published Kitáb-i-Aqdas, however, it is stated that “the spirit of the law is that coffins should be of as durable a material as possible.”

Obtaining an appropriate coffin—i.e., one made of a durable material such as

hardwood—can be difficult in Japan, where comparatively flimsy softwood coffins suitable for cremation are usual. For inquiries please contact the National Spiritual Assembly

If an individual is to procure a coffin, care should be taken that it is not too large for the burial plot. The dimensions of a burial plot at a Bahá'í cemetery can be confirmed with the National Spiritual Assembly

Preparation of body

Embalming is prohibited.(5) In the case of an unavoidably delayed burial or of very warm weather, dry ice can be used for the preservation of the body; a refrigeration unit at the hospital or an undertaker's facility can be expensive.

A burial ring with a special inscription may be applied if the deceased was 15 years of age or older, and the body may be wrapped in a shroud of either silk or cotton, but neither the ring nor the shroud are now binding provisions; also, the body may be washed beforehand. These can be done by the relatives or possibly by an undertaker or hospital staff. There is no ordained or otherwise specified way to wash the body, place the ring, and wrap the shroud. The Bahá'í Funeral Desk has several burial rings in stock, with the inscription in either Arabic or English; the price of a ring is 1,200 yen. Given that burial in a shroud is not now universally binding, and given that burial in clothes, while not provided for, is not expressly forbidden, if a shroud is not used the relatives can avoid leaving the body uncovered by dressing the deceased in clothes.(6).

Customary practices, such as anointing the body with attar of roses, may be followed; however, any such customs should not contravene the Bahá'í laws of burial nor should customs be regarded as requirements. Ritualistic practices that would imply adherence to a religion other than the Bahá'í Faith should be avoided in preparation of the body and at burial.(7)

Donation of body to medical science

The body may be donated to medical science, provided it is stipulated to the medical personnel that the remains be neither cremated nor transported for more than one hour to the place of burial.

Undertaker

The bereaved family is free to decide whether they will use an undertaker or not. An undertaker may be referred by the hospital where death occurs, or the relatives of the deceased may wish to engage their own. In the case of burial at a Bahá'í cemetery, the responsible Bahá'í Cemetery Committee may be able to give advice. If the body is being transported by aircraft for burial, it may be necessary for two undertakers—at either end of the flight—to be engaged.

The undertaker(s) should understand the laws and prohibitions of Bahá'í burial.

Transport of body

Depending on the place of death and the location of the cemetery, it may be necessary to transport the body by air. The cost of transport will be lower if the body is placed in a lightweight coffin made for the purpose of transport rather than in the (comparatively heavy) burial coffin for the flight; the undertaker can provide the transport coffin. The transport coffin will be placed within a special container for the flight, and transfer of the deceased to the burial coffin will take place at the undertaker's facility in or near the locality of burial. Certain details will have to be coordinated between the undertaker of the locality where death occurred and the undertaker of the locality of the cemetery.

The undertaker of the locality where death occurred can arrange airline tickets for relatives accompanying the deceased. There may be agencies that can arrange for the body to be transported more cheaply than can the undertaker, but it is up to the relatives to investigate this.

Funeral

There is no requirement for the funeral other than the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead, preceding interment. The Prayer is to be recited if the deceased was 15 years of age or older, and by one believer while others stand in silence; it is not necessary to face the Qiblah.

Persons not Bahá'ís attending a Bahá'í funeral should understand the requirement to stand during the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead. They may recite Bahá'í prayers other than the Prayer for the Dead.

Following is the Prayer for the Dead. If the deceased is a woman, the phrase “Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden” should be substituted for

“Thy servant and the son of Thy servant”, and the word “her” for “his” and “him”; “men” is not substituted. For the repetitive portion of the Prayer, note that the Greatest Name is recited not six times consecutively but rather once before each of the six repeated verses; the six verses are recited 19 times each.(8)

Prayer for the Dead

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 concealest 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.

Alláh-u-Abhá. [say once]

We all, verily, worship God. [say 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá. [once]

We all, verily, bow down before God. [19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá. ["]

We all, verily, are devoted unto God. ["]

Alláh-u-Abhá. ["]

We all, verily, give praise unto God. ["]

Alláh-u-Abhá. ["]

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God. ["]

Alláh-u-Abhá. ["]

We all, verily, are patient in God. ["]

There is no set program for a Bahá'í funeral service. The practice in Japan has ranged from the simple recitation of the required prayer and a few other readings confined to the cemetery, to a more elaborate program of readings/testimonials/reminiscences held in a private residence, a rented hall, and/or a Bahá'í Center in addition to the cemetery, and including refreshments or a luncheon. Note that the longer the outdoor service at the cemetery lasts, the more vulnerable it will be to vagaries of weather. There is no provision in Bahá'í law that either allows or forbids the display of the body in an open coffin during a funeral.

If burial is at a Bahá'í cemetery, the responsible Bahá'í Cemetery Committee

may be able to recommend facilities near the cemetery for a service and/or a luncheon; also, the undertaker may have facilities or otherwise be able to offer a recommendation. If the locality of the cemetery is some distance away from the locality of residence of the deceased, an option is to have a reading of prayers at the cemetery and a memorial service later in the home locality. One factor to consider in preparing a program is the number of persons who are anticipated to attend the funeral: if few, such as for a strictly private occasion, a simple service confined to the cemetery may suffice.

Just as there is no set program for a funeral service, there is no established protocol of hospitality. Whether or not any service other than the recitation of the required prayer is held, or whether or not a luncheon is hosted or refreshments served, is ultimately solely the decision of the bereaved relatives, and in making this decision undue consideration should not be given to any precedent.

It would be a good idea for the relatives to choose a person to be in charge of proceedings at the funeral, including the program itself, any announcements that have to be made to the attendees, and any issues that may have to be dealt with at the cemetery with the undertaker or the company that has prepared the burial space. Also, the person who will recite the Prayer for the Dead should be chosen beforehand, as the person may wish to prepare for the recitation.(9)

Depending on the cemetery there may be either crushed stones (“jar”), or dirt that can become soft after a rain, covering the lot; persons attending a funeral or visiting a grave should therefore refrain from wearing elevated shoes as their footing could be unstable.

The cemetery may have an attached florist, to which orders for memorial bouquets may be made. The relatives may wish to find another florist, though, as cemetery florists can be expensive. If burial is in a Bahá’í cemetery, the responsible Bahá’í Cemetery Committee may be able to offer a recommendation in this regard or may be able to handle orders for floral bouquets.

Orientation of grave

The grave of a Bahá’í may point toward the Qiblih, although it is not now a requirement to do so. If a grave is to be oriented to the Qiblih, it is recommended that great-circle reckoning be used. Great-circle direction can be determined at the website www.qiblih.com.

The National Spiritual Assembly can inform the relatives as to whether or not a burial plot at a particular Bahá’í cemetery is, or can be, oriented to the Qiblih.

In the case a grave is oriented to the Qiblih, the coffin should be placed in the

grave so that the body faces the Qiblah; i.e., with the feet pointing toward Bahjí.(10)

Gravestone

A gravestone is not a requirement, although it is usual. If a gravestone is to be emplaced, neither the Greatest Name calligraphic arrangement nor the ringstone emblem should be inscribed on it; however, the nine-pointed star, the word “Bahá’í”, and quotations from the Writings may be used. Concerning the five-pointed star, see note (11).

If burial is in a Bahá’í cemetery, the Cemetery Committee may be able to refer a stone mason. Because preparations for the burial will have upset the ground of the plot, a gravestone should not be put in place for at least several months, in order to allow the ground to settle.

Bahá’í cemeteries in Japan

There are seven Bahá’í cemeteries in Japan, located in: Yoichi, Hokkaidō; Katagami, Akita Prefecture; Jōsō, Ibaraki Pref.; Yokohama, Kanagawa Pref. (within Yokohama Foreigners’ Cemetery, and thus restricted); Ashiya, Hyōgo Pref.; Kasaoka, Okayama Pref. (not yet developed for use); and Nanjō, Okinawa. Efforts are ongoing to acquire more cemeteries.

Most of the Bahá’í cemeteries are situated either within larger, municipally administered cemeteries or in the vicinity of Buddhist temples. The National Spiritual Assembly has appointed for each Bahá’í cemetery a responsible committee. Detailed questions concerning a Bahá’í cemetery should be addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly

While it is not a requirement to bury a Bahá’í in a Bahá’í cemetery, Bahá’í burial laws must always be adhered to. The procedures (as opposed to laws) described in these guidelines may vary among Bahá’í cemeteries, depending on local circumstances.

Reservation of burial plot

The National Spiritual Assembly has encouraged the members of the Bahá’í community to reserve a burial plot at a Bahá’í cemetery if they wish to be buried

there. Although a reservation is not a requirement for burial in a Bahá'í cemetery, a reserved plot is less expensive than an unreserved plot. As an alternative, Bahá'ís may investigate the availability of cemeteries near their communities where burial according to Bahá'í law is feasible.

The current fee for a burial plot at a Bahá'í cemetery is 1,120,000 yen. The amount can be paid in a lump sum or in installments. An application form is available from the National Spiritual Assembly. The fee for an unreserved plot is 1,600,000 yen. In the Ibaraki Bahá'í Cemetery it is possible to bury two persons (i.e., place two coffins) vertically aligned (one above the other) in one plot. The reservation fee is 2,240,000 yen for two persons. For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly.

The fees for burial plots in Bahá'í cemeteries are applied toward a number of expenses: purchase of Bahá'í cemetery grounds around Japan; earthwork at each cemetery, such as digging burial spaces according to specifications (for example, installing the concrete chamber that Ashiya City requires for each burial plot in Ashiya Bahá'í Cemetery) as well as plot preparation, lowering of the coffin into the grave, and plot restoration at the time of burial; beautification or improvement of the Bahá'í cemetery (e.g., landscaping, such as laying “jari” crushed stones and steppingstones) as well as routine maintenance; and the annual management levy the National Spiritual Assembly must remit to the administrative authority of the larger cemetery within which each Bahá'í cemetery is situated.

Costs such as transportation of the deceased, funeral, coffin, and gravestone must be borne by the relatives of the deceased.

Will

The writing of a will is ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and is binding on all believers. A certain form is prescribed for the beginning of the will: see paragraph 109 of the main text and No. 137 of the Notes in the published Aqdas. The writing of a will in and of itself does not necessarily make it legally binding, so believers should consult a legal professional about how to write a legally valid will and appoint an executor. Foreign nationals living in Japan need to make sure that their will follows the line of their home country. In the case of U.S. citizens, moreover, the will needs to follow the laws of their home state.

It should be clearly stated in the will that the testator wishes to be buried according to Bahá'í law. If the testator wishes to donate his or her body to medical science, this should also be specified in the will, along with stipulations prohibiting cremation and more than one hour's transport of the remains for burial. If due,

payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should also be specified in the will (see under “Ḥuqúqu'lláh”, below).

The will may be deposited with a Spiritual Assembly; also, an Assembly may be named in the will as beneficiary of some portion of the testator's estate, but should not be named as executor of the will.

Where none of the testator's relatives are Bahá'ís, or the executor of the will is neither a Bahá'í nor a relative, it would be a good idea to provide an explanation in the will that would help them to understand and carry out the various requirements mentioned in these guidelines. The explanation could include a summary of the currently binding burial laws.

Sample Bahá'í wills in English can be found online and a Japanese sample can be obtained from the National Spiritual Assembly. For further concerning the will, see the Notes section of the published Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

In addition to writing a will, a Bahá'í should inform a Spiritual Assembly—i.e., the Local Spiritual Assembly, or the National Spiritual Assembly if he or she lives in a locality without an Assembly—as well as relatives of his or her intention to be buried according to Bahá'í law.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Ḥuqúqu'lláh is established in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and “is a spiritual obligation, the fulfillment of which has been left to the conscience of each Bahá'í” (from the Notes section of the published Aqdas). A believer should instruct in his/her will that payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh be made on whatever portion of his/her estate such payment is due at his/her death, after debts and expenses (such as those of burial) have been settled.

Note that if payment of Ḥuqúq is due on any portion of a deceased Bahá'í's estate, and no instruction about payment of the due amount is included in the deceased Bahá'í's will, or he/she has left no will, the executor of the will, or the administrator of the estate, nevertheless has a responsibility to make that payment from the estate. This is why writing a will and explaining any due payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is important: it can help the executor fulfill the obligation.

In the case a Bahá'í is named in a deceased person's will as beneficiary of some portion of the person's estate, that portion may be subject to computation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh once it passes to the Bahá'í beneficiary, depending on the kind(s) of asset it consists of. If an asset is of a kind subject to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the beneficiary must pay Ḥuqúq on that asset even if the testator paid Ḥuqúq on the same asset when he/she was alive or the executor paid Ḥuqúq on it before disposition of the

estate.(12)

Notes

1. (Re “Notification of National Spiritual Assembly”, p. 6.) In a letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly of Japan by the secretariat of the Universal House of Justice it is stated that a Bahá’í may be buried in the same grave (such as a family grave) as contains the ashes of persons who have been cremated. For further on this particular topic see the Japan NSA. News No. 74 (April 8, 2016).

Parenthetically, the House of Justice secretariat (*Lights of Guidance*, pp. 198 and 203 or No. 655 and 673) has stated in a letter to a different National Assembly that a non-Bahá’í may be buried in a Bahá’í cemetery, while adding that available space would be a deciding factor. Since there is not sufficient cemetery space in Japan at this time, only Baha’is may be buried in Baha’i cemeteries except for special cases which the National Spiritual Assembly approves.

2. (Re “Bahá’í burial laws”, p. 8.) A believer is not required to follow a burial law found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas unless it has been, or until such time as it is, promulgated as binding by the Universal House of Justice. Also, a believer is free to follow a non-binding Bahá’í burial law.

3. (Re “Burial”, p. 9.) In a Tablet written to a believer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also makes an exception to the prohibition of creation in the case death is due to a highly contagious disease (*). Clearly this would be an extraordinary case, in which various medical and civil authorities would necessarily become involved—Japanese law requires that the Public Health Center be notified immediately in such a case—and if a believer has passed away from such a disease the relatives should contact the National Spiritual Assembly immediately.

The secretariat of the House of Justice has addressed issues of cremation in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Japan: see a summary in the NSA News No. 74 (April 8, 2016). (* Quoted by Marzieh Gail in *Summon Up Remembrance*, pp 174-6 or Ruhi Book 8, Unit 1, Section 12, para. 2)

4. (Re “Burial”, p. 9.) In letters written by the secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly (dated 19 February 1985 and 24 June 1993), it is stated that the Bahá’ís of Japan should do their best to follow the law of one hour’s journey, although the House of Justice is aware that circumstances may not always enable compliance, and it is further suggested that a remedy for this difficulty is the acquisition of more Bahá’í burial grounds. In this regard, if

any believer learns of a cemetery anywhere in Japan where burial according to Bahá'í law is feasible, it would be helpful if he/she contacted the National Spiritual Assembly with that information.

Concerning a time limit for burial, the practice among Bahá'ís in Middle Eastern countries has been to bury the body within 24 hours, if possible; however, this is not a Bahá'í requirement. Japanese law stipulates that a burial or cremation should not occur sooner than 24 hours after death or stillbirth (unless a contagious disease is the cause of death, in which case burial or cremation may be required immediately). (Aside from the law, as a practical matter, in Japan it would be very difficult to prepare and conduct the funeral and burial of a Bahá'í within 24 hours of death.)

5. (Re “Preparation of body”, p. 10.) In a letter written by the secretariat of the Universal House of Justice (in *Baha'i Burial and the Baha'i Funeral Service*, dated August 2007 revised version, No. 16), it is clarified that if necessitated by a delayed burial or by a civil law requirement the body may be embalmed, but only for the short term in a way which temporarily slows decomposition; an embalming process which is intended to prevent natural decomposition and thereby preserve the body indefinitely is not permitted. (There is a difference between short-term and long-term embalming, both in the mixture and strength of the ingredients of the chemical solution and in the procedures for the application of the solution.)

Embalming is ordinarily neither required nor performed in Japan, although it is available. If short-term embalming is thought necessary because of a greatly and unavoidably delayed burial in the case of a deceased Bahá'í, the National Spiritual Assembly should be consulted before any action is taken.

Parenthetically, an autopsy is neither required nor forbidden under Bahá'í law. Japanese law does not require an autopsy and the procedure is rarely performed in Japan except in criminal or special medical cases.

6. (Re “Preparation of body”, p. 10.) In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (in *Baha'i Burial and the Baha'i Funeral Service*, dated August 2007 revised version, No. 8), it is stated that the body should be washed and also that the shroud should be white in color and preferably of silk; however, these requirements have not yet been universally promulgated by the House of Justice. The material of the burial shroud—silk or cotton—is stated explicitly in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and repeated under “Bahá'í burial laws”, above, but as explained there the use of a shroud is not now binding under law—although it is common in practice.

In the Aqdas it is written, “*The Lord hath decreed . . . that the deceased*

should be enfolded in five sheets of silk or cotton. For those whose means are limited a single sheet of either fabric will suffice.” In the Questions and Answers annex (No. 56) to the published Aqdas the inquiry, “Concerning the shrouding of the body of the deceased which is decreed to comprise five sheets: does the five refer to five cloths which were hitherto customarily used or to five full-length shrouds wrapped one around the other?” is answered by Bahá’u’lláh, “*The use of five cloths is intended.*” The custom was to use five cloths to each wrap a different portion of the body—such as the legs, lower torso, upper torso—rather than use five larger sheets or a single large sheet to wrap the entire body. In this regard the Notes section (No. 151) of the published Aqdas states, “Concerning the way in which the body should be wrapped, there is nothing in the Bahá’í Writings to define how the wrapping of the body is to be done, either when ‘five cloths’ are used or only ‘a single sheet.’ At present, the Bahá’ís are free to use their judgment in the matter.”

The statement “Burial in personal clothes is not provided for under Bahá’í law” is taken verbatim from a letter written by the secretariat of the House of Justice to an individual Bahá’í (dated 5 May 2010). Given that burial in a shroud is not now universally binding, and given that burial in clothes, while not provided for, is not expressly forbidden, if a shroud is not used the relatives can avoid leaving the body uncovered by dressing the deceased in clothes.

7. (Re “Preparation of body”, p. 11.) In letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and by the secretariat of the House of Justice it is stated that believers should avoid conduct or practices that would imply adherence to a religion other than the Bahá’í Faith and that believers should not allow observances or practices to become codified or systematized. (See, for example, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 138, 139, and 199 [No. 460, 464, 465, and 658]; the compilation *Baha’i Burial and the Baha’i Funeral Service*, 2007 revised version, No. 23 and 24; the compilation *Baha’i Burial Laws and Related Subjects*, No. 28; an e-mail letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated 5 May 2010.)

Among Bahá’ís of Middle Eastern descent there are customary routines for washing the body, placing the ring, and wrapping the shroud for burial, and practices for other occasions as well, often with a basis in the ways of the Holy Family; however, the infallible authorities of the Faith have not seen fit to prescribe protocols for such activities for the general Bahá’í community, and in letters written on behalf of the infallible authorities it is stated that any such customary practices should not be embraced as a standard because there is a danger they will thereby come to be regarded as compulsory and take on the characteristic of ritual.

8. (Re “Funeral”, p. 12.) In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (see *Directives from the Guardian* p. 33) it is stated, “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 [at the funeral service of a non-Bahá’í] or, indeed, to a Bahá’í conducting the funeral service of a non-Bahá’í if this has been requested.”

Specifically concerning the Prayer for the Dead, the House of Justice secretariat has written to an individual Bahá’í (dated 5 May 2010), “Regarding the permissibility of reciting the Prayer for the Dead for a non-Bahá’í, no text has been found in the Writings on this matter, and therefore it is left to the discretion of those concerned until such time as the House of Justice decides upon this question.” When the Prayer is recited, in the Notes section (No. 10) of the published *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* it is stated that a “believer” should do so.

Certain instructions for reading the Prayer for the Dead, formally incorporated into the text in the version found in most prayerbooks, have been left out of the text of the Prayer given here; however, the explanation given here concerning substituting gender terms and the recitation of the Greatest Name reiterates those formal instructions as well as clarifications issued by the House of Justice.

9. (Re “Funeral”, p. 14.) There are quite a few customs in Japan relating to a funeral, such as a wake, a condolence money gift, certain days of the traditional calendar avoided for a funeral service, and certain words or expressions that are innocuous in normal speech but assume an inappropriate connotation when spoken at a service. Needless to say, such customs do not formally pertain to a Bahá’í funeral (although the Writings do counsel wisdom in speech). Customs that have a direct Buddhist or other religious connection or that contravene the Bahá’í laws of burial should not be followed.

10. (Re “Orientation of grave”, p. 14.) In letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 196 [No. 646]; the compilation *Baha’i Burial and the Baha’i Funeral Service* [2007 revised version], No. 14; the compilation *Baha’i Burial Laws and Related Subjects*, No. 36), it is stated that the grave of a Bahá’í should point toward the Qiblih and that the coffin should be placed in the grave so that the decedent’s feet point toward, and the body thus faces, the Qiblih; however, in a letter written by the secretariat of the House of Justice (to an individual, dated 27 June 2011, or the compilation *Baha’i Burial Laws and Related Subjects*, No. 37, 38, and 49), it is clarified that the requirement for the grave to point toward the Qiblih is not now universally binding. Naturally, the feet cannot point toward the Qiblih if the grave itself does not, but if the grave does, the feet should.

It should be mentioned here parenthetically that non-Aqdas burial-related requirements—i.e., requirements specified in letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi but not appearing in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (such as that the grave face the Qiblih)—are, like the Aqdas laws themselves, not binding universally until promulgated as so by the House of Justice.

While the House of Justice has not yet promulgated great-circle direction as the proper way of alignment with the Qiblih, one of the above-mentioned Secretariat letters (to an individual, dated 27 June 2011), addressing how to ascertain direction to the Qiblih for the purposes of obligatory prayer, orientation of a grave, and orientation of the *Mashríqu'l-Adhkár*, discusses only great-circle reckoning and does not mention any other way of alignment (such as a straight line on a map). Great-circle direction can thus be considered, de facto, the correct method of alignment with the Qiblih.

A great circle is a line circumscribed on the surface of Earth by an imaginary plane that bisects the planet. Any two points on the surface of the planet can be connected by such a line, which describes the shortest possible route between those two points. The lines of longitude are examples of a great circle, but the only line of latitude that is so is the equator.

It is usual for the graves of Bahá'ís to be oriented to the Qiblih, if possible. From Japan, depending on the location, the great-circle direction to the Qiblih is roughly 30 to 35 degrees north of due west. It might seem intuitively apparent to sight along the latitude (i.e., due west) in order to face the Qiblih, inasmuch as the Holy Land and much of Japan are very close latitudinally, but actually the only way to face a faraway location on Earth is to sight along a great circle. To put it differently, if one were in the Holy Land and facing the Qiblih, and if one then rose up in the air and floated back to one's home in Japan while constantly facing the same direction (i.e., the Qiblih), one would necessarily have moved along a great circle.

11. (Re “Gravestone”, p. 15.) While the nine-pointed star and the Greatest Name have been expressly approved or disapproved for display on gravestones of Bahá'ís, the five-pointed star or the pentagram, viz., the *haykal*—which has been described in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (see *Directives from the Guardian* p. 52) as “the symbol of our Faith”—does not appear in the available sources to be either approved or disapproved. Nonetheless, a reasonable conclusion is that the five-pointed star (unlike the nine-pointed star) should be avoided on gravestones, for two reasons: primarily because it represents the Manifestation of God and—by the same criterion applying to the Greatest Name (see *Directives* p. 79)—is thus too sacred a symbol for mundane public display, and secondarily

because it has widespread use outside the Faith variously (and far more commonly than other-pointed stars) as an ideological, occult, national, military, and commercial symbol or graphic design.

Regarding the nine-pointed star on a gravestone, although there is no requirement concerning the appropriate design or orientation of the star, a House of Justice letter, addressing the design of an individual believer's gravestone in a particular country, states, "We understand that . . . generally, it is preferable for the central point of the star to be directed upwards rather than downwards" (a memorandum from the World Center Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, <bahai-library.com/uhj_nine_pointed_star>). (By "central point of the star to be directed upwards" presumably it is meant a vertex of the star to be pointing straight up.) While this House of Justice letter concerns an individual case, the reader may choose to follow the stated preference.

12. (Re "Ḥuqúqu'lláh", p. 17.) The explanation of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is limited to basic information pertaining to the disposition of the estate following a death. Questions should be directed to The Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Japan.