

Bahá'í Burial and Related Laws

Selected Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and
Communications by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

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CONTENTS

Part A:

Selected extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Part B:

Selected extracts from communications on behalf of Shoghi Effendi
and by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

1. Overview and applicability of Bahá'í burial law..	5
2. Limitations on transport of the body..	8
3. Preparation for burial..	12
4. Coffin..	14
5. Prayer for the dead and funeral service..	16
6. Graves, tombstones, and related issues..	20
7. Stillborn infants and deceased children..	23
8. Cemeteries..	25
9. Honoring the dead..	27
10. Exhumation and reburial..	28
11. Cremation and related issues..	29
12. Miscellaneous issues..	32

Part A:

Selected extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

In the Prayer for the Dead six specific passages have been sent down by God, the Revealer of Verses. Let one who is able to read recite that which hath been revealed to precede these passages; and as for him who is unable, God hath relieved him of this requirement. He, of a truth, is the Mighty, the Pardoner.

(The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 8)

[1]

It hath been ordained that obligatory prayer is to be performed by each of you individually. Save in the Prayer for the Dead, the practice of congregational prayer hath been annulled. He, of a truth, is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

(The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 12)

[2]

Division of the estate should take place only after the Ḥuqúqu'lláh hath been paid, any debts have been settled, the expenses of the funeral and burial defrayed, and such provision made that the deceased may be carried to his resting-place with dignity and honor. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is Lord of the beginning and the end.

(The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 28)

[3]

The Lord hath decreed that the dead should be interred in coffins made of crystal, of hard, resistant stone, or of wood that is both fine and durable, and that graven rings should be placed upon their fingers. He, verily, is the Supreme Ordainer, the One apprised of all.

... If the following verse, which hath at this moment been sent down by God, be engraved upon the burial rings of both men and women, it shall be better for them; We, of a certainty, are the Supreme Ordainer: "I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Thus doth the Lord single out whomsoever He desireth for a bounty from His presence. He is, in very truth, the God of might and power.

The Lord hath decreed, moreover, 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. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. It is forbidden you to transport the body of the deceased a greater distance than one hour's journey from the city; rather should it be interred, with radiance and serenity, in a nearby place.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraphs 128-130)

[4]

QUESTION: Which is to take precedence: the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the debts of the deceased or the cost of the funeral and burial?

ANSWER: The funeral and burial take precedence, then settlement of debts, then payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, "Questions and Answers", number 9)

[5]

QUESTION: Is the ordinance that the body of the deceased should be carried no greater distance than one hour's journey applicable to transport by both land and sea?

2

ANSWER: This command applieth to distances by sea as well as by land, whether it is an hour by steamship or by rail; the intention is the hour's time, whatever the means of transport. The sooner the burial taketh place, however, the more fitting and acceptable will it be.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, "Question and Answers", number 16)

[6]

QUESTION: 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?

ANSWER: The use of five cloths is intended.

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, "Question and Answers", number 56)

[7]

QUESTION: Is the use of the burial ring enjoined exclusively for adults, or is it for minors as well?

ANSWER: It is for adults only. The Prayer for the Dead is likewise for adults.

(The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, "Question and Answers", number 70)

[8]

QUESTION: Concerning the Prayer for the Dead: should it precede or follow the interment? And is facing the Qiblih required?

ANSWER: Recital of this prayer should precede interment; and as regards the Qiblih: "Whichever way ye turn, there is the face of God."

(The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, "Question and Answers", number 85)

[9]

3

Part B:

Selected extracts from communications on behalf of Shoghi Effendi
and by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

4

1. *Overview and applicability of Bahá'í burial law*

For the burial of the dead, the only requirements now universally binding are to bury the body in a coffin (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.

(From a document entitled "Laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Not Yet Universally Applied",
March 2016, approved by the Universal House of Justice)

[10]

A concise statement of the Bahá'í law of burial is given in the Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, as follows:

"Briefly the law for the burial of the dead states that it is forbidden to carry the body for more than one hour's journey from the place of death; that the body should be wrapped in a shroud of silk or cotton, and on its finger should be placed a ring bearing the inscription "I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to

His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate”; and that the coffin should be of crystal, stone or hard fine wood. A specific “Prayer for the Dead” is ordained, to be said before interment It has been explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian that this law prohibits cremation of the dead. The formal prayer and the ring are meant to be used for those who have attained the age of maturity.”

(From a letter dated 13 October 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [11]

In a Bahá'í cemetery believers should be buried with their feet pointing towards the Qiblah (the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in ‘Akká). However, this is not a binding requirement at present.

(From a letter dated 24 November 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [12]

If Mrs ... recognizes the station of Bahá'u'lláh, then she should understand that He is the Law-giver for our Day and, further, that the law of God supersedes all human conceptions of right and wrong. Since one of the important laws is that one's body should be buried and not cremated, it is unseemly that a believer in Him would consciously disobey that law, even if that person had made a promise, as did she, to her father to have her body cremated.

(From a letter dated 7 June 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [13]

... concerning the burial wishes of your non-Bahá'í mother, you are advised that, since Bahá'í law is not, of course, binding on non-Bahá'í relatives, their own wishes regarding burial may be carried out.

(From a letter dated 1 March 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [14]

Use of the shroud and burial ring are ordinances not yet applicable in the West, but the family of the deceased may choose to observe them.

(From a letter dated 7 December 2003 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [15]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... in which you seek guidance regarding the application of Bahá'í burial laws to Iranian Bahá'ís living in the “west”, and has asked us to reply as follows.

The issue of application of the laws for “eastern” and “western” Bahá'ís at this time is perhaps best considered in the light of the following explanation. As you are aware, many of the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* were applied in Írán and the neighbouring lands of the Middle East from very early days, and others were progressively enforced by Shoghi Effendi.

As the Faith spread in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, certain laws were applied there also, but fewer than were already current in Írán. The Faith continued to spread around the world, and the terms “east” and “west” in this context acquired specialized meanings. While the “east” continued to designate Írán, 'Iráq and other countries of the older Bahá'í communities of the Middle East, the term “west” came to include the rest of the world. Thus, Persian pilgrims in the time of Shoghi Effendi would stay in the “Eastern” Pilgrim House, while Australian and Chinese pilgrims would stay in the “Western” Pilgrim House.

To pioneer for the Faith and for many other reasons, believers from Írán began to move to other parts of the world. This mere change in residence was no reason for them to cease to observe those laws of the *Aqdas* with which they were familiar, but they had to learn not to impose them on the “western” Bahá'ís. With intermarriage between “eastern” and “western” Bahá'ís other variations arose, depending upon whether the children were raised in a western or eastern family environment.

With this understanding, the individual believers now residing in the “west” must decide, given their own situations, which of the laws are binding upon them. The House of Justice has clearly specified those laws which are currently not binding on the “western” friends. The fact that certain laws are not binding does not, of course, mean that the believers are forbidden to obey them if they wish to and circumstances permit. Bahá'ís from Írán who have migrated to the west should already know which laws are binding upon them, having learned this in their homeland. Bahá'ís of Íránian or mixed descent living in the west, whose parents have not familiarized them with the laws, should at least follow those laws which are universally binding.

(From a letter dated 19 June 2006 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[16]

Concerning your query as to whether it would be a sin to disregard Bahá'í law by interring the deceased in a family plot that is more than an hour's distance from the

place of death, there are vitally important spiritual questions surrounding this issue that must be given due consideration when making such a decision. Spiritual blessings accrue to all concerned when the law of God is obeyed, and, in this instance, the soul of the departed is also a factor to take into account. While it may be distressing for family members to be unable to inter the deceased in a family plot, the friends are encouraged to place their trust in God and abide by the

law if at all possible, confident that obedience to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh is a source of divine bestowal.

(From a letter dated 10 February 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [17]

When the House of Justice determines that it is timely to apply additional aspects of the burial law, it will provide any clarifications that are necessary. In the meantime, it is important that these teachings not be presented in a way that would imply that any of the laws are binding beyond those that are explicitly identified as such or that would suggest there are qualifications or restrictions beyond what is clearly stated.

(From a letter dated 5 May 2010 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [18]

The Bahá'í law of burial has been revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and is not subject to change by the Universal House of Justice.

(From a letter dated 21 December 2011 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [19]

Your desire to obtain a greater understanding of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh is warmly acknowledged. Concerning your question, the Bahá'í law stipulates burial. The instructions of Bahá'u'lláh in His *Most Holy Book* make this law clear, and Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer in 1955, comments that 'Abdu'l-Bahá "... also explained that burial is natural and should be followed."

With regard to the hesitations you have experienced because of the Bahá'í teachings on burial, it is to be expected that when one begins to learn about the Faith, one encounters aspects of the teachings that differ from one's beliefs. Naturally, the customs and views of people worldwide vary greatly with regard to issues such as

burial practices. Yet, in coming to understand that Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for this Day, that His Revelation reflects God's will for humanity, and that His teachings are intended to unite the peoples of the world in one common Faith, one can, over time, come to see the wisdom of His teachings and appreciate the importance of adopting them, confident that "The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind" and recognizing that "No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained."

(From a letter dated 29 June 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

[20]

2. Limitations on transport of the body

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... in which you ask for guidance in observing the law for the burial of the dead in cases where the graveyard is more than an hour's journey on foot from a village.

If alternative means of transport are not available or practicable in cases such as you mention, another possibility is for the Bahá'ís of such a village to acquire a graveyard nearer to the village so that it can be reached within one hour from the village limits. If no such solution is feasible the believers will just have to do their best for the present to keep the journey as short as possible. In any case the House of Justice presumes that the journey is not likely to greatly exceed the one hour limit.

(From a letter dated 21 September 1981 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[21]

... while transportation of the body by air is permissible, due consideration should always be given to the preference expressed by Bahá'u'lláh for the body to be buried soon and in a nearby place.

(From a letter dated 16 June 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[22]

... The burial of Bahá'ís in a Bahá'í burial ground, although most appropriate, is not a law of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. However, burial of the dead within a distance of one hour's travel is one of the laws. Therefore, should the Bahá'í cemetery be located more than one hour's journey away, the believers should make use of a nearby non-Bahá'í

burial ground, providing there is no objection on the part of the local people and the authorities.

... Should the Bahá'ís be prevented from burying their dead in the public cemetery, and there is no other alternative, obviously they can do nothing but take the body to the nearest cemetery for burial.

(From a letter dated 6 November 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [23]

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... concerning the difficulty you are experiencing in observing the Bahá'í law relating to burial, and we are asked to respond as follows.

As the circumstances existing in your country are out of the control of the Bahá'ís, they should do the best they can to comply with the law requiring the body to be buried within an hour's journey of the place of death. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to acquire burial plots in the vicinity of Bahá'í communities if possible.

(From a letter dated 19 February 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [24]

The House of Justice hopes that it will be possible for you to locate a suitable burial place, in which the remains of your dear wife are to be interred, which can be reached within

one hour from the civil limits of the city in which she passes away, by whatever form of conveyance you choose to use. Should you continue to experience difficulty in locating a cemetery, you are encouraged to turn to your National Spiritual Assembly for advice and assistance. Since the time limit is determined by transportation from the city limits to the cemetery, it is not affected by the holding of a funeral service at the Bahá'í Centre in the city.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [25]

With respect to your specific question, concerning the traditional custom of moving the body three times, which cumulatively would add up to more than one hour's

travel time, the House of Justice feels that, in respect to this issue, it would be sufficient to translate all or part of the following extract taken from pages 62–63 of the Synopsis and Codification of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

Briefly the law for the burial of the dead states that it is forbidden to carry the body for more than one hour's journey from the place of death.

You will note that the restriction on moving the body refers to moving it a distance equivalent in time to “one hour's journey from the place of death” (emphasis added). Assuming that the various movements mentioned in your letter take place relatively near to the location where death occurred, there would not seem to be any contradiction to the law as stated.

(From a letter dated 29 December 1991 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [26]

... you wished to know whether there is an explanation for this law given in the Bahá'í Writings, so that you can explain it to non-Bahá'í relatives. The words of the law, as they appear in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, are: “It is forbidden you to transport the body of the deceased a greater distance than one hour's journey from the city; rather should it be interred, with radiance and serenity, in a nearby place.” The Research Department has been unable to locate any passage in the Writings giving specific reasons for this law, but if one bears in mind Bahá'u'lláh's purpose to unite mankind and to free it from many of the ritual observances and traditional practices which divide one people from another, one can perhaps obtain an understanding for the very simple and dignified burial laws that He has given us. In past centuries it has been a practice of various peoples to transport the bodies of the dead over long distances so that they could be buried either in the vicinity of a sacred place or in some other location of special significance for the deceased. The Bahá'í law abolishes such practices. It also emphasizes the unity of the world and recognizes the importance of the spirit as compared with the body. The body of the dead person is treated with reverence and dignity and, without undue delay, is consigned to the earth in a place near where the person dies. The soul, we know, continues to exist in a world that is exalted above the limitations of time and place.

(From a letter dated 23 November 1993 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [27]

In an email ... from your National Bahá'í Secretariat, the question was posed as to how the provision of the Bahá'í law concerning burial within the distance of one hour's journey from the place of death is to be applied if death occurs in the course of an extended journey by plane or ship, or in a desert.

The Universal House of Justice provided the following reply on 18 September 1968 to an individual who asked about death at sea.

The laws of burial as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* do not refer to the occurrence of death at sea. Until such time as the Universal House of Justice legislates on these matters, the friends when faced with such incidents should be guided by whatever civil or maritime law is applicable under the circumstances. Should land be reached, however, obviously the body must be buried on land in the nearest suitable place.

Applying this guidance to death in an aeroplane, the principle would be to bury the body in the nearest suitable place to where the plane lands, within the provisions of civil law in that locality.

Concerning the occurrence of death in a desert, the principles noted above can be applied to conclude that the body of the deceased may be transported to the nearest location suitable for burial, even if this would require transportation for more than one hour's journey from the place of death.

(From a letter dated 16 June 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[28]

In your email ... you have asked for guidance in cases where a believer passes away in a foreign land, and the children, who are not Bahá'ís, wish to transport the body home for burial, which would involve a journey in excess of one hour.

There are a number of factors to be considered in such cases. One is the legal question as to who has the authority to decide what is to be done with the body of the deceased. This may well vary from country to country, and the civil law does not always uphold the wishes of the deceased. It may not be possible, therefore, for a Bahá'í with non-Bahá'í relations to make certain what is to be done with his body when he dies. In any event, Bahá'ís would want to make their wishes known, familiarize their relatives beforehand with the Bahá'í laws on burial, and also make the necessary provisions in each of their wills that they be buried in accordance with these laws.

In the case where the believer has clearly left instructions for a Bahá'í burial, if the family persists in ignoring these wishes, the Spiritual Assembly should not

participate in planning or executing the funeral or the burial, although the individual believers are free to attend and to offer Bahá'í prayers on behalf of the departed. In this event the Assembly may wish to organize a separate Bahá'í memorial service at which the Prayer for the Departed may be read.

(From a letter dated 7 October 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[29]

10

In response to your question regarding whether there are any exceptions to Bahá'í burial requirements in the case of believers who pass away while on military service outside their home country, you are advised that while in exceptional cases it may not be possible to comply with Bahá'í law, believers serving in the military should take whatever measures are necessary to see that Bahá'í laws regarding burial are observed. If it is possible under military regulations, you should arrange with your commanding officer that in the event you should pass away during your service in ..., the responsible military authorities will arrange for your burial in accordance with Bahá'í law—which prohibits cremation and calls for no more than one-hour's transport from the place of death, as well as for the Bahá'í Prayer for the Dead to be said on behalf of the deceased. Beyond this, you may leave this matter in the hands of God and trust that His unerring eye will watch over you. You may be interested to learn that in connection with prior military conflicts, United States military agencies have acknowledged Bahá'í ordinances on burial and shown willingness to respect them. Further, in response to your question, there is no objection to the combination of the Bahá'í burial service with the military one.

(From a letter dated 14 January 2004 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[30]

As to the question raised about the definition of the place of burial for the purposes of observing Bahá'í law, the House of Justice has asked us to confirm that the hour's journey may be calculated from the city limits of the place of death to the place of burial—that is, the actual site where the burial is to take place.

(From a letter dated 12 April 2007 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[31]

It is understood that Mr and Mrs ... would like their daughter to receive an official Bahá'í burial ceremony despite their awareness, following consultation with your

National Spiritual Assembly and the National Spiritual Assembly of ..., that to transport her body a greater distance than one hour's journey from her place of death is a violation of Bahá'í law. The guidance provided to you by Counsellors ... and ... that neither your Assembly nor any other Bahá'í institution should participate in planning or executing the funeral or the burial is correct. Individual believers are free to do as they wish about attending the funeral, and they may certainly offer prayers on behalf of the departed in their personal capacity. It is appreciated that you will continue to handle this delicate matter with sympathy and compassion for the grieving family.

(From a letter dated 25 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [32]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... enquiring whether it would be permissible—for the sake of surviving dependents—to deviate from the Bahá'í law forbidding the transport of the body of the deceased for more than one hour's journey from the place of death. We have been asked to convey the following.

You have raised this question out of deep concern for whether your mother would be able to be present for your funeral, should you predecease her. While your concern is acknowledged, adherence to the explicit injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, in form and spirit, must be respected. Spiritual blessings accrue to all concerned when the law of God is obeyed; in

11

this instance, the soul of the departed is also a factor to take into account. Although it may be difficult for a dear family member to be absent for the funeral of a loved one, no exemption to the law requiring burial within one hour's journey from the place of death exists in such a circumstance.

(From a letter dated 14 December 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [33]

3. Preparation for burial

The practice in the Orient is to bury the person within 24 hours of the time of death, sometimes even sooner, although there is no provision in the teachings as to the time limit.

(From a letter dated 2 April 1955 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual) [34]

believer)

There is no provision in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* determining the finger on which the burial ring should be placed.

(From a letter dated 13 March 1978 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [35]

With reference to your two questions concerning the washing of the body, there is nothing in the Writings stating who should wash the body, nor what should be used in the water.

(From a letter dated 7 December 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [36]

Bahá'u'lláh has advised that it is preferable for burial to take place as soon after death as possible. 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. However, the body should not be subjected to an embalming process which has the effect of preserving it without decomposition for a lengthy period; such processes often aim to preserve the body indefinitely.

(From a letter dated 17 June 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [37]

The inscription to be engraved on burial rings is set out in the latter part of paragraph 129 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. There are no provisions about the size of the ring or its composition.

(From a letter dated 18 May 1999 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [38]

In relation to the washing of a body, the only statement that has been found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian is a letter dated 2 April 1955, written

on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, which states that “the preparation for the body for burial is a careful washing”

(From a letter dated 29 March 2010 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[39]

Your email letter ... concerning viewing the body of the deceased at a Bahá'í funeral has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to convey to you the following. Nothing has been found in the Writings concerning the viewing of the body before interment, and the House of Justice has not legislated on the matter. Therefore, the decision as to whether the body is to be viewed is left to the family or those responsible for arranging the funeral. While for the time being the friends are free to decide for themselves whether the body of their loved one is to be viewed before interment, they should be mindful that this should not become an issue in the community and that the personal decisions of the friends in this regard are to be respected.

(From a letter dated 4 July 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[40]

Concerning the shrouding of the body of a deceased believer, referred to in paragraph 130 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, there is nothing in the Writings to define the manner in which the five pieces of shroud should be wrapped or to clarify other aspects of the shrouding, and at present, the House of Justice does not wish to legislate on this question. Because believers should be left free to determine the manner in which the law should be applied and because a demonstration video could be misunderstood as fixing the form of the application of the law, the House of Justice does not feel the production of such a video would be advisable.

(From a letter dated 15 April 2015 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[41]

With respect to your query whether or not the body of the deceased must be clothed before shrouding, in a letter dated 2 April 1955 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, it is stated: “The preparation for the body for burial is a careful washing, and placing in a shroud of white cloth, silk preferably.” The Research Department at the World Centre has reported that, while this and other passages in the Bahá'í writings suggest that after the body is washed it should be shrouded and buried, to date no mention has been found as to whether or not

clothing the body prior to shrouding is either allowed or prohibited. Although the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ordains that the body of a deceased believer be wrapped in a shroud, the details of this aspect of Bahá'í burial have not been laid down by the House of Justice, and the friends are free to use their discretion in the matter at this time. As to your question about the applicability of Bahá'í law related to shrouding, the shrouding of the body is not presently required of Western believers.

(From a letter dated 29 November 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[42]

4. Coffin

With reference to the use of hard wood or crystal coffins for the burial of the dead, you will be interested to know that the Báb revealed the passage which appears on page 95 of *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, in connection with an injunction to bury a body in a marble coffin. Of particular significance is the sentence: "Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced."

The law of burial was confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh in the "*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*". The clarifications given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are based on that law and are equally binding.

Bahá'u'lláh's laws are for the whole world and for the duration of His Dispensation. Certain exigencies in specific parts of the world at this time, such as the high cost of coffins or limitation of burial space in some countries, cannot become the determining factors as to what is best for humankind all over the world and for centuries to come. The specific burial problems you have mentioned require specific solutions which should be arrived at through consultation with Bahá'í institutions on a case-by-case basis.

(From a letter dated 3 March 1987 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í couple)

[43]

Your final query asked whether it is acceptable to observe simplicity in the choice of coffin material and perhaps contribute the difference to the Fund or to charity. The House of Justice feels that in view of the requirement to show the utmost respect for the dead, it would not be permissible to use inexpensive materials in order to give to the Bahá'í funds or to charity.

(From a letter dated 26 February 1989 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í agency)

[44]

As you know, it is stated in paragraph 128 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* that “the dead should be interred in coffins made of crystal, of hard, resistant stone, or of wood that is both fine and durable”. In recent years, in situations in which the friends are unable to use these specific materials because they are not available at all in the location of the funeral, or could be obtained only at excessive cost, the House of Justice has referred to note 149 relating to this passage in the *Most Holy Book* indicating that “the spirit of the law is that coffins should be of as durable a material as possible” and that “for the present, the Bahá'ís are left free to make their own choices in this matter”. Materials that have been used under these provisions include concrete and pressed particle wood composite.

(From a letter dated 7 January 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í couple)

[45]

... although burial in a coffin is among the laws universally binding on believers, the law regarding the composition of the coffin is not currently applicable to believers in the West. Bahá'í law does not address the use of a grave liner; its use is left to the discretion of the family of the deceased, whose decision may be affected by civil law or the requirements of certain

14

cemeteries. Even if a grave liner is used, the law of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* mandating that the dead be buried in a coffin must still be observed.

(From a letter dated 12 June 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[46]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... seeking guidance with regard to having a “green burial”, which you describe involves shrouding the body of the deceased and placing it directly into the ground without a casket. We have been asked to convey the following.

Your desire to observe the laws of Bahá'u'lláh is warmly acknowledged. As believers strive to understand the wisdom of His laws, it is important for them to bear in mind Bahá'u'lláh's counsel in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

“Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures.”

Also in the Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh declared: “Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained that “the Manifestation of God acts with consummate wisdom, and human minds may be incapable of grasping the hidden wisdom of certain matters” as revealed by the Manifestation. Nevertheless, some insight into the wisdom of burying the dead in coffins is gained by reflecting on the Báb’s words in the Persian Bayán concerning an injunction to bury a body in a marble coffin:

Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced ...

Therefore, it hath been ordained that the dead body should be treated with the utmost honor and respect.

In a similar vein, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 13 November 1944 written on his behalf to an individual believer, stated: “The Báb has told us to bury the dead in silk (if possible) in coffins of crystal. Why? Because the body, though now dust, was once exalted by the immortal soul of man!”

As you are aware, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* provides that “the dead should be interred in coffins made of crystal, of hard, resistant stone, or of wood that is both fine and durable”. Note 149 of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* states, “the spirit of the law is that coffins should be of as durable a material as possible.” Although the law regarding the material of the coffin is not currently applicable to Bahá'ís in the West, burial in a coffin is among the laws universally binding on believers. Given the practice of “green burial” does not involve interring the dead in a coffin, it would be inconsistent with Bahá'í law and impermissible for believers

(From a letter dated 7 April 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[47]

5. *Prayer for the dead and funeral service*

The Prayer for the Dead should be read in its entirety by one person, while all others

stand in silence. It is not the practice for those present to repeat any part of the prayer in unison.

To overcome the problem of illiteracy, the believers should be taught to memorize the passages of the Prayer for the Dead designated for those “unable to read”, in the same way that they are taught to memorize other prayers and passages from the Writings; and they should know that each verse is to be repeated 19 times in accordance with the requirements of the prayer.

(From a letter dated 16 June 1987 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[48]

There is considerable flexibility in the Bahá'í burial service, and there is no reason why non-Bahá'ís should not be invited to participate in some element of its program; however, their involvement would be governed by the need to not introduce into a Bahá'í event such as a funeral service practices from other religions. Apart from the Bahá'í service, there would be nothing to prevent your Jewish relatives and friends, in the situation you describe, from performing whatever rituals they desire.

(From a letter dated 2 September 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[49]

Bahá'í family members and friends will surely wish to offer Bahá'í prayers for the progress of the soul, of which the Prayer for the Dead is the essential element of a Bahá'í funeral. There is no stipulation, however, that it must be recited at the graveside or at the funeral service; only that it be recited before the interment of the body takes place. It may even be recited in a private setting prior to any graveside prayers and the interment of the body.

(From a message dated 4 May 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[50]

... it is not permissible for a Covenant-breaker to receive a Bahá'í burial. In the case of Mr ..., you acted wisely by informing his relatives that, while he could not receive a Bahá'í burial, as he had requested, they themselves were of course free to recite Bahá'í prayers at his funeral.

(From a letter dated 21 July 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[51]

... in the Prayer for the Dead when the Most Great Name is repeated six times, the words to be used are “Alláh-u-Abhá” and not their translation in the language or languages of our choice.

(From a letter dated 21 February 2000 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [52]

16

The Research Department advised the House of Justice that it has not found any guidance in the Bahá'í Writings to suggest that it is inappropriate to hold a Bahá'í funeral service in a Bahá'í Centre. The House of Justice recognizes that there may well be cultural, social or civil factors to be considered in some parts of the world when deciding whether or not a Bahá'í funeral service should be conducted in a Bahá'í Centre. Therefore, it should be left to the Local Spiritual Assembly involved, in consultation with the family of the deceased, to decide whether to use the Bahá'í Centre for this purpose.

(From a letter dated 5 July 2005 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [53]

Your thoughtfulness in raising questions concerning the use of recordings of the Prayer for the Dead at a funeral service and the Tablets of Visitation at commemorations of Holy Days associated with the Central Figures of the Faith is appreciated. Because of the special nature of these prayers, the House of Justice feels that it would not be appropriate for a recording of any of them to be used in place of live recitation or chanting.

(From a letter dated 14 May 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [54]

... a person who is deprived of his Bahá'í administrative rights may have a Bahá'í burial service if he or his family requests it.

(From a letter dated 9 November 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [55]

Your email letter ... with a query regarding the number of times to recite the Prayer for the Dead when a Bahá'í couple is buried at the same time, has been received at the Bahá'í World Centre and forwarded to the Research Department for study.

The Research Department has indicated that no statement has yet been found in the authoritative writings of the Faith which specifically addresses this question. The beloved Guardian has categorized the manner of the performance of this prayer as among the miscellaneous matters not explicitly revealed in the Text for which decisions are to be made at a future time by the Universal House of Justice. Until this matter is addressed, the decision can be made based on the specific circumstances.

(From a letter dated 5 July 2010 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [56]

The Bahá'í funeral service is marked by its dignity, simplicity and flexibility. The only requirement is that the Prayer for the Dead be read before burial. Other prayers and passages from the Writings may, of course, be included. The friends are encouraged to avoid adopting a uniform procedure lest it become a ritual.

The Prayer for the Dead is to be said when the deceased is 15 years of age or older. Bahá'u'lláh has clarified its recital should precede interment. Facing the Qiblah is not required, but the friends may choose to do so.

With respect to how the Prayer for the Dead is to be said, it is to be recited by one believer while all present stand and listen in silence. As indicated in note 11 in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* and in recently published editions of Bahá'í prayer books, such as *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdul-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002, 2011), the correct way of reciting the Prayer for the Dead is as follows: "Alláh-u-Abhá" is said once, then the first of the six verses, "We all, verily, worship God," is recited nineteen times. Then "Alláh-u-Abhá" is said again, followed by the second verse, which is recited nineteen times, and so on.

The Prayer for the Dead should be offered even if a believer has lost his or her administrative rights. Normally it would not be appropriate for a believer whose administrative rights have been suspended to be asked to read the Prayer for the Dead at a Bahá'í funeral service unless there are special reasons to do so, for example, if such a believer is a close relative of the deceased.

(From a response dated 3 March 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice) [57]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... seeking guidance on whether a Bahá'í may plan for her funeral service to be held in a church, which would function just as a venue for the occasion. The House of Justice has directed us to reply as follows.

Generally there is no objection to holding functions, other than marriages, in places owned or operated by non-Bahá'í religious bodies, provided such use does not tend to identify the Faith, in the eyes of the public, with the other religions.

(From a letter dated 19 May 2015 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[58]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... enquiring about the features of a Bahá'í funeral service and whether those who are not registered Bahá'ís may have such a service.

In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh set forth several laws related to the burial of the dead, such as the prohibition on carrying the body of the deceased for more than one hour's journey from the place of death. Moreover, He ordained a specific Prayer for the Dead, to be said before interment, and clarified that this prayer is for adults only. Thus, for adult believers, a Bahá'í funeral consists of the recital of the Prayer for the Dead and may well include the offering of other prayers and Bahá'í Writings.

The conduct of the funeral service and the arrangements for the interment are usually handled by the relatives of the deceased, though the Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Bahá'í law of burial as presently 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. While the Assembly plays a role in upholding Bahá'í burial laws, it does not necessarily have an extensive role in carrying out the funeral itself. Other than ensuring that the Prayer for the Dead is recited at the funeral, the Assembly offers support to the extent that the relatives of the deceased may require it. Unlike a Bahá'í marriage ceremony, a Bahá'í funeral is not a legal ceremony, so there is more flexibility in how it may be carried out and what part the Assembly may play in it.

The laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are obviously binding only on Bahá'ís. Nevertheless, if there is a request for a Bahá'í funeral for an individual who was not

a Bahá'í, the Bahá'í community should generally respond positively in honouring the deceased and serving his or her relatives. Through consultation, it can be ascertained to what degree the relatives of the non-Bahá'í desire to have Bahá'í law carried out. Some may wish only to have Bahá'í prayers and Writings recited as part of the funeral; others may also want the Prayer for the Dead to be read; and still others may ask that Bahá'í burial laws related to the preparation of the body of the deceased also be observed. Normally, it would be sufficient for one or a few believers known to the deceased's relatives to assist with the necessary arrangements, and the Assembly would not need to become involved, unless it were directly approached by the relatives.

(From a letter dated 22 April 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of a National Spiritual Assembly)

[59]

Concerning the question of burial according to Bahá'í law in the case of a believer having committed suicide, the Research Department has reported that to date nothing has been found in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá or in letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi that addresses this question. Although suicide has been strongly condemned in the teachings, this does not mean that a person has ceased to be a Bahá'í because he committed suicide, and the House of Justice has determined that he may certainly be given a Bahá'í funeral.

(From a letter dated 29 November 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[60]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... forwarding an inquiry from a believer who is assisting in the preparations of a funeral programme for another believer in your community and requests to know if she can change the gender pronouns from male to female in two prayers for the departed. This believer is concerned that, given the unique sensitivities in ... regarding gender equality, as expressed in language, and that several distinguished and well-known members of the believer's non-Bahá'í family will be present at the programme—including members of the local public—they may misunderstand the Faith's views on gender equality. We have been asked to convey the following.

As you are aware, the Guardian did not wish Bahá'ís to change the gender of pronouns and nouns in the revealed prayers. The following excerpt from a letter dated 14 January 1947 written on his behalf makes this clear:

In regard to the question you asked him: As Bahá'u'lláh Himself specified,

in the long prayer for the dead, that the gender could be changed and “his” said for “her”, etc., it is permissible to do it—nay obligatory—but in all other prayers, including those for the dead, we must adhere to the exact text and not change the gender.

You should inform the friends of this principle so that they can make any necessary changes to the plan for the funeral programme.

(From a letter dated 30 July 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [61]

7

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letters ... enquiring, on behalf of a believer in your community, whether the Prayer for the Dead may be put to music. It is understood the question has arisen in the context of whether the prayer may be chanted in its ... translation. We have been instructed to convey the following.

It would not be appropriate to set the Prayer for the Dead to music for such purposes as a recording or performance. However, there would be no objection to a believer chanting it during a Bahá'í funeral service if you are satisfied the style is appropriate and dignified.

(From a letter dated 25 April 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [62]

6. Graves, tombstones, and related issues

The dead should be buried with their faces turned towards the Qiblih.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [63]

In regard to your question regarding the use of the Greatest Name on tombstones of Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, the Guardian considers this too sacred to be placed in such a position in general use, and the friends should not use it on their tombstones. They can use quotations from the Teachings, if they wish to, but not the Greatest Name. Naturally, if anyone has already used it, it does not matter.

(From a letter dated 20 June 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly) [64]

As regards your question: there is no reason why the word “Bahá'í” should not appear in the centre of a nine-pointed star on the tombstone of dear ..., but the ringstone emblem should not be used, nor the Greatest Name.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1955 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [65]

The position of the body in the grave should be with the feet towards the Qiblih, which is Bahjí in ‘Akká.

(From a letter dated 17 September 1971 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [66]

Neither the symbol “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá” nor the emblem used on Bahá'í ringstones should be used on tombstones.

(From a letter dated 15 October 1972 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [67]

The House of Justice sees no objection to the believers' following the custom which is normal in ..., namely that of placing the coffin directly in a grave dug in the earth and covering

20

it with loose earth, rather than lining the grave with concrete or cement blocks. This is a matter that should be left entirely to the discretion of the family.

(From a letter dated 29 July 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [68]

The Universal House of Justice has requested us to send the following reply to your letter ... concerning the permissibility of Bahá'ís being buried at sea.

Bahá'í laws of burial do not refer to burial at sea and the House of Justice has not yet legislated on the matter. However, it is preferable that Bahá'í burial should take place on land whenever this is possible.

(From a letter dated 23 December 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [69]

... there is no prohibition in Bahá'í law to burial in several levels of graves, nor against the use of vaults above the level of the ground, as is the practice in some countries where, for example, the land is solid rock.

(From a letter dated 29 July 1986 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [70]

While it is not a binding requirement at present, eventually Bahá'ís in all countries will be buried facing the Qiblih (i.e., so that the feet of the body will point towards Bahjí), as is now done in the East. If you consider the direction that the face of such a body would assume if it were in an upright position, it should become clear that the two passages you refer to ... do not present a contradiction.¹

(From a letter dated 13 September 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [71]

¹ See extracts 63 and 66 for the two referenced passages

In response to your request for guidance about using an underground chamber or vault for the burial of members of the community, it [the Universal House of Justice] advises that, providing all the requirements for Bahá'í burial are observed, you have permission to follow this course of action because of the difficulties you are currently facing in acquiring a suitable property for a cemetery.

(From a letter dated 11 March 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [72]

You state that in local government cemeteries there are legal restrictions on the size of tombstones, but that these restrictions do not apply in the Bahá'í cemetery which is private property, and you ask if there are any specifications Bahá'ís should follow in such a case. Normally, matters related to headstones on graves are for consideration by the Bahá'í institution which has jurisdiction over that cemetery. Generally, the decision as to the nature of the headstones, their size and design is left to the family of the deceased, but it will, of course,

need to take into account any requirements or considerations that the Local or National Spiritual Assembly concerned may determine.

With regard to your query concerning guidance from the Writings, no texts have been found specifying requirements for the headstone or the type of superstructure on

a grave. Regarding the inscription on a headstone, the beloved Guardian asked the believers not to use any form of the Greatest Name, but a nine-pointed star may be used. If desired, an appropriate text from the Sacred Writings may be inscribed on the headstone.

(From a letter dated 3 March 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[73]

Your email letter ... regarding the application of Bahá'í burial laws in areas subject to flooding has been received by the Universal House of Justice, and we have been asked to reply as follows.

As a first step, your Assembly will wish to determine whether any means exist for the burial of the bodies of the deceased in the affected locality, or nearby place, in a manner permissible by civil law, which could include burial above ground. For example, in response to one National Spiritual Assembly in whose country the land available for cemeteries was very scarce, the House of Justice suggested that the Assembly might be able to acquire a small piece of land in each location where a cemetery is needed, on which a mausoleum consisting of many single burial vaults could be built. It was pointed out that there would be no objection to the vaults' being on top of one another and that a small but attractive garden could be made around the building, in front of it, or even inside it. It may be helpful, moreover, to bear in mind that the one-hour limit for travel may be calculated from the city limits to the place of burial and that there is no restriction on the type of transport that can be used.

(From a letter dated 15 June 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[74]

As you are no doubt aware, a provision of the burial law is that the body is to be laid on its back in the grave oriented so that the feet point toward the Qiblih, and not on its right side with the face toward the Qiblih, as is the custom in Islám.

(From a letter dated 15 July 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[75]

... if it is optional, it would be more appropriate for the remains to be reburied in a separate grave and not in a common grave. There is no prohibition in Bahá'í law to burial in several levels of graves nor against the use of vaults above the level of the

ground.

(From a letter dated 19 April 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [76]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... enquiring whether it is permissible under Bahá'í law for two bodies to be buried in the same grave.

22

The beloved Guardian has stated: "It is better and more appropriate to assign a grave for every dead person." However, the House of Justice advises that this expresses a preference and is not given as a binding ruling. The House of Justice has not legislated upon the question of what exactly constitutes a "grave", nor does it wish to legislate on such details of burial laws at this time. Individual friends are, therefore, free to use their own discretion in this matter at this time. Of course, when a Spiritual Assembly is faced with the question of whether more than one body should be buried in a grave, for example when the Assembly is establishing a cemetery, the decision would be left to the Assembly.

(From a letter dated 20 September 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [77]

Regarding your further concern about the use of a burial vault, Bahá'í law does not address the use of a burial vault or grave liner.

(From a letter dated 7 April 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [78]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... in which you seek clarification as to whether it is permissible to use on a headstone the name of Bahá'u'lláh. We have been asked to convey the following.

... it is permissible to use on headstones quotations from the Bahá'í Writings as well as the name of the Author of the quotation. That would include the name of Bahá'u'lláh at the end of quotations from His Writings.

(From a letter dated 3 July 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [79]

7. Stillborn infants and deceased children

As to your question about Bahá'í burials for stillborn infants and miscarriages, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh the formal prayer for the dead has been revealed only for adults. The friends are, of course, free to recite other prayers at funerals for children, whether they died before or after birth.

(From a letter dated 30 July 1971 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[80]

... the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey the following explanation concerning your question regarding the use of the Prayer for the Dead for children.

The statement in the American Prayer Book is correct and is based on the section of “Questions and Answers”, which is an annexe to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, quoted below:

“*Question:* Is the burial ring decreed in the *Aqdas* only for adults or is it for minors as well?”

“*Answer:* It is only for adults and the Prayer for the Dead is likewise only for adults.”

As stated in *A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Prayer for the Dead is an obligatory one, and in it the following supplication is made:

“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.”

However, regarding children, as you know, in *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained that children “are under the shadow of the favor of God; and as they have not committed any sin and are not soiled with the impurities of the world of nature, they are the centers of the manifestation of bounty, and the Eye of Compassion will be turned upon them.”

(From a letter dated 24 May 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[81]

In response to your letter ... seeking confirmation of your understanding that the Prayer for the Dead is recited only for believers over the age of 15, the Universal House of Justice directs us to advise that this is correct.

(From a letter dated 9 February 1986 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [82]

Your email letter ... concerning various aspects related to the burial and graves of the foetus from a miscarriage or a stillbirth, has been received by the Universal House of Justice, and we have been asked to convey to you the following.

As you are aware, from a Bahá'í point of view, the soul is present from conception and therefore the foetus, no matter how young, should be treated with respect. However, as there is no specific guidance in the Writings concerning the disposition of the foetus, no hard and fast rules need be followed, and details referring to its burial are left to the discretion of the parents.

(From a letter dated 22 October 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly) [83]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... requesting guidance on behalf of ... whose unborn baby, you state, has serious health problems that are likely to cause him to be stillborn.

The House of Justice regretted to learn of the circumstances giving rise to this question. While the feelings that prompted this question are understood, Bahá'í law requires that burial occur within an hour's distance from the place of death. Should your cousin's baby pass away after birth, his body should not be transported for burial to a place which is more than one hour's journey from the place of his passing. However, if he is stillborn, as nothing has been found in the Writings that addresses this matter, all the details of the burial are left to the discretion of his parents.

(From a letter dated 9 September 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [84]

8. Cemeteries

At the present time there are no definite regulations for preparing Bahá'í cemeteries. However, in a Tablet of the Master's, He emphasizes the need for the cemetery to have a beautiful outward appearance and states that the graves should not be joined

together but that each one should have a flower bed around its four sides. He also indicates that it would be pleasing if a pool were located in the center of the cemetery and beautiful trees were planted around it as well as around the cemetery itself.

(From a letter dated 20 February 1978 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [85]

... in countries ... where there are large numbers of believers scattered in small communities, the House of Justice appreciates that the friends undoubtedly feel the need to have a Bahá'í cemetery. It understands that many governments are willing to provide land for cemeteries, and there is no objection to Bahá'í institutions accepting grants of land for this purpose. It is suggested that as a first step you should approach government authorities about your needs. If the government is unable to assist you in setting aside such lands, you should investigate whether it is permissible to bury on private property and whether privately-owned property of Bahá'ís might be available for this purpose. Should this be so, you could then endeavour to find out what can be done locally; that is, whether any of the friends are willing to donate a piece of land or, in the alternative, how much the friends are able to contribute toward the purchase of a suitable piece of land.

(From a letter dated 24 November 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [86]

It would not be right to refuse to bury in a Bahá'í cemetery one who has lost his voting rights. Furthermore, it is quite possible that non-Bahá'í relatives of believers or others may be permitted to be buried in a Bahá'í cemetery. However, a deciding factor could be whether the area of land chosen for use as a Bahá'í cemetery would be large enough to permit burial of non-Bahá'ís. It is suggested that no hard and fast rules be adopted, but that each case be considered on its own merits.

(From a letter dated 12 July 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [87]

The Universal House of Justice was most interested to learn from your email ... that there is a possibility of the allocation of a portion of the ... cemetery to the Local Spiritual Assembly of ... to serve as a Bahá'í cemetery.

... Naturally, the Bahá'í cemetery should be maintained in a neat and beautiful condition. Since a Bahá'í cemetery is the property of the Bahá'í community, funds for

the purchase of the land should be the responsibility of the institutions of the Faith. Some of the believers may wish to purchase a plot or plots. Others may wish to make earmarked contributions for the project. However, the House of Justice feels that no Bahá'í should be denied the use of such a facility because he cannot afford to pay the full cost of a plot and its maintenance. General appeals may be made to the friends for contributions to a fund for the upkeep of the cemetery,

25

but it would not be proper to solicit funds for this purpose from the families of those buried in the cemetery, whether Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís.

(From a letter dated 24 November 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [88]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email ... seeking guidance regarding the advisability of reserving family vaults in the Bahá'í cemetery.

The House of Justice has not legislated upon this question, nor does it wish to legislate upon such details of burial at this time. However, Spiritual Assemblies may wish to formulate specific guidelines for Bahá'í cemeteries, and owing to the potentially far-reaching effect any decision on this matter might have, you may wish to request the advice of your National Spiritual Assembly.

(From a letter dated 14 January 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly) [89]

Your email letter ... asking how to determine the direction of the Qiblih in relation to both obligatory prayer and the orientation of graves in a Bahá'í cemetery has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has instructed us to reply as follows.

The following notes prepared for the House of Justice by an ad hoc committee describe how to ascertain the direction of the Qiblih from various points on the earth for the purpose of prayer. Although the requirement for graves to be oriented towards the Qiblih is not binding in the West at this time, if feasible, these same notes may be used for this purpose as well. It may be of additional interest for you to know that the orientation of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* follows the same principle.

The direction of the Qiblih from a given location on earth may be set along the shorter arc of a great circle that passes through Bahjí and the point concerned. A

great circle in this context is one whose plane bisects the earth (e.g., the equator and longitudinal meridians). Bahjí is located at approximately 35 degrees east longitude and 33 degrees north latitude.²

(From a letter dated 27 June 2011 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [90]

² 32.943442, 35.092387

... in considering the layout of the new cemetery, you should bear in mind that, eventually, Bahá'ís will be buried facing the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world. Therefore, it would be desirable to align any future graves in such a way that the feet of the bodies will point towards Bahjí.

(From a letter dated 10 June 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [91]

9. Honoring the dead

Your letter ... was received, asking about the holding of memorial services at regular intervals for as long as two to three years.

As you know, the offering of prayers on behalf of the departed, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, is encouraged in our teachings, as such prayers are conducive to the progress of their souls in the world beyond. As to the holding of memorial gatherings at regular intervals, there is nothing in the teachings specifically prohibiting such gatherings, but we find general guidelines in the letters of the beloved Guardian, in which he warns the believers against adhering to the rites and customs of past systems and of former religions, and instead urges them to show forth the Bahá'í way of life and demonstrate the independent character of the teachings of the Faith.

Advertising memorial gatherings by the family is entirely a personal matter for the family to decide. It is left to the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly whether Local Spiritual Assemblies may permit the use of their Bahá'í Centres for such gatherings.

(From a letter dated 24 May 1974 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [92]

In deciding whether or not to hold a memorial service for a prominent believer, the

National Spiritual Assembly will have to use the utmost wisdom and discretion. Such actions can establish precedents and you will necessarily have to be selective.

Beyond this, provided the general rules governing the nature of services in the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* are observed, there is no objection to your Assembly's permitting the use of the auditorium for special prayer meetings by visiting groups at times when no general service is scheduled, and such meetings could include memorial services for departed souls, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í. However, in some religions it is customary to hold memorial services for the departed at a specific time after the death—for example, in Islám it is forty days after the passing. The Guardian has stated that such practices have nothing to do with the Faith, the friends should be quite clear on this matter, and should preferably discontinue the practice. Therefore, in all such things the National Spiritual Assembly should be careful to ensure that no set practices or forms arise.

(From a letter dated 24 November 1976 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[93]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... requesting guidance as to the appropriateness of naming a building or hall in memory of a deceased believer.

In keeping with a principle established by the beloved Guardian, the House of Justice ordinarily advises against naming a building such as a *Hazíratu'l-Quds*, which is an institution of the Faith, after a person, even if that person is or was a distinguished Bahá'í who has nobly served the Cause. However, there is no objection in some cases to naming a particular room such as a meeting hall, library or other designated area in the name of such a believer as an alternative way of honouring his or her memory. Also, it is quite acceptable and is a common practice throughout the world to name a Bahá'í educational facility or training institute after a much-loved and highly regarded believer who has passed away.

In such matters a National Assembly has to exercise wise discretion. The House of Justice wants to avoid the emergence within the Bahá'í community of the practice that has been common in other religions whereby people of financial means contribute substantial sums of money for the erection of buildings with the understanding or on condition that the building would be named after a departed loved one. The friends should give freely in support of projects for the construction of

facilities to be used for the good of the community without personal interests being attached to their donations and the institutions of the Faith should be left free, in certain circumstances, to name such facilities after souls who are deserving of the honour independent of financial considerations.

(From a letter dated 11 March 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [94]

With regard to Bahá'ís attending a gathering for the purpose of what you refer to as celebrating a person's life, in principle, there would of course be nothing to prevent the friends from taking part in meetings held to say prayers for the progress of the soul of a deceased person and to share accounts of his or her life and services.

(From a letter dated 7 June 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [95]

10. Exhumation and reburial

As the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf, "The spirit has no more connection with the body after it departs, but, as the body was once the temple of the spirit, we Bahá'ís are taught that it must be treated with respect." These words show why, in principle, it is preferable not to disturb the remains of the deceased once they have been interred.

(From a letter dated 5 February 2014 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [96]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... regarding a situation in which the lease of a deceased believer's burial plot will soon expire and the family cannot afford to transfer her remains to another site. We have been asked to convey the following.

Regarding exhumation and reburial, generally speaking, it is preferable not to disturb the remains of the deceased once they have been interred. However, when circumstances demand or if it is required by civil law, it is permitted in Bahá'í law to exhume and reinter mortal remains, keeping in mind that the friends should do everything possible to ensure that the remains are not removed more than one hour's journey from the place of death and that the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's law for burial to take place near the place of death is observed.

Whenever the problem of the obliteration of a grave or the incineration of

remains arises, it is left to individual families to take whatever action they feel is within their means. In cases where there are no family members or the family cannot afford to cover the expenses associated with extending the lease of a burial plot or transferring the remains, it would not be feasible for the Bahá'í community to incur such costs, although there may be special circumstances that would require it to do so.

In places where land is scarce and it is the common practice to lease burial plots for limited periods of time, the only solution may be to acquire land for a Bahá'í cemetery Even if making provision for such cemeteries may not currently be financially feasible, it is a course of action that many Local and National Spiritual Assemblies will have to take in the future and that will then make it possible to exhume and reinter the remains of the believers as the need arises. For now, it is left to the friends and their families to do the best they can with the resources available to them and within the circumstances presented by their society.

(From a letter dated 10 March 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[97]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... forwarding a number of questions from your property committee pertaining to the exhumation and reburial of the dead. We have been asked to convey the following.

It is understood that you are considering the possibility of transferring the remains of some believers to a new site as there is concern that the current burial area is becoming polluted. Generally speaking, it is preferable not to disturb the remains of the deceased once they have been interred. However, when circumstances demand, such as when required by civil law, it is permitted in Bahá'í law to exhume and reinter mortal remains. Whether the present situation necessitates that the remains be transferred to a new cemetery site is left to your judgement, considering the circumstances in light of the principles outlined above and taking into account the views of the family members of the deceased as to the exhumation and reburial.

Exhumation and reburial, when necessary, should be undertaken with minimal disturbance to the body and in a manner which shows respect. Bahá'í law does not rule out transferring the mortal remains into a new or smaller casket. However, the remains should not be reshrouded nor should the Prayer for the Dead be recited again, though, of course, there would be no objection to other prayers being offered

on the occasion.

(From a letter dated 14 November 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[98]

11. *Cremation and related issues*

He feels that, in view of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said against cremation, the believers should be strongly urged, as an act of faith, to make provisions against their remains being cremated. Bahá’u’lláh has laid down as a law, in the *Aqdas*, the manner of Bahá’í burial, and it is so beautiful, befitting and dignified, that no believer should deprive himself of it.

(From a letter dated 7 July 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[99]

Concerning your question about cremation, the Bahá’í law stipulates burial. The instructions of Bahá’u’lláh contained in His *Most Holy Book* make this law clear. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer in 1955, comments that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “... also explained that burial is natural and should be followed.” The explanation of the Master referred to by Shoghi Effendi is found in Tablets revealed by Him.

One of those was published in *Star of the West*, Volume XI, No. 19, page 317, from which we quote:

Thy letter has been received. Due to scarcity of time, I write the answer briefly: 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. But the divine order formulated by the heavenly ordinance is that after death this body shall be transferred from one stage to another different from the preceding one, so that according to the relations which exist in the world, it may gradually combine and mix with other elements, thus going through stages until it arrives in the

vegetable kingdom, there turning into plants and flowers, developing into trees of the highest paradise, becoming perfumed and attaining the beauty of color.

Cremation suppresses it speedily from attainment to these transformations, the elements becoming so quickly decomposed that transformation to these various stages is checked.

When we realize that our physical bodies actually are composed of elements placed in the earth by their Creator, and which through the orderly processes of His Law are continually being used in the formation of beings, we can better understand the necessity for our physical bodies to be subjected to the gradual process of decomposition. As at the time of death, the real and eternal self of man, his soul, abandons its physical garment to soar in the realms of God, we may compare the body to a vehicle which has been used for the journey through earthly life and is no longer needed once the destination has been reached.

(From a letter dated 6 June 1971 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[100]

Obviously a Spiritual Assembly cannot itself arrange for the cremation of the remains of a Bahá'í even if it was that person's wish that his body be disposed of in this way. Bahá'í relatives, likewise, are under the obligation of obeying the Bahá'í law and must not agree to the cremation of a Bahá'í. Where non-Bahá'í relatives of the deceased Bahá'í have charge of the body and are proposing to cremate the remains, the responsible Spiritual Assembly should do all it can to explain the Bahá'í attitude to the relatives in an effort to prevent the cremation. If these efforts fail, the Assembly can have nothing officially to do with the cremation of the body; the believers, however, are free to do as they wish about attending the funeral and the cremation and they may certainly offer a prayer for the progress of the soul of the deceased. The Assembly could, if it seemed appropriate, arrange a meeting at a time other than the funeral, at which the Prayer for the Dead could be said on behalf of the deceased.

... if a Bahá'í makes a provision in his will that is contrary to Bahá'í law, that provision is null and void in Bahá'í law, and neither the Bahá'í relatives nor the Spiritual Assembly are permitted to fulfil it. Thus, if a Bahá'í states in his will that his remains are to be cremated he should, nevertheless, be buried in accordance with Bahá'í law unless there is some element of the civil law that would prevent such an occurrence—in which case the civil law would have to

be followed, but the Assembly, as indicated above, could take no part in it. If the remains are under the control of non-Bahá'í relatives, the principles explained in [the] paragraph ... above apply.

(From a letter dated 9 December 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [101]

The House of Justice sympathizes with you in the difficulty you are experiencing in modifying your views about cremation to conform to the Bahá'í teachings. It is a clearly stated principle of the Bahá'í Faith that the laws and teachings revealed by the Manifestation of God must not be weighed according to the standards and sciences current amongst men. Once the investigation of truth has led to the recognition of the Manifestation of God, a believer is expected to accept the statements of the Manifestation as being divine truth, even if the reason for these statements is not entirely clear. Through prayer, meditation and diligent study of the Bahá'í writings, together with the passage of time, one gradually comes to understand more deeply the truths brought by Bahá'u'lláh in His Revelation.

... it is evident that Bahá'í law calls for burial, rather than cremation. Although this law differs markedly from the aspects of Hindu philosophy referred to in your letter, it should be remembered that one of the purposes of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh is to clarify misconceptions about religious and philosophic issues, and provide authoritative guidance on matters which were hitherto the subject of speculation and conjecture.

(From a letter dated 25 November 1987 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [102]

... burial is natural, inasmuch as the human body was formed gradually. However, in emergencies, such as the spread of plague and cholera, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has advised that cremation is permissible.

(From a message dated 29 January 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [103]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... in which you describe a new method being used ... for disposing of the body of the deceased, and it has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice agrees with your assessment that this process of freezing the body and subsequently shattering the remains into powder form is not in conformity with Bahá'í law.

(From a letter dated 10 October 2006 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [104]

Individuals are free to donate their bodies to medical science. They should request that when the use of the body for this purpose concludes the remains not be cremated but, if feasible, interred within an hour's journey of the place of death or from the location where they are at the end of the medical process. It will be up to the prospective recipient medical institution to decide whether or not to accept such conditions, but if the institution is unable to honor the above conditions, it would still be permissible to donate one's body if a believer chooses to do so.

31

The friends are encouraged to discuss these matters with their families in order to ensure that their wishes regarding the disposition of their remains are carried out.

(From a letter dated 21 December 2014 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [105]

The prohibition against cremation is not an arbitrary law pertaining to burial, but rather an aspect of Bahá'u'lláh's guidance to His followers about how to respectfully inter the deceased. By choosing cremation, one deprives oneself of the blessings of obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's laws.

(From a letter dated 2 December 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [106]

12. Miscellaneous issues

When a Bahá'í in a community has passed away, for whatever cause, the Local Spiritual Assembly, or the National Spiritual Assembly, as the case may be, does have a responsibility to provide for a proper burial which cannot otherwise be provided for either by the family or by insurance.

(From a letter dated 17 August 1969 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [107]

As to wearing black clothes for mourning, that is answered in passages from two hitherto untranslated letters written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believers in the East regarding this question:

“It is not permissible to imitate others, but it is permitted to wear black clothes, and the friends should be left free in such matters.” (This was written in reply to the question whether on the day of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb's martyrdom the friends should wear black clothes.)

“All the friends should follow what is explicitly recorded in the texts. Whatever is not recorded should be referred in these days to the National Spiritual Assemblies. In these days the friends should, as much as possible, demonstrate through their deeds the independence of the Holy Faith of God, and its freedom from the customs, rituals and practices of a discredited and abrogated past.” (This was written in reply to a question regarding wearing black clothes for mourning, and visiting graves on the ninth day, and delaying the burial of the dead.)

(From a letter dated 7 May 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Bahá'í family) [108]

Mr ...'s second question asks whether an individual in a state of coma, whose brain is dead, but whose respiratory and circulatory functions are still artificially and temporarily maintained, is considered dead. The Universal House of Justice has made no rulings on the criteria which are to be followed in deciding when a person is to be considered dead, and

32

therefore, at present time, as far as the Bahá'ís are concerned, this is a question that is left to the judgement of the appropriate medical and legal authorities.

(From a letter dated 19 June 1986 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [109]

... a person is permitted to leave his body for scientific research, which would

inevitably result in a longer period between death and ultimate burial.

(From a letter dated 4 January 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[110]

In instances where non-Bahá'í relatives are arranging funeral services, there may be interference in carrying out the written will of the deceased which clearly stipulates that Bahá'í burial laws are to be followed. If this should occur, no legal action should be taken. However, the importance of adhering to the last wishes of the deceased should be brought to the attention of the non-Bahá'í relatives, and the Assembly should endeavour to convey to them the moral obligation which this entails, but should not insist if the family refuses to comply.

(From a message dated 4 May 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[111]

The Universal House of Justice has decided that at this time disregard of the law on burial does not call for deprivation of administrative rights.

(From a letter dated 29 October 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[112]

The Universal House of Justice has considered your request for guidance in your email ... concerning the suitability of a Bahá'í becoming a director of a funeral home which renders services such as cremation and extensive embalming which are contrary to Bahá'í law.

We have been asked to convey that there is no prohibition, as you are well aware, in the Writings against a believer becoming a funeral director, and at this time the House of Justice does not wish to legislate on this matter. There may be circumstances in a believer's life which may have to be considered by him or her in arriving at a decision, and in the last analysis the matter should be left to the believer's discretion.

(From a letter dated 10 June 2001 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

[113]

The House of Justice sympathizes with your concern over the situation in which some local believers, holding important positions in the Faith and familiar with the requirements of the law regarding Bahá'í burial, follow traditional practices which require burial in specific locations that are often at a distance greater than one hour's

journey from the place of death. It may be helpful to bear in mind that weaning indigenous believers away from prevailing tribal customs is a gradual process, which requires the greatest patience and understanding in the education of believers and also perseverance on the part of the affected friends as they resolutely strive to conform to Bahá'í standards. Similarly, great forbearance must be exercised by international pioneers, who should not pretend that any group of believers is perfect. As

indicated in a letter dated 27 February 1943 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, "The greater the patience, the loving understanding and the forbearance the believers show towards each other and their shortcomings, the greater will be the progress of the whole Bahá'í Community at large".

As you may know, the Bahá'í institutions have the responsibility to uphold the authority of Bahá'í law and to educate the believers in the laws and principles of the Faith. In this connection, you might consider consulting with an Auxiliary Board member or your Local Spiritual Assembly as to how to wisely foster increased adherence to the laws you have mentioned.

(From a letter dated 22 February 2005 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [114]

The House of Justice appreciates the desire of ... to be of service to the friends.

However, a crucial consideration is to protect the Bahá'í community from succumbing to forms of commercialism that are commonplace and which have left their mark on religious practice in the wider society. The House of Justice finds no justification for marketing a Bahá'í burial kit. Rather, Local Assemblies should be encouraged to take the necessary steps in order to be fully prepared to assist believers with funeral arrangements, especially in tragic circumstances that arise unexpectedly.

(From a letter dated 12 April 2010 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [115]

The House of Justice has indicated that the Bahá'í community should not succumb to forms of commercialism that are commonplace and which have left their mark on religious practice in the wider society. At the same time, Bahá'í institutions and

individual Bahá'ís should not attempt to impose unwarranted uniformity on burial and funeral practices.

(From a letter dated 5 September 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[116]

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... in which you ask several questions pertaining to Bahá'í burial law. It is understood that these queries have arisen in connection with your not currently having the means to pay for the expenses of burial. We have been asked to convey the following.

The House of Justice warmly acknowledges your concern. It encourages you to consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly to explore how financial arrangements can be made so that following your passing your remains can be buried according to Bahá'í law. If a Bahá'í is unable to provide for his or her own burial, it is the duty of the institutions of the Cause to offer financial help to provide burial according to Bahá'í law.

You also ask whether Bahá'í law requires “an eternal burial plot”. Although, in principle, it is preferable not to disturb the remains of the deceased once they have been interred, there is

34

nothing in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* about a burial plot being maintained eternally. Indeed, 'Abdul-Bahá has stated that as the human body has been formed gradually, it must similarly be decomposed gradually.

(From a letter dated 31 December 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[117]

Your email letter ..., seeking guidance concerning the application of Bahá'í law in places where wintertime burials may not be available, has been received by the Universal House of Justice. Specifically, you describe how in northern climes where the ground is frozen in the winter, burial of the deceased may be delayed for an extensive period of time until the ground thaws. You ask what permissible options there may be for Bahá'ís who are faced with this situation.

Your care in seeking clarification on this subject is acknowledged. As you are aware, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* provides that it is forbidden to transport the body of the deceased “a greater distance than one hour’s journey” from the place of death.

Moreover, in “Questions and Answers” of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh stated: “The sooner the burial taketh place ..., the more fitting and acceptable will it be.” As to the timing of the recital of the Prayer for the Dead, it should precede interment.

When a Bahá'í passes away in the situation you have described, fellow believers should, in the first instance, endeavor to find a way to observe the burial laws of the Faith. For example, they could investigate whether there may be any cemeteries that can be reached within one hour from the civil limits of the city in which the believer passed away—by whatever form of conveyance chosen—that do offer winter burials, or which may be willing to make special provisions to accommodate a winter burial. However, if no such solution is feasible, the believers will have to do their best to keep the journey as short as possible. Also, there is no prohibition in Bahá'í law against the use of vaults above the level of the ground, which suggests another solution that is consistent with the laws of the Faith. The friends should turn to their National Spiritual Assembly if there are questions that cannot be resolved by reference to the points shared in this letter, providing it with the full particulars. This would include questions pertaining to embalment. Depending upon the facts, the Assembly may offer guidance about how to resolve the matter. However, it is recognized that there could be unusual or novel circumstances that are not easily resolved; in that case, the National Assembly would, naturally, turn to the House of Justice for assistance in identifying an acceptable solution.

(From a letter dated 19 December 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[118]