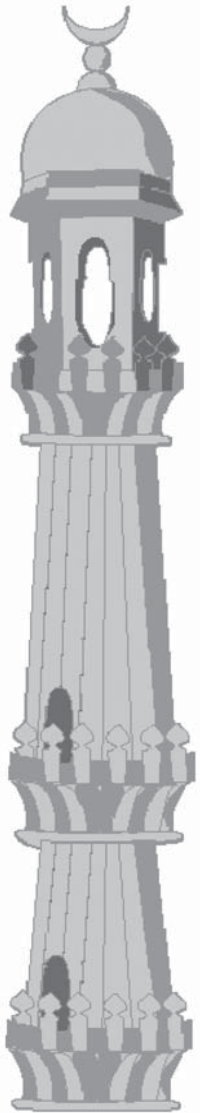


Out From Darkness ... Into Light



A Grief and Bereavement Booklet
for Muslims in Prisons and Jails

S. E. Jihad Levine (Sister Safiyyah)

Allah is the Wali (Protector or Guardian)

of those who believe.

He brings them out from darkness

into light.

— *Al-Baqarah (2:257)*

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I acknowledge and thank Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, to Whom all praise is due. Without His permission, nothing is possible. With His permission, everything is possible.

Second, I would like to thank Rev. Debra Reitz, FCPD, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Muncy, who encouraged me to write a grief and bereavement booklet from the Islamic perspective.

I would also like to acknowledge the incarcerated men and women in the state and county correctional systems of Pennsylvania. Thank you for letting me into your lives, and for sharing your grief and pain with me. You have made me a better counselor and chaplain, and more importantly, a better human being.

Lastly, my gratitude goes to Phyllis B. Taylor, BN, BA, CGF, chaplain in the Philadelphia prison system, and Ginette G. Ferszt, PhD, RN, CS, who works tirelessly in the Rhode Island prison system. These special ladies are the authors of *When Death Enters Your Life: A Grief Pamphlet for People in Prisons or Jails*. Their booklet is the first work of its kind that directly provides comfort for incarcerated persons who are coping with grief and bereavement issues.

May Allah (swt) weigh this humble work on the Scale of my good deeds on the Last Day. Ameen.

S. E. Jihad Levine (Sister Safiyyah)
Muslim Chaplain
PA Department of Corrections

Author

S. E. Jihad Levine, BA, CAC/CCS, also known as Sister Safiyyah, serves as a Muslim chaplain at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Muncy, a state facility for females. She is also a member of the Pennsylvania Prison Chaplains Association (PPCA).

For ten years, Sister Safiyyah worked as a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Specialist, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Prior to that, she worked at the Lycoming County Pre Release Center in Pennsylvania, and has volunteered at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in Jessup, Maryland.

Copyright © 2010, S. E. Jihad Levine and the Pennsylvania Prison Chaplains Association
This booklet may be duplicated only for use in prisons and jails. It can be accessed at:
<http://www.PennsylvaniaPrisonChaplains.com>.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

Alhamdulillah. Indeed, all glory and praise is due to Allah. We glorify and praise Him, and we ask Him for help and forgiveness. In Allah we seek refuge from the evils of ourselves and from our wrongdoings. He whom Allah guides shall not be misguided, and he whom He misguides shall never be guided.

I bear witness that there is no true god except Allah, alone without any partners, and I bear witness that Muhammad (*sall-Allahu ‘alaihi wa-sallam*) is His *Abd* (devoted servant and worshipper) and Messenger. “Believers! Fear and worship Allah as He deserves, and do not die except as Muslims.” (Qur’an, 3:102)¹

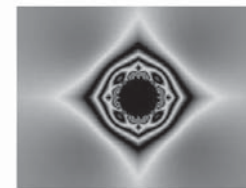
“People! Revere your Lord who has created you from one soul, and created from it its mate, and from these two spread forth multitudes of men and women; and fear Allah through whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (revere the ties of) the wombs. Indeed, Allah is ever-watchful over you.” (Qur’an, 4:1)

“Believers! Revere Allah, and (always) speak the truth. He will then direct you to do righteous deeds and will forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed achieved a great victory.” (Qur’an, 33:70-71)

Verily, the best words are those of Allah; the best guidance is that of Muhammad (saw); the worst matters (in creed or worship) are those innovated (by people), for every such innovated matter is a *bid’ah* (innovation in the creed or in acts of worship), and every *bid’ah* is an act of misguidance that deserves the Fire.²

¹ Qur’an and hadith in this booklet are English translations of the original Arabic.

² These opening paragraphs are a translation of *Khutbat ul-Hajah* (the Sermon of Need) with which the Messenger (saw) used to start his speeches and which he was keen to teach to his companions.



As Salaamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh Dearest Brother or Sister in Islam:

Perhaps you just received a letter from home telling you that someone close to you has died.

Or maybe you called home during phone time and learned that a loved one passed away.

Maybe your counselor or the chaplain met with you to inform you that a family member has died.

However you found out, it is my *dua* that this booklet provides comfort and guidance to you as you begin your journey through grief and bereavement.

Know that you are not alone. Muslims on the outside keep you in their constant duas. More importantly, Allah (swt) is always with you. As author Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood points out:

In times of crisis, it is so easy to feel that He is far away and cannot hear our cries—but this is not so. He is closer than our own neck vein; or, as the Messenger (saw) touchingly put it, closer than the neck of our own camel. His love will never desert us or let us down, even in our darkest hour (Maqsood 2006).

Might I suggest that the reader remember Allah in good times and bad with this *dua*:

Our Lord, forgive us and all of the believers, and bestow Your peace and praise upon our Prophet Muhammad (saw).³

³ *Dua from Life in al-Barzakh*, al-Jibaly



Death: A Fact of Life

“In different ways, death is mentioned 164 times in the Qur’an” (Al-Arfaj, 2003).

No one lives in this world forever. Our time here is limited. The cycle of birth and death will continue until the Last Day. In *Surat Al-An’ām*, Allah (swt) says,

“And it is He Who made you generations coming after generations, replacing each other on the earth.” (Qur’an, 6:165)

The Muslim knows that death is the natural conclusion of life on earth. We prepare for it, spending our lives in obedience to Allah (swt), expecting His reward. Death then transitions us to an intermediate life in *al-Barzakh*.

“Everyone shall taste death,” we are told in the Qur’an (3:185). It is simply a fact of this life. Still, it is seldom easy when news reaches us of the death of a loved one—especially if the news reaches us when we are behind bars, seemingly helpless to assist our family and friends on the outside during this critical time.

Supplication and Patience

The Muslim is encouraged to be patient upon receiving the news of a loved one’s death. A hadith encourages us to utter the words of *Al-Istirja*,⁴

Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilayhi Rajioon

(Verily, we are for Allah and to Him we shall return.)

The Prophet (saw) also said,

“Allah says, ‘When I take the prized one from this world of one of my believing worshippers, and when that believing worshipper then seeks reward from me (for that calamity), there is no other reward for him except Paradise.’”⁵

Reactions to Grief

“While it is compulsory for the Muslim to be patient when afflicted with a trial, one may make clear to others his situation or how he feels, with statements such as the following: ‘I am sick,’ or ‘I am in pain,’ or ‘In every situation, all praise is for Allah’ (Al-Arfaj 2003).

When someone close to him passes away, a Muslim will have to deal with a combination of human emotions like anger, anxiety, confusion, sadness, shock, self-pity, and guilt. Initially, he may feel a sense of unreality. He may also feel overwhelmed, vulnerable, preoccupied, and tearful.

As terrible as these feelings are, they are normal.

While reactions like wailing, screaming, and the tearing of clothing are not allowed in Islam, crying is a healthy and permissible expression of grief.

“Tears are not forbidden in Islam. By the grace of Allah, in the tears are forces that heal both physically and mentally. Tears have a relieving effect on the stress produced by loss and trauma. They really are a gift from Allah” (Maqsood 2006).

⁴ Muslim, Ahmad

⁵ Ahmad

The Prophet's (saw) Grief

Many ahadith illustrate examples of the Prophet (saw) and his Companions (*radi-Allahu anhum*) being extremely overwhelmed with grief! The Prophet (saw) experienced intense grief in his lifetime when he lost his mother and grandfather. He mourned two of his wives, Khadijah and Zaynab (*radi-Allahu anhum*). He lost sons who died in infancy, and outlived adult daughters. He also lost many of his companions. Can you imagine his pain? This short hadith describes his sorrow:

Abu Hurayrah (ra) narrated, “The Prophet (saw) visited the grave of his mother, and he wept and caused those around him to weep too.”⁶

The Messenger (saw) was so tearful that others felt his pain and became tearful, too. Subhan’Allah!

The following hadith describes the Prophet’s (saw) grief and tears at the time of the death of his son, Ibrahim:

Anas bin Malik reported that: The Messenger of Allah (saw) entered the room and we accompanied him... And Ibrahim breathed his last. The eyes of Allah’s Messenger (saw) were filled with tears. Abdur Rehman Ibn Auf said: ‘you are weeping, O Messenger of Allah (saw)’. He (saw) replied: “Ibn Auf, This is mercy”. Then he (saw) said: “Our eyes shed tears and our hearts are filled with grief, but we do not say anything except that by which Allah is pleased. O, Ibrahim we are sorrowful due to your separation.”⁷

Another version of this hadith gives us more physical details of the event:

It is recorded from Jabir Ibn Abdulla Ansari that: The Messenger of Allah (saw) held the hand of Abdur Rehman Ibn Auf and took him to Ibrahim, his son, when Ibrahim was in his last moments. The Messenger of Allah (saw) took him in his lap and began to weep.⁸

⁶ Muslim

⁷ Bukhari, Muslim and others

⁸ Tirmidi

The Prophet (saw) was an affectionate man. Masha Allah, he was not afraid to hold the hand of another man, nor was he afraid to let others see his emotional pain.

Umar's Grief

Even the strong Umar ibn al-Khattab (*radi-Allahu anhu*) struggled with his shock and grief on the day that the Prophet (saw) died. At first, Umar was in denial and refused to accept that the Messenger had died. He told the people that the Prophet (saw) had merely gone away like Musa (*alayhi salam*) had when he left his people for forty days and returned. Umar was so angry that he accused those saying the Prophet (saw) had died as hypocrites, and threatened, “Let the hands and feet of those who say that the Messenger of Allah (saw) has died be cut off” (as-Sallabi 2007).

When Abu Bakr (*radi-Allahu anhu*) arrived in town, he went to the house of Aishah (*radi-Allahu anha*) and viewed the Prophet’s (saw) body. When Abu Bakr returned to the mosque, Umar was still speaking to the people. Abu Bakr told Umar to calm down and listen, but Umar was so upset that he kept on talking. When Abu Bakr started speaking, the people turned from Umar and listened to Abu Bakr. After praising and glorifying Allah (swt), Abu Bakr told the people that if they worshipped the Prophet (saw), he had died, but if they worshipped Allah (swt), He was living and would never die. Then Abu Bakr recited the verse,

“Muhammad is no more than a Messenger, and indeed Messengers have passed away before him. If he dies or is killed, will you then turn back on your heels as disbelievers? And he who turns back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to Allah; and Allah will give reward to those who are grateful.” (Qur’an, 3:144)

Abu Hurayrah (*radi-Allahu anhu*), the narrator of this hadith, commented, “By Allah, it was if the people did not know that this verse had been revealed until Abu Bakr recited it to them that day.” And then Abu Hurayrah said, “Umar said, ‘By Allah, when Abu Bakr recited it I began to feel dizzy and my legs would not carry me, and I fell to the ground. And I knew that the Messenger of Allah (saw) had died’” (as-Sallabi 2007).

What we learn from these ahadith is that it is normal to initially feel overwhelmed with shock, grief, and even anger upon learning of the death of someone we love. Grief is a process, and the emotional tailspin is usually temporary as we have seen by Umar's initial reaction to the death of the Prophet (saw).

Special Challenges During the Grief Process

In prison where the incarcerated are isolated from the outside, grief and bereavement can seem even more painful. For example, saying goodbye or seeing a loved one for the last time is an important part of the grief and healing process. But many incarcerated Muslims are not able to have a deathbed visit or funeral visit due to financial or security constraints.

Sometimes incarcerated Muslims blame themselves when someone on the outside passes away. It is natural to think that maybe things would have been different if you were home and not separated from your loved ones. This is natural, but remember what Allah (swt) tells us,

O you who believe! Be not like those who disbelieve and who say about their brethren when they travel through the earth or go out to fight: 'If they had stayed with us, they would not have died or been killed,' so that Allah may make it a cause of regret in their hearts. It is Allah that gives life and causes death. And Allah is All-Seer of what you do.
(Quran, 3:156)

Another problem may be that even our Muslim friends don't seem to understand our pain. As Maqsood says:

One of the biggest problems for devout believers is the attitude of so many friends, who – because of their sincere belief in the afterlife – simply do not seem to see that there is a problem in a person's grief, or if they do see it, they refuse to admit it. In reality, the mourner may *not* be coping very well with his or her grief, but because of the attitudes of these pious 'comforters,' cannot speak up or make it known that help is needed (Maqsood 2006).

While our friends may mean well and have the intention of comforting us with reminders of the afterlife, they may not understand that grief and bereavement are a process. Islam, though, is not opposed to acknowledging grief and providing comfort to the grieving:

True religion enables us to take charge of our own lives and accept responsibility in a disciplined way, and this reduces the causes of guilt and sets in motion wise processes necessary for the management of grief. Our religious faith should help us find a perspective through which we can evaluate our own feelings (Maqsood 2006).

Comfort sometimes comes in the form of a warm and supportive friend who is willing to be there for us, and to simply listen when we need to talk. The important thing is that you do not stop reaching out to friends and members of your support group.

Deceased Children

If your loved one was a young child, it may comfort you to know that Islam teaches us that they will go directly to Jannah, and that our children can even guide us into Paradise!

Ahmad reported that the Prophet (saw) said: "Any two Muslims who lose (by death) three of their children, Allah grants them Paradise thanks to His blessing on them." Some companions asked, "O! Messenger of Allah and how about two?" He replied, "And two." They asked, "Or one?" He (saw) said, "Or one." Then he said, "By whom my soul is in His hand, the fetus that dies a neonatal death drags his mother with his umbilical cord in Paradise if she stays patient seeking the reward for this affliction from Allah."⁹

⁹ Ibn Majah

Ahl ul-Fatrah (People Without Messengers)

Many of us have family members who were not believers at the time of their deaths. This may cause us great pain because we may think that our loved ones will not be with us in the Next Life. Al-Jibaly's description of one small aspect of Allah's mercy may serve as a source of hope:

"Ahl ul-Fatrah" are those who lived at a time, or place, or situation that prevented them from receiving a clear and convincing message about Allah (swt). Even though they may have died as disbelievers, Allah (swt) out of His perfect justice and mercy, would not admit them to Hell without a fair trial. He will give them a trial that, in His knowledge, will be equivalent to the trials that other people face in this life. Among Ahl ul-Fatrah are those who never received a messenger from Allah, young children of disbelievers who died before reaching puberty, old people who were senile when the message came to them, mentally disabled people, deaf people who could not communicate at all, and so on. Anas, Aboo Sa'eed, and others reported that the Prophet (saw) said:

'On Resurrection Day, four types of individuals will be brought forward (before Allah), each presenting his argument (of not receiving the full message): a child (who died before puberty), a mad man, a person that no messenger came in his time, and a very old man (who became senile). The Lord will command a tongue to come out from the Fire, and will then tell them, "I used to send to my servants messengers from among themselves and, indeed, I am now My own messenger to you. Enter this (fire)." As for those who will be destined to misery, they will say, "O our Lord, why should we enter this from which we always used to run away?" Allah will tell them, "(If you dare to disobey Me now) you would then show even more denial and disobedience to My messengers." And as for those who will be destined to happiness, they will go forth and rush to

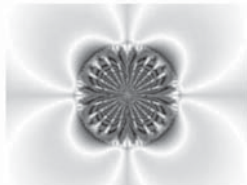
*enter that fire. Thus, they will enter Jannah, whereas the others will enter Hell."*¹⁰

This should teach us not to pinpoint any disbeliever in this life and say that he or she will definitely end up in Hell. First of all, we do not know what their faith will be at the time of death. Secondly, we usually cannot be sure that they have received the Message in its true form and then rejected it, which would then mean that they denied the truth from Allah. It is only to Allah to determine these things, and He will surely do so with perfect precision on Judgment Day (al-Jibaly, 2004).

Since it is not known who is or is not from Ahl-ul-Fatrah, we may ask Allah (swt) on our loved ones' behalf:

"O Allah. If You know they are from Ahl-ul-Fatrah, make them pass the trial successfully."

¹⁰ Recorded by Aboo Ya'laa, al-Baghawee, and others.



Getting Help

Of course, all help comes from Allah (swt). We should only seek help from Him. By His permission, there are many resources and gifts He gives us that help us journey through grief and bereavement. Follow these suggestions to help you through your pain:

First and most importantly, hold tight to the Rope of Allah (swt) and the Muslim believers in your facility.

Develop a support network. This could include friends both inside and outside of the walls.

Seek help from your counselor or a Psychology staff member, especially if you have feelings of despair or suicide, may Allah (swt) protect us from those. Ameen. Nothing in Islam prevents us of taking advantage of the halal skills of professionals when we need assistance. Remember: they only help us with the permission of Allah (swt).

Feel free to use the chapel resources and the chaplains. Your institution might have a Muslim chaplain who can be helpful in guiding you from an Islamic perspective.

Some Muslims find it helpful to write in a journal, while others may get comfort from creating artwork.

Be sure to get plenty of rest, and do not neglect your nutrition. You may not have much of an appetite, but try to eat something wholesome at each meal, even if it is fruit juice or milk. Be careful of the empty nutrition contained in a lot of commissary foods!

Go to yard. Talk with others if you feel like it. If you don't feel like talking, walk a little or lift some weights. Sit in the sunshine.

Make a choice. In her book, *After Death, Life!* Sister Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood provides a simple metaphor to help widen your perspective on your pain. You can be a chick or an egg!

If they choose to be an egg, then they'll see the end of their relationship with their dead loved one as the destruction of the whole fabric of their life. It will split in half and fall into two empty shells. Alternatively, they can see themselves as the chick that comes out of the egg. In that case they will feel small, very vulnerable, greatly in need of warmth and comfort and food. Above all, they'll have the craving for security. But as a chick they will grow. A smashed eggshell never recovers (Maqsood 2006).

Be sure to remember Allah (swt) often. Say *dhikr* and make dua for your loved one and recite from the Qur'an. The following may be helpful:

Dua

“O Allah, grant forgiveness to (this our dead loved one); let him arise to the company of those who have followed Your path in righteousness; let him become a guide and a helper to those he has left behind. Forgive us, and him, O Lord of the Universe; make his grave spacious, and grant him light in it.”¹¹

“To Allah we belong, and to Him we return. My Lord, reward me for my tragedy and compensate me with better than I have lost.”¹²

¹¹ Muslim

¹² Ahmad and Muslim

Comfort from the Qur'an

O Soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing! Join My servants! Enter My Paradise! (Quran, 89:29-30)

On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear (Quran, 2:286)

And to Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn there is the Face of Allah. Surely, Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knowing. (Qur'an, 2:115)

And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad, saw) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near. I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me. So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright. (Qur'an, 2:186)

Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, "When (will come) the Help of Allah?" Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near! (Qur'an, 2:214)

And no person can ever die except by Allah's Leave and at an appointed term. (Qur'an, 3:145)

Allah is your Maulā (Patron, Lord, Helper, Protector), and He is the Best of helpers. (Qur'an, 3:150)

Verily, my Wali is Allah Who has revealed the Book, and He protects the righteous. (Qur'an, 7:196)

So the fact is that along with every hardship there is also ease. Indeed, with every hardship there is also ease! (Qur'an, 94:5-6)

It may well be that Allah brings about ease after hardship. (Qur'an, 65:7)

Say: "Nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is our Maula (Helper and Protector)." And in Allah let the believers put their trust. (Qur'an 9:51)

Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest. (Qur'an, 13:28)

Conclusion

This small booklet is intended only as a beginning for you as you journey through grief and bereavement.

For an incarcerated person, the death of a loved one is an incredible crisis. Know that feelings of sadness may roll over you like waves, and at times, it may seem as if you are drowning. The shock and sense of unreality may cause your head to feel like it is spinning.

These feelings and others are normal. Remember that they are temporary.

Seek professional help if you need to do so. You have choices. The Muslim has clear guidance from the Qur'an and Sunnah for emotionally grounding himself. Allah (swt) promises us that after every hardship, He provides relief.

Allah (swt), your Protector and Guardian will bring you out from darkness into light. Ameen.

References

Al-Jibaly, Muhammad. 1999. *Life in al-Barzakh*. Arlington, TX: Al-Kitaab & as-Sunnah Publishing.

Al-Jibaly, Muhammad. 2004. *Knowing the Last Day*. Arlington, TX: Al-Kitaab & as-Sunnah Publishing.

As-Sallabi, Dr. Ali Muhammad. 2007. *Umar ibn al-Khattab: His Life & Times, Vol. 1*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House.

Bin Abdullah bin Baz, Abdul-Aziz. 2003. *Explanation of Important Lessons (For Every Muslim)*. Compiled by Muhammad bin Ali bin Ibrahim al-Arfaj. Riyadh: Darussalam.

Maqsood, Ruqaiyyah Waris. 2006. *After Death, Life!* New Delhi: Goodword Books.

Graphics Credits

Islamica Clipart – Minbar and Arabic script

S. E. Jihad Levine – Fractal digital art