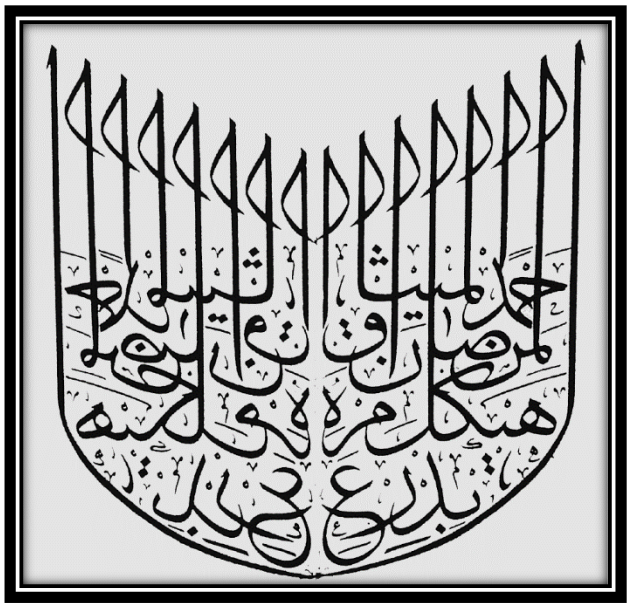
The Will and Burial

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

A discussion of wills and burials is not something many people look forward to, especially in societies where thinking about or discussing death is customarily avoided. For Bahá'ís, preparing a will with burial instructions is a spiritual obligation with spiritual influence. "The execution of the provisions of the will," wrote Shoghi Effendi in one example, "causes the spirit of the deceased to rejoice in the `Abhá Kingdom."[1]

So much family conflict can be avoided if people make clear how their possessions are to be disbursed and to whom, and where and how their burial is to take place. The central objective for Bahá'ís is always to effect an environment of unity. Preparing one's will and making provisions for one's burial ensure the best possible outcome: unity among family and friends who must remain.



Calligraphic arrangement of part of the opening sentence of the Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá:
"All Praise to Him Who, by the Shield of His Covenant, hath guarded the Temple of His Cause."[2]

While most states in the United States permit a person to prepare their own will, it is often advisable to seek the assistance of an attorney. Writing and executing the will to conform to the law helps ensure that the person's wishes are carried out after death. A pamphlet, *The Writing of a Will*, giving instructions about will preparation, is available from the Treasurer's Office at the Bahá'í National Center.

Often, a will is neither read nor even located until after the burial. It is, therefore, preferable to keep an additional copy of the burial instructions separate from the will and in an easily accessible location. Family members or friends should know where the instructions are kept, and a copy should be given to a Local Spiritual Assembly. Even in cases where there are burial instructions, they are usually not legally binding.

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator Review the following objective with the participants:

> The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding Bahá'í wills and burials.

[1] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, February 2025 edition, Chapter 10, p. 73.
[2] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, 1971 printing), par. 1, p. 3.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
   - **A**. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*
   To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:
   - **A**. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then…
   - **B**. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
   - **C**. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
   - **A**. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
   - **B**. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **Bahá'í wills or burials**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. *Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will. The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Faithful.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 109, p. 59.

adornment: enhancement in splendor and attractiveness by adding beauty
bear witness: give as evidence and proof
Creation: this world
Dayspring of His Revelation: Manifestation [in this day Bahá'u'lláh]
enjoined: charged with the responsibility [of]
head: write as the heading or title [of]
kingdoms: realms or dominions belonging to God
Most Great Name: There are several forms of the Most Great Name, all of which are derivatives of the name "Bahá," such as "`Abhá," as well as certain phrases such as "Alláh-u-Abhá," ⇗ "Yá Bahá'u'lláh," or "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá."
oneness: quality, state, or fact of the singleness and indivisibility
praiseworthy: deserving of honor or praise
Revelation: the next world
testator: person who dies leaving a will
testimony: solemn declaration or affirmation of faith
treasure: abundance of that which has great value
will: legal declaration of a person's wishes regarding the disposal of their body, property, and estate after death

2. According to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the making of a will is essentially an obligation of the individual Bahá'í. Each believer is free to dispose of his estate in whatever manner he chooses, within the limits imposed by civil law and after payment of burial expenses and other debts and obligations. There are several ways a believer can leave instructions regarding his burial; there is no objection for such instructions to be included in the will, if the law permits, and the believer so wishes.

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 631, p. 192.

civil law: city, state, or federal law
dispose of: transfer to the control of another
estate: possessions and assets left by a person at death
imposed by: established or applied by authority [of]
limits: determining features or bounds
obligation: moral duty and responsibility
obligations: One of the spiritual obligations for a Bahá'í is The Right of God, or Huqúqu'lláh. ⇗

This may be paid during one's lifetime, or through one's will. Summarized from a verse written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, "Huqúqu'lláh." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990,* (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 1188, p. 517.
will: legal declaration of a person's wishes regarding the disposal of their body, property, and estate after death

3. The friends should be strongly advised to make wills specifying that they want their funerals to be conducted under the auspices of the Bahá'í Faith or at least in conformity with its requirements and they should make this known both to the Local Spiritual Assembly and to their own relatives, while they are still alive. In this way it is quite possible that agreements may be reached with non-Bahá'í relatives before death takes place.

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 633, pp. 192-93.

at least: in any case
auspices: support and guidance
conducted: directed and carried out
conformity: accordance or agreement
funerals: rites used in the ceremony and burial of the body
Local Spiritual Assembly: administrative ⇗ body of the local Bahá'í community
requirements: conditions demanded as necessary and appropriate
specifying: naming or stating exactly and clearly
wills: legal declaration of a person's wishes regarding the disposal of their body, property, and estate after death

4. The execution of the provisions of the will causes the spirit of the deceased to rejoice in the `Abhá Kingdom.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Cited in *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, February 2025 edition, Chapter 10, p. 73.

`Abhá Kingdom: most glorious spiritual World where souls pass on to after death
deceased: person who has died

execution: doing what is provided or required
provisions: conditions; advanced stipulations
rejoice: feel joy and great delight

5. For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour's journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased is a believer over the age of 15.

—The Universal House of Justice

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), par. 147.18, p. 279.

binding: put under obligation
carry: move by transporting
cremate: reduce the body to ashes by burning
journey: travel by any means of transport, [see *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Questions and Answers no. 16, pp. 111-12]; "…which may be calculated from the city limits to the place of burial."—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 152, p. 230.
Prayer for the Dead: Published in *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. CLXVII, pp. 260-261, and *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*, pp. 101-02. This is the only Bahá'í obligatory prayer which is to be recited in ⇗

congregation. It is to be recited by one believer while all present stand in silence. [Summarized from *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 19, pp. 172-73.]
requirements: conditions demanded as necessary and appropriate
West: "…many of the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* were applied in Iran and the neighbouring lands of the Middle East from the very early days…. While the "east" continued to designate Iran, Iraq and other countries of the older Bahá'í communities of the Middle East, the term "west" came to include the rest of the world."—The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, email message to author, March 31, 2005.

6. In brief, the Bahá'í 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. As affirmed by `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, this law precludes cremation of the dead. The formal prayer and the ring are meant to be used for those who have attained the age of maturity, i.e., 15 years of age....

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 149, p. 229.

affirmed: declared as a fact
carry: move by transporting
cremation: reducing the body to ashes by burning
forbidden: not permitted or allowed; prohibited
interment: depositing the dead body in the earth or in a tomb
journey: travel by any means of transport, [see *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Questions and Answers no. 16, pp. 111-12]; "…which may be calculated from the city limits to the place of ⇗

burial."—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 152, p. 230.
law: rule of conduct established and enforced by authority
ordained: established and enacted
Prayer for the Dead: see quotation #5.
precludes: prevents consequently
shroud: cloth

7. There is nothing in the Teachings against leaving our bodies to medical science. … 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. **—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi**

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 667, pp. 200-01.

connection: relationship, bond, or tie
departs: detaches from the body
medical science: research, education, organ banks etc.

respect: high and special regard or consideration
spirit: immortal essence of one's rational, spiritual, and emotional self
temple: place reflecting the divine presence

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration…*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

_____

It made me feel _____

_____

I felt this way because _____

_____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation…*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Bahá'ís can make provisions in their will for all their possessions to be…
- ☐ a. taken with them.
- ☐ b. given to members of the family only.
- ☐ c. given to anyone or any institutions they choose.
- ☐ d. cremated.

2. According to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the individual has a duty to write a will and testament, and is free to dispose of their estate in whatever manner they choose, after…
- ☐ a. debts are paid.
- ☐ b. obligations to Huqúqu'lláh are met.
- ☐ c. funeral expenses are paid.
- ☐ d. the estate is allocated as described in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book,* for cases where there is no will.

3. Believers in the West (see definition of "West" in quotation #6) can have all the requirements of Bahá'í burial laws met if they choose, but they are obligated to meet only three at this time. All the requirements of the laws are listed below. Which *three* are required for Western believers?
- ☐ a. "The position of the body in the grave should be with the feet pointing toward the Qiblih, which is Bahjí, in `Akká."[1]
- ☐ b. To say the congregational Prayer for the Dead *before* internment.
- ☐ c. To be buried, not cremated.
- ☐ d. Not to carry the body for burial more than one hour's journey from the place of death.
- ☐ e. To carefully wash and then wrap the body in a shroud of cotton or silk, preferably silk.
- ☐ f. To bury the body in a coffin of crystal, stone, or hard fine wood.
- ☐ g. To have a ring placed on the finger of the body bearing a designated inscription.
- ☐ h. Not to be embalmed.[2]

Continued on next page…

[1] Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 656, p. 198.
[2] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 639, p. 194.

4. The body can be left for use by medical science, providing it is treated with respect and the remains are not cremated or taken more than four hour's journey from the place of death for burial.
☐ true ☐ false

5. A pamphlet, *The Writing of a Will*, giving instructions about will preparation, is available from the _____ .

6. The Universal House of Justice wrote: "The reading of any other prayers or writings at a Bahá'í funeral is entirely optional. In general, it is desirable to keep the service simple and dignified."[1] Which prayer *must* be said at a Bahá'í burial to conform to Bahá'í burial laws? _____
_____

7. While most states permit people to prepare their own will, it is advisable to seek legal assistance from…
☐ a. friends.
☐ b. the Local Spiritual Assembly.
☐ c. an attorney.
☐ d. medical science.

8. "The execution of the provisions of the will," wrote Shoghi Effendi, "causes the spirit of the deceased to _____ in the `Abhá Kingdom."[2]

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*
Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *"It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...."* Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: *"**One could**...."* Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*
From your experience in this study class on "The Will and Burial," describe what ***you*** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will** make conscious efforts to...* _____
_____
***My** next step will be...* _____
_____

[1] The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1504, p. 461.
[2] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, February 2025 edition, Chapter 10, p. 73.

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song…*

From the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

As for the question of inheritance which is occasioning perplexity: in truth, one is entirely free during his lifetime to make provision in his will for the division and distribution of his property amongst his heirs in whatsoever manner he seeth fit, in order that his wishes may then be implemented after he hath passed away. The writing of a will is obligatory upon everyone; everyone, that is, must in his lifetime draw up a will that is firm, sound, and clear in its provisions; seal and hide it; and guard it in a very safe place. In drawing up his will the testator enjoyeth full discretion to dispose of his property as he seeth fit; his will is a binding instrument, having precedence over any other provision, and no one hath the power to either modify or change it. Under these conditions, should he bequeath his whole property to his children, he is but acting within his rights. In the event, however, of disobedience to this command, of failure to draw up a will, and of non-fulfilment of the divine obligation; likewise in the event of disappearance of the will itself, the testator's property will be divided up according to the designated shares. [see *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*, pp. 26-28]

In truth, the wisdom of this perspicuous and most mighty ordinance is that no one should draw breath without a will. Observe how, in the absence of a will, the inheritance in its entirety is divided up, distributed and dispersed contrary to the wishes of the deceased; what difficulties and disagreements are thus engendered! The will, however, is the settler of every dispute, and the cause of ease for all, for in it the testator disposeth of his property in whatsoever manner he desireth. How agreeable it is for the estate in its entirety to be disposed of in accordance with the testator's will and pleasure! Observe ye how many people during their lifetime are fearful about what will happen when they pass away. Now, with this divine commandment—the obligation and religious duty of drawing up a will before one's passing—all these difficulties are resolved. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Cited in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1986-2001*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2010), par. 229.16-229.17, pp. 542-43.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures…*

1. a, b, c, and d
2. a, b, and c
3. b, c, and d
4. false; the body cannot be taken more than *one* hour's journey from the place of death for burial. Note: It can, however, be taken more than one hour's journey from the place of death for use by medical science, but it must be buried within one hour's journey from the place of death. . —The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, email message to author, May 19, 2005.
5. Treasurer's Office at the Bahá'í National Center
6. **Prayer for the Dead**: Published in *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. CLXVII, pp. 260-261, and *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*, pp. 101-02. This is the only Bahá'í obligatory prayer which is to be recited in congregation. It is to be recited by one believer while all present stand in silence. [Summarized from *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 19, pp. 172-73.]
7. c
8. rejoice

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