

WHEN DEATH COMES. . . .

Most of us tend to push the panic button. Confusion. Fear, Shock. Bewilderment. These and many more emotions take hold of us when someone near and dear passes away. Well, that's human nature!

Since most of us don't know what to do immediately after death, a few simple hints are given below which will be of use to our readers.

1) Just before death takes place at home, a lamp (*divo*) and fire in a small *Afarganya* should be placed a little distance away from the head of the person who is to breathe his last. Sandalwood and incense should be burnt on the fire. If the last stage takes a longer time, *Avesta* prayers by proxy should be recited. The *Atash Niyایش* and the *Patet Pashemani* (not *Patet Ravan-ni*) are a must.

2) Immediately after death, two Zoroastrians should hold a *Paivand* (Joining of hands) - one of them should place his/her other hand on the body and continuously recite *Ashem Vohu* near the ears of the deceased.

In case a Zoroastrian is not readily available a dog or even a living plant will do for the *Paivand*. The *Paivand* is to ensure security against the onslaught of *druj-e-nasu* that emanates from the dead body and accelerates as time passes.

What is very essential is that the next major step to be taken - the *Sachkar* — should be performed in the same *Geh* that a Zoroastrian dies. This also means that the two persons who have held the *Paivand* and

are reciting the *Ashem Vohu* will not be polluted in that *Geh* if they touch the corpse. Even the wooden bed, the mattresses, blankets, etc. are not polluted if the corpse remains on them till the *Geh* changes.

If a Zoroastrian dies in a hospital, all that one can do is take the *Paivand* and recite the *Ashem Vohu* without break.

3) In a big city like Mumbai, the *Khandhiyas* (pall bearers) come to take the body, a couple of hours after death. But in other parts of the country the *Behdins* themselves have to take the body for the *Sachkar*.

4) The *Sachkar* is the first most important ceremony for the departed soul. The vital point that needs to be reiterated is that only *Ab-i-zar* or *Taro* should be used for sponging the body. Water should not be used. Water aggravates the *druj* emanating from the body. *Taro* smites the *druj* and neutralises it. In Mumbai, fortunately, two gentlemen voluntarily supply fresh *taro* to the *Doongurwadi* twice a week. One bottle each is delivered at each *Bungli*. The other big bottle is given to the employees near the *Sagdi* for use after the congregation returns from the *Paidust*.

Bombay readers are requested to insist on the fresh *Taro* being used for the *Sachkar* in any *Bungli*. After sponging with the *taro*, the body is clothed with the *Sudreh-Kusti* of the departed. A loin cloth is tied round the genitals, after which the old clothes worn by the deceased are put on the corpse. Thereafter, four tourniquets are tied round the throat, hands, waist, knees, etc. of the

corpse. Finally, the body is placed on slabs of stone round which the *Nassalaras* draw the *Karsh* (circuit) with an iron nail thrice, reciting the *Yatha Ahu Valryo*.

5) Attention should be paid to the *Sagdid* at different times. *Sagdid* is the sighting of the corpse by a dog. After the *Sachkar*, *Sagdid* should be done at the change of, just before the *Geh Sama*, after half the *Geh Sama* is over, that is, when the corpse is shifted from the stone slab to the *Gehan*, after the completion of the *Geh Sama* and just before taking the corpse into the *Dakhma*

6) Do not desert the departed! The soul sits near the head of the body for three nights - till the dawn of the fourth day. It is the duty of every Zoroastrian to ensure that the soul, which is in a very delicate state (like a new-born babe) - having just arisen from its years-old

slumber inside the body — is not left in the lurch. So, stay put at the *Doongurwadi*, where there are *Bunglis* for the sojourn of those who have come to see the departed soul off.

The soul is thirsting for the exalted vibrations of the *Avesta Manthra*, which provide tremendous protection and solace to it, as it meditates over the life it has led. If you forsake your dear one at the *Bungli* and perform the ceremonies at a Fire Temple, you are guilty of deserting not the individual whom you loved so dearly, but the divine spark that is now ensconced in the astral body.

In a recent survey, this writer found that on a given day, of the eight *Uthamnas*, only one was held at the *Bulgli* where the soul was sitting. The rest were in different *Agaries*. How would you like your meal to be placed in the *Jogeshwari Agiary*, when you are revenously hungry at Camp's Comer?

Besides, you may not be aware that the moment you turn your back on the soul after the *Paidast*, non-Zoroastrian workers take over the sweeping and cleaning of the *Bunglii*

So, all the ceremonies and prayers (*bhojn nu bhantay*) must be performed where the soul is sitting. The prayers which should be done by relatives and friends should include *Haptan Yasht*, *Khordad Yasht*, *Hom* and *Vanant Yashts*. One should continue with these prayers, right till the *Uthamna* on the dawn of the fourth day.

7) Keep a *divo* burning constantly at home just behind the bed of the deceased. This should be done for at least four days. The ideal period used to be six months.

8) Ceremonies for the deceased can continue as long as you can afford and manage them. But, most importantly, the

relatives themselves must recite the *Patet Ravan-ni* and the *Srosh Yasht Vadi* for the departed, daily. In these bad times, there's nothing that can take their place.

- Adl Doctor

A Change-over from one religion to another must mean the other is lacking either in quality or content. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "All religions are branches of the same mighty tree, but one must not change from one branch to another for the sake of expediency.

By doing so, one cuts the very branch on which he sits.