

## THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ANATOMY OF DEATH IN MUSLIM TURKISH CULTURE

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**Abstract:** *Folklorists and theologians have maintained an interest in the cultural and theological aspects of death and burial-funeral customs; popular beliefs about death, dying and the afterlife; the folklore of forewarnings of death; and so on. Death is not only a natural reality but also a social and cultural fact. As one of the most important events of the life, a great number of beliefs, customs, tradition, ceremonies, rites, pattern behaviors, transactions have been grouped around death. The forms and contents of these beliefs, customs, tradition, ceremonies, rites, pattern behaviors connected with death may differ in terms of time, society and culture. Turkey has very rich folkloric traditions, which have been kept alive for centuries. There is a special place of the folkloric traditions connected with death in Turkish culture. Such beliefs, customs, transactions, ceremonies and pattern behaviors, which accumulated around the death, are categorized under three groups: pre-death, during death and after death. Most of Turkish people are Muslims. Their folkloric traditions are impressed by Islamic values. But, in fact, Turkish death traditions are composition of pre-Islamic customs, Islamic principles and other traditions. In this article, we discuss the comprehension of the Muslim Turkish people about the death as a physical and spiritual matter. They mirrored the understanding of death in the decease customs. But, on the other hand, like other traditions, death customs are affected by globalization.*

**Key Words:** *Turkish Islamic Culture, Death, Religious and Cultural Ceremonies, Theology.*

### INTRODUCTION

Just as the evidences of burial are often the only data surviving from early Paleolithic cultures, mortuary constructions are often the most impressive and revealing remains of early civilizations. The importance of ancestors in the religions of the Jews, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims make tombs and burial customs important sources of data for classical and modern culture. The structure of customs designed for the dead seem to provide a special fund of information about the ideologies and values for ancient and modern societies. (Huntington 1980, 6)

Funeral customs have traditionally diverse by religion. In Buddhism, death is ready for through meditation, and death itself is considered as a new beginning after death. The body is washed, rituals are performed over it, a wake is held, and then it is typically cremated. In early Judaism, with perhaps the simplest of all ceremonies,

the customs included a prayer service, washing the body and covering it in linen, followed by a funeral ceremonial meal. According to Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' body is buried, covered it in linen cloth, placed in his tomb, and sealed it with a large stone. (XXVII: 57-61) In the Catholic Church, the body is prepared for burial, usually by embalming; this is followed by a funeral song mass and burial. Protestant churches usually hold one ceremony, followed by the usual structure or cremation. Hindu ceremonies are closely tied to a belief in reincarnation. Thus mostly relatives, to ensure a proper new beginning, conduct a detailed set of rituals. Islamic ceremonies include washing and preparing the body, prayers, reading from the Qur'an, and placing the body on the right side facing Mecca for burial.

The diversity of cultural reaction is a measure of the universal impact of death. But it is not a random reaction; always it is meaningful and expressive. The issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Likewise, the funeral rituals constitute important cultural institutions in the Muslim Turkish society.

More than 90 percent of Turkey is Sunni Muslim. A great majority of the Turks still live under the authority of tradition especially in the provincial areas of the country. In the foundation of main activity models which form traditional life of people, ensuring them to have specialty and formation, there lay many customs, beliefs and ethic operations. Such kinds of practices so realized have shown difference and similarity from one region to another.

Central and eastern parts of Turkey are usually composed of people who adopt traditional and religious way of life. Accordingly, they appear to be more conservative than those in Western parts of the country for whom the western life styles and customs are more influential as a result of the strong affects of globalization in the world.

In the traditional believes of Turks, death is perceived as the leaving of soul from human body into another place. Death is considered an act of the God according to Islamic theology. Faithful followers believe that all the events in the life course of an individual, including the time and type of death is written, as destiny, by the God (Qur'an, LXVII: 2). Death is not end of life. Islamic theology has a highly sensitive belief about afterlife, from the time of physical death to the Day of Resurrection. Allah says in the Qur'an: "Everyone shall taste death. And only on the day of resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away from the fire and admitted to paradise, this person is indeed successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception" (III: 185), "Every soul shall have the taste of death". (XXIX: 57)

Jews, Christian and Muslims are in accord with the understanding of physical resurrection.

According to Islamic theology, death is a second resurrection in training for afterlife. Some scholars compared the time spent in the grave before the Resurrection to the time spent in the womb. Just as a fetus develops in the womb, the soul undergoes growth and change in the grave, based on deeds accomplished on earth. This close linking of birth with death echoes the Qur'an, which mentions death together with birth (XXIII: 14-16), and promotes the view that death is an inevitability of life. Rather than viewing death as an end of life, Muslim views earthly death as a transition from this world to eternity. The purpose of worldly life, according to Islamic theology is to prepare for eternal life. Death is not the end of a person's existence. Rather, eternal life is to come, and we pray for Allah's mercy to be with the departed, in hopes that they may find peace and happiness in the life to come. (Zamahsari 1947, 293-294)

For the Islamic theology the human are sacred. Yunus Emre, an eminent Muslim Sufi, says: "We love the created/For the Creator's sake". For this reason a human body, whether one is a Muslim or a non-Muslim is sacred and must be shown respect. At the same time, another great Islamic Sufi Mawlana Jalaladdin Rumi gives extraordinary value to human and exalts the human being virtually to level of a sacred being, too. However, if death is a natural event, then, like all other natural events, it is also a symbol of something else. From the Islamic standpoint death is not to be construed as simply natural events, but rather as "signs" of the divine order of the cosmos. In turn, the last stage of life, from the Islamic theology, assumes a positive character as a period of "religious maturity" and personal transcendence.

Muslim Turkish people have a considerate folkway about death in the shape of pre-death, during death- and after death customs. Even though they are also Muslims, some of these customs differ from the Muslims of Arab origin in the Middle East.

#### **PRE-DEATH CUSTOMS**

When a person is in the deathbed, those around him or her are called upon to give comfort, and reminders of God's mercy and forgiveness. They recite verses from the Qur'an, give physical comfort, and encourage the dying one to recite words of remembrance and prayer. It is recommended for a Muslim's last words to be the declaration of faith: the Shahada: "Ashadu al La ilaha illa Allah", which means "There is no God but Allah" in a very kind and sincere manner as these may be his/her last words. They make *dua* (Supplicate) to Allah to help him/her go through situation easy, and forgive him/her, end they read the "Yasin" part of the Qur'an. In urban parts of Turkey, they are putting the Qur'an under the head of a dying

Muslim. If they do not know to read of Qur'an, they invited a Muslim preacher for pray. (Balikci 2007)

The source of this attitude is some words of the Prophet such as "Help Muslims who are dying to say: "La ilaha illa Allah". (Muslim 1992; Gazzali 1989, 48-50)

There exists, for example, no Islamic teaching ordaining the placing of the Qur'an beneath the head of a dying Muslim. However, people themselves may be firm in their belief that this physical placing of the Qur'an provides him or her help on the death bed. Theologically, all Muslims are responsible for their life span actions. 'Life span' being of little meaning as to the individual who during life, deliberately caused harm to others, this individual's prayers for favor and the Qur'an (Yasin) including the declaration of Faith, are in vain. The Prophet's advice is that it is of more use to those surrounding the death bed.

It is possible that he/she told about her/his *wasiyyah* (testament) in the deathbed. A testament (*wasiyyah*) includes deceased's estate and legacies, orders and admonishments, and determining of rights. There is no specific wording which is necessary for making a testament. It can be oral or written, and the purpose of the testator must be clear so that it is to be accomplished after his death. If he/she is a rich person, it is possible that her/his *wasiyyah* on building a school, a mosque, and charity institutions.

#### **DURING DEATH CUSTOMS**

When death takes place at home, it is roughly exhibited, separated in small parts and stages. It is not possible to know exactly when-with the loss of consciousness or with the last breath-death occurs. In urban parts of Turkey, although the occurrence of death in hospital is getting more common, hospital authorities inform the relatives about the awaiting death of patients.

After decease at home, one of the aged members of the household ties the chin and toes before the body cools. Keeping the joints together and prevention of drooping of the chin explain the necessity of this act. The corps is laid down facing upward; the arms are joined on the belly and covered with a sheet in a way such that all the body including the face is under the cover, the head facing the direction of Mecca. A steel knife is laid lengthwise on the corps and metal coins are put on the eyelids as it is traditionally done in many places across Turkey. This knife is believed to prevent the body from swelling up and the coins keep the eyes shut. Qur'an is read at the bedside of the deceased. (Tapucu 2004, 55; Gork 2006, 2)

The source of the practice of binding up the deceased's chin and head facing Mecca, are words of the Prophet. (Muslim 1992) Theologically, this has no relevance as to increase or decrease the importance of Mecca. According to Yilmaz if the burial is set the day following the decease, the deceased's relatives and friends

will not leave the corpse alone, but stay with it and keep lights burning. (Yılmaz 2007, 75) This is due to an ancient belief, that the soul of the dead will return to the corpse and visit the deceased's house. This stems from old Turkish tradition, from early ancestors' cults. According to pre-Islamic Turks, the soul of the deceased will return to visit the home of the newly dead. According to Islamic theology the soul is a body in no need for extra illumination.

When a person died there are some responsibilities, which need to be performed. Like, payment of funeral expenses, payment of his/her debts, execution his/her will and distribution of the remaining estate amongst the heirs according to traditional law.

After death they should pay his/her debts from his/her money, or if there is not enough money, then by any family member or any relative. This matter is important since the Prophet encouraged Muslims to pay the debts of the deceased.

The most natural type of proclamation of event of death has occurred through crying of relatives of the deceased. People who hear about one's death come together in the house of the deceased and participate in the grief strike of relatives of the deceased, to condole with them, to help them to do primary preparations.

In villages, agreeable way of announcement is to ask Muslim preacher (*hoca*, *imam*) to call people for a funeral rites for dead. In some towns of Turkey, a muezzin, who is the reciter of an invitation described by the composed of special words in order to elucidate the beginning of the prayer times for deceased, declares the death from a mosque minaret with some religious words together with his name, interment time and place. To announce the unpleasant incident by giving announcements through newspapers are usually witnessed in big cities.

It is a Muslim's responsibility to offer condolences, comfort, and sympathy to the family and the relatives of the deceased. This strengthens the relationships within community. When offering condolences, words should be chosen carefully. Condolences may be offered to the family and to the relatives of the deceased before, during or after burial for up to three days, but it may be offered even at later time if someone did not hear about it or he/she was far away.

It is recommended to leave after offering condolences to give the family time to take care of their other affairs, assistance may be offered for anything the family may need, and one may stay to help, if asked.

When meeting with someone who has lost a relative, conversation start by saying: like "will stay in paradise", "may your life be spared", "may God rest his soul", "God give you patience", "may you be alive and May God's blessing be on him/her (the deceased)."

Condolences is not only and special to Turks and Muslims. It is a very common use in many other societies. But, there are some different practices according to their cultural and religious understandings.

There is no mention of funeral practices in the Qur'an. Burial practices have been established by fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and are considered religious rituals, and social conventions. It is considered an honor to assist in carrying the coffin to the cemetery. As the funeral processes, coffin bearers repeat the phrase "God is great, God is merciful". A close relative of the deceased officiates at the funeral, standing by the head of a male corpse or the trunk of a female corpse. After all debts owed by the deceased are settled, the funeral party recites specific prayers and statements.

Mourning is 3-7 days in Turkey. They do not get a shave in these days, and their mourning dresses are black, dark or gray. Mourning over the dead is allowed in Islam, but there is a great difference between what is allowed Islamic and the practice of some Muslims at the present time. Grief at the death of a beloved person is normal, and weeping for the dead is allowed in Islam. In the ancient Turks, mourning was 30-40 days.

This custom can also be seen in the European people; traditionally, dark clothing tends to be worn during ceremonial services; although this trend has shifted in recent years to a more color-based wardrobe which focused on creating an atmosphere of celebration and hope.

Upon death, those with the deceased are encouraged to remain calm, pray for the departed, and begin preparations for burial. The eyes of the deceased should be closed, and the body covered temporarily with a clean sheet. It is forbidden for those in mourning to excessively wail, scream, or thrash about according to Islamic theology. As a matter of fact, Prophet said: "The deceased suffers when someone bewails loudly" (Bukhari 1992). Sorrow is normal when one has lost a loved one, and it is natural and permitted to cry. At the same time when the Prophet Muhammad's own son died, he said: "The eyes shed tears and the heart is grieved, but we will not say anything except which pleases our Lord." (Muslim 1992) One should strive to be patient, and remember that Allah is the One who gives life and takes it away, at a time appointed by Him.

Some believe that the deceased's eyes accompany the soul by leaving a corpse's body. Thus, the soul makes its way to the world of the souls. Therefore, the eyes of the deceased must be shut. There is no scientific or religious base for this practice, also originating from ancestral cult.

After accomplishment of preliminary preparations, which is necessary for religious and traditional aspects, are started.

This organization consists of washing of corpse, enwrapping in enshroud and praying performed at the funeral. The corpse is washed by someone who is a relative or is experienced about washing, always women by a woman, and men by a man. The body is always washed by beginning with the right side, which is preferred in Islamic tradition. The first body parts to be washed are the hands, arms, mouth, nostrils, and feet, which are washed in ablution before prayer during life. After the ablution the corpse (gusl) is dressed in a white shroud, put in a wooden coffin covered with a green piece of cloth.

A foremost religious obligation is to keep the body clean and in this, the washing of the body is obligatory, especially, before performing prayer, after sexual conduct, after birth and post mortem. Body wash and the use of incense are parts of paying respect to deceased. In this, there is an exception.

The body of a Martyr should not be washed, nor be shrouded but buried with the same clothes that people found him with. The strongest opinion of Muslim scholars is not to offer funeral prayer for martyrs since Prophet did not offer it for a "martyr". In Turkey, martyr's coffin is usually covered with the Turkish flag.

A martyr is the one who is killed in a battle between Muslims and disbelievers and for the sake of their country. Turkish people do not wash a martyr because of there is a declaration of the Qur'an verse on this topic "And say not of those who are slain in God's cause, "They are dead": nay, they are alive, but you perceive it not."(II: 154)

Martyrdom is a sacred phenomenon. People believe that a martyr does not decay under soil and is thus being buried fully dressed. The ancient Turks held similar traditions, only differing in that what in Islamic understanding is reserved for the martyrs, was possible for all deceased. Enshroud is a general custom in the world. It is not only found among Muslims, except martyrdom.

The coffin is carried to the table outside in the courtyard of a mosque on people's shoulders before prayers. Nobody stands in front of the funeral procession and people in the street stand up and salute the funeral motionless and in silence. While the coffin rests guarded on the table outside, people perform their regular prayers. From within the mosque, following the prayers, they all come out and line up in front of the coffin to take part in the funeral service under the leadership of the *imam/hoca*. Women are allowed to join this service. But, in general, they do not. It is an exceptional religious attitude in the Islamic tradition. Muslim women should pray five times per diem like Muslim men. But women fall behind of the men on the pray. In the prayer performed at funeral, women pray side-by-side with men. There is no specific explanation in the religious sources about this behavior.

The Imam asks people what they thought of the deceased and answers are always positive: “He was good, may God bless him, mercy be upon his soul”, etc.

When an imam makes questions about a deceased among people in his or her community, this is to be interpreted as an advice for the community. Nobody would like a negative word about oneself and this be the witness against himself for the afterlife.

#### **FUNERAL PRAYER AND PRACTICE**

Funeral prayer is required to be performed in congregation to request pardon for the deceased and all dead Muslims, and to wrap them all in Allah’s Mercy. It is preferable that funeral prayer be performed outside the Mosque or the Musalla (Prayer room), like in activity rooms or courtyards.

When a Muslim dies, funeral prayer (Salat al-Janazah) is offered in congregation. This prayer unlike other prayers has neither any *ruku* (bowing) nor any *sajdah* (prostration) and you do not have to recite *tashahhud* (sitting down) those acts are in the normal prayers. Funeral prayer is collective obligation (*Fard al-Kifayah*) on all the Muslims of the locality of the dead person. It is a kind that if some people perform it, others escape from responsibility. This is contrary to Individual-Obligation (Fard al-Ayn), which requires everybody to perform it respectively such as daily prayers. There are specific times when it is prohibited to perform *Salat al-Janazah*, unless it becomes necessary, due to the condition of the body, to perform it quickly and then bury the body.

There is no “funeral prayer” for the “suicide” to according to some Islamic jurists. Deliberate suicide is considered a total lack of faith in God. To kill oneself is just as forbidden as to entrust murder, and is a sign of ungratefulness towards God. The understanding of suicide is opposite of the part of collective life/social life. Muslims believe that God tests people in this life in the world, yet does not trouble a soul beyond what it can bear. To preserve in times of suffering and to call upon God for relieve and abidingness is an important element in the Islamic lifestyle and worldview. Eventually, Muslims are to call upon God’s illimitable mercy and seek a suitable solution to life’s contradictions. “And most certainly shall We try by means of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of (labour’s) fruits. But give glad tidings unto those who are patient in adversity.” (Q. II: 155)

Some areas in Turkey have a strong and deeply rooted tradition, which goes beyond Islamic domination. This tradition has been in accord with Islamic rules in many aspects of life, but there is a significant conflict about death. For example in some Anatolian sub-cultural groups, though it is not widely practiced today, suicide in some situations is socially respected.

In accordance with the modern Islamic theology, at all events, the victim of suicide has a faith. For this reason the funeral prayer is seen as a prayer for him/her.



As known that, Turkey's political structure is secular. But, Turks are culturally and historically Muslim. The Turkish state officially does not recognize the application of Islamic laws. Accordingly, people usually follow the religious functionaries such as imams, muftis and independent *alims*. But the state does not recognize their authority.

Another discussion on the funeral prayer is about "euthanasia", the practice of desistence someone's life to end their professed suffering, and it is not permissible in Islam. (Cases where the physical body is being kept alive through artificial means are another matter). Muslims believe that all things are eventually according to God's decree, and pain and suffering must be dealt with through prayer and penitence. Additionally, only God determines the time and way of one's death. Muslims also believe that the suffering of fair believers in this life is a trial and it will be atoned by incommensurable happiness and reward in the Afterlife. (UNN Islamic Society 1999a; Oguz 1996, 170-171)

According to contemporary Islamic authorities, death is defined as total brain death, including cessation of brainstem activity. Even if a person with no brain activity retained some physiological functions by means of mechanical equipment, such functions are considered "movement of the slain," and the person is considered dead by Islamic law. This definition of death holds true for determinations regarding medical issues such as removal of artificial life support and organ donation, as well as judicial issues such as the beginning of the 4-month and 10-day period that a widow must wait before she can remarry. (UNN Islamic Society 1999b)

The euthanasia is implemented by a disease. It is not a religious affair. If there is very big problem in relation to life, we must depend on the reports of the consultants. So the theologians are contingent upon euthanasia to specialists. Theologians give a fatwa according to doctors.

Muslim people have a distinctive style of building graves and cemeteries that is characterized by humbleness, frugality and economy in costs. It is of great importance that a special cemetery be dedicated absolutely for the use of Muslims. In Turkey, Muslims may not be buried in the cemeteries of non-Muslims, nor can non-Muslims be buried in a Muslim cemetery.

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cemetery alongside with Muslims, caused by apparent non-Christian symbols like the crescent and the cross.

The coffin is carried to the cemetery by a long fleet. Graves are oblong in shape and designed to accommodate only one person. The deceased is buried in only the covered not the coffin. The body is laid on its right shoulder facing the direction of Mecca. The tombstone is on the head's side. (Tugrul 1973, 290) Those who enter the body of the deceased in the grave say: "In the name of Allah and in the faith of the Messenger of Allah".

Death is a natural event. But according to Islamic theology, it is God's fact. And so there are some religious attitudes, like turning to Mecca. In fact, when Muslims pray, they turn to Mecca. I think people fictionalize that the deceased takes part in the prayer under the sod.

It is possible that putting the part of money or earth on the jaw or hand of death in the some area in Turkey. (Ciblak 2002, 606-608) In fact, there is no Islamic teaching of putting food, water, or money around the grave that will benefit the deceased. But some people are putting water, money and earth on the jaw of death. It is inherited from ancient, pre-Islamic Turkish culture as ancestral cult.

The tradition of putting coins or earth on the jaw or hand of the dead is an old Turkish custom. According to these, money or earth is a token he or she will prosperous and happy in the Hereafter or the next life.

The Imam's prayer is signifying the end of the burial. Afterwards, a religious attendant reads passages from the Qur'an. After reading passages from Qur'an, people start to pray, pronouncing the deceased's name and pleading for forgiveness for his/her in sin. The name of deceased's mother is pronounced with highlight, as only the mother can be known with certainty in early ages.

As most of women are generally unprepared, they hurriedly cover their heads on the burial time. This tradition is very commonly used among the Jews, Christian and Muslim people.

The deceased is remembered on the seventh and fifty-second days of his death with Islamic readings, like *mawlid*. Sometimes big funerary meals of *halwah* are offered to the poor and surrounding people. (Gerçel 2001, 297-298)

This custom is very widespread in the world, like in the Asian-American culture. Asian-Americans may follow Buddhist, Confucian, or Taoist practices regarding death, with some elements of Christian traditions. They have a gathering of family and friends for a meal after the funeral shows respect for the spirit of the deceased, and gives thanks to those who came to pay their respect.

At the time of funeral or the meal after the funeral his/her relatives give away some money to poor and charity institutions. Alike, for the Jewish people, donations to charities at the time of the funeral are an ancient custom. (Lamm 1969, 76)

#### **AFTER DEATH CUSTOMS**

The people consider that funeral ceremony a final service that they can do for their relatives and an opportunity to remember that their own existence here on earth is brief.

In the end of dig in, the people left the burial place except Muslim preacher (hoca). He prayed. According to Islamic theology, that upon burial the deceased is visited in the grave for questioning by two angels. Based on this questioning, the deceased is determined to be a believer or unbeliever. They ask the questions of "Who is your God", "Who is your Prophet" and "What is your religion?" to a person put in the grave. For believers, the grave expands "as far as the eye can reach" and contains all the comforts of a heavenly garden. For unbelievers, the grave contracts "so that the deceased's ribs are piled upon one another" and a door is opened to allow heat and smoke from *Gehenna* (hell) to enter the grave. The grave remains expanded or contracted until the Day of Resurrection. (Gazzali 1999, 136-139; Welch 1977, 194)

When the dead is buried, buried as lifeless. But the Muslim preacher asks some information to deceased. And according to Islamic theology two angels ask some questions. If the dead answers correctly the grave is become wide, for the unbelievers the grave contracts.

These sentences indicate that there is an alive person, who understands of the words, speeches and conscious in the grave. But it is not possible that the dead has a conscious. We understand that these attitudes are from old-Turkish custom. At the same time these are to some extend based on Islamic principles. Certainly there is no explanation on this problem in the Qur'an. Islamic theologians have different comments on this topic.

It appears that these ceremonies are for the people who stay around the grave, not for the deceased. Because of the strong influence of death on the people, they may be drawing a lesson from funeral customs.

According to Islamic theology, after the funeral procession to the grave site, when the coffin is put into the earth, God commands the spirit to return to its body. Some theologians claim that, God puts spirit into the body for the questioning of the grave, others that the spirit is questioned without the body. From the perspective of Islamic theology, the questioning in the grave is directly to the issue of justice as an attribute of the divine. Both are inseparable from the whole issue of the punishment of the tomb. (Dalkilic 2004, 282)

According to Islamic theologians, when the soul has left the body it goes to the world of souls. Some people believe that soul come back to body for the questions after burying. In fact the soul does not need a place to come back to grave. At the same time some people die at war or on the water. Or some people's bodies are burned. So, in such cases, there is no one in the grave. In fact the imaginations of people about the grave are contrary to the facts. The grave is a symbol for the after state of the death.

Many in the history of Islamic thought, of course, have denied any possibility of the idea of punishment in the grave was generally refuted by the *Mu'tazila* on the basis of such rational arguments. (Kadi Abdulcebbar 1988, 730) For some groups such as the *Ikhwan al-Safa*, the vast majority of the philosophers and many *Shi'a*, the whole idea of punishment in the grave is unacceptable for it is predicated on the notion that the soul is reunited with the body and the total individual thus suffers. For the great majority of Muslims, however, the punishment of the grave has been a reality, affirmed in the creeds and writings of the *Ahl al-Sunna*, and specified in *hadiths* of strong and not-so-strong chains of transmission. (Gazzali 1999, 104)

The Qur'an itself several times mentions, although certainly not in detail, the idea of some kind of punishment in the grave. But the idea most probably partly stems from the Qur'an and partly has been borrowed from earlier Semitic traditions. (Smith-Yazbeck 2002, 41)

The punishment of the grave is opposite of the divine justice because human must answer for the behaviors in the world and they render an account of the worldly behaviors and there is less likely the punishment of grave according to divine justice.

In spite of different arguments that exist between the Islamic sects, Turkish people usually pray and donate for the deceased in order that he/she is saved from punishment in the grave.

In Turkey, there are certain occasions in which dead person is commemorated through religious ceremony and meal. First of all is the third day ceremony, death *halwa*, seventh day ceremony, the fourth day ceremony, the fifty-second day ceremony and anniversary of dead person. (Unal 1996, 161-162; Aladag 2007) According to popular understandings the soul of deceased visits home until the corpse is buried, or in forty days after the death or on holy days and in holy months. According to the belief, the soul asks for *dua* for itself. Although it is not very often, on the third and seventh days dead person is also remembered in a certain way. (Guzelbey 1985, 316) In fact, such days with respect to certain numbers have become important due to religious, magical and traditional qualifications brought

therein; and gradually a number of customs have been inserted into their structure as a main element.

The days of third, seventh, fortieth and fifty-second are accepted as sacred days in popular culture. Similarly, these days are sacred days for the old Turkish pre-Islamic period. (Yilmaz 2007, 80-82)

There are some different days like, the fifty-second day for the Muslim Turkish and the twentieth day for the pre-Islamic Turkish period. But, in general, on some important days a soul visits home and relatives. It is an ancestral cult. One may claim that people brought some of their old traditions to Islamic practices. By the same token, there are other customs and traditions, like the meal of dead person, brought to Muslims' life.

Another practice performed after burial ceremony is the meal of dead person. This meal which consists of a significant share of traditions and beliefs related with death has been accenting that dead person is also in need of eating and drinking in the other world along with other things on the one part, and revealing the fact that transition ceremonies accompanying the event of death is necessary among people, on the other hand. In order that farewell of dead person to the other world is to be full and valid, along with religious rules and procedures, traditional incidents should also be satisfied. Otherwise, it is believed that soul of dead person would disturb his relatives who are alive. (Inan 1995, 189-190; Selcuk 2003, 174)

The belief of the dead's soul visited his/her relatives who are alive and disturb them, is an ancestral cults. (Ocak 2000, 62) This ancestral cult is very old and deep-rooted in Turkish culture, and very widespread in the Asian popular cultures like the Chinese culture. (Lung 2003, 33-36; Lee-Zhu 2001)

Another custom on death is the lamentation. It has an important place in the after-burial ceremonies. In general, women put into words regrettable cries. They start to sing laudations by remembering the good deeds of the departed, as was done in the pre-Islamic times. The difference between the pre-Islamic and present day lamentation is the roles of the persons. (Unal 2005, 80; Ersoy 2002) While the men sung eulogies in pre-Islamic ceremonies, these are now offered especially by the women. The reason could be the new outdoor role of men in their capacity as breadwinners of the family, and the need to remain. If so, this shows the influence of Islam.

As a matter of fact, especially in the provincials in the Turkey, like Jewish customs, newborn babies may be named after the deceased. Again majority of the people in the world, like Asian, America, European, and Jewish, Christian and Muslim are covering the casket of deceased with a white cloth.

Some old ancestral traditions and cultures continued after the conversion of Turks to Islam. These traditions and customs are basically consisting of certain

elements from Shamanism and local cultures. Accordingly, many of the funeral customs are mixed of pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions. Despite the non-existence of any theological text, people are committed to believe some old customs such as the Islamic statement that soul of the dead body visits the relatives.

At the same time, many of the customs have been sustained in the provincial people. Urban people, however, are not interested in these traditions. It is generally used as an example of the impact of the globalization on the Turkish people. Some traditions are affected by globalization like visiting deceased on the religious holidays, such as Ramadan and the Sacrifice festivals. This convention could not be saved despite all the efforts deployed by the Muslim preacher. At the same time some customs are not accepted by the Muslim scholars, like tying clothes around the shrines.

### **TOMBS**

Tombs are monuments of great value for studying of the time, social relations, life, and circumstances in which they were made. According to Roux tombstones are very important during the Turkish history. (Roux 1999, 188) Tombs were built above “mezar” of extremely important, religious and popular people. Tombstones are very beautiful examples expressing Turkish people’s rich endogenous world with their inwardness features and with inscriptions cut thereon. Traditions, customs, social structure of the community have been seen on all of these tombstones. There are wishes, desires etc. Transitoriness of the world has been also realized through epitaphs on these tombstones. These tombstones had been called as “Balbal” by ancient Turks. “Balbal” had shown heroism of the ancient Turks. Tombstones of today however have been revealing philosophy of life, feeling and thought, point of view on the universe, belief, global view of the same nation. (Boyraz 2003, 46-50)

It has been established that the balbals were erected by Turks and that they were held to represent the dead man’s foe; but the source of the custom remains as obscure as ever, as do the stylistic development to the balbals, the chronology of the various types to be met with, and their interrelation with other forms of human figural representation to be found in the same steppes. There has not yet even been a provisional survey, which would have been perfectly possible by now; nor do we have a comparative study of the Orkhon monuments, which were erected with the help of Chinese craftsmen, with other burial site where balbals have been found. According to Barthold, the word balbal, although it occurs apparently, in the Yenisei inscriptions as well as those from the Orkhon, is now considered to be non-Turkish in origin and that a Chinese source is being sought for it. (Barthold 1970, 197-198)

Many tombstones today are gone, so cannot precisely say how they looked, and the appearance of some tombstones has been changed during the reconstruction.

Tombstones are the beautiful examples of products of language and architectural. They are treasury as folkloristic, philosophical and religious. In brief, tombstones are pages of history, pages of literature coming from the past. Remembrance pages of history can also be seen the history on them. (Boyras 2003)

Nowadays, many of the tombstones cannot also resist against time; they are losing their sovereignty in the war against pollutions, disappearing in the nature. Race of contemporary civilization has been eliminating old graves by considering them even ancient.

The alteration in the cemetery culture of Ottoman took place after the nineteenth century. In the contemporary Turkey, cemeteries are located far from cities either because of economical reasons or city planning doctrines. As is the case with almost all municipally owned cemeteries, there are wash rooms, mosques, a large area for funeral praying, and a marble used as a table on which the coffin is provisionally placed kept ready for the funeral prayer.

People visit tombs after death. Especially they visit their deceased on the religious holidays, like Ramadan and the Sacrifice festivals. Tombs are divided into two groups in Turkey: Public cemetery (*mezarlık*) and sacred person's tombs (*turbe*). People visit sacred tombs in order to venerate the sepulcher, sacrifice an animal, make a vow or wish for good things by tying clothes around the shrines, donate money, recite the Qur'an and *mawlid* ceremony, preach sermons, burn candles on the grave stones etc.(Eroz 1985, 67)

For the proprietor of the tombs, shrines or sanctuaries where people idolize and perform certain prevention rituals around of it as was mentioned beyond, various names, mostly Islamic, such as *waly*, *sheikh*, *mubaraq*, *pir*, *shahid*, *eren*, *ermish*, *dede*, *baba*, *abdal* are given and many extraordinary stories, mythology and miracles, which were seen in the pre Islamic Turkish traditions, are attributed. (Gunay 1996, 10-11) But we can easily see that those appellations and rituals are possible to view in many countries around the world, as Muslim, Christian and Jews, that all can called as saint cults.

Islam occasions many manifestations of belief in communication between the living and the dead, as demonstrated repeatedly in the foregoing materials. The dead are reported in a variety of ways to be cognizant of the living and through the media of dreams and other appearances are often felt to be able to communicate their desires and directives to those still alive on this earth. (Lee 2003, 361-362)

A great number of pious Turkish Muslims, both rural and urban, believe that the dead saints figure actively in the affairs of the living in terms of this world and the next.

There are a lot of saint's tombs in Turkey. One of the most articulate of those customs of visitation of saint tombs is Ayyub Sultan in Istanbul.

The question of visitation of graves of the deceased has been subject to some varying interpretations in the history of Islam and Islamic theology, but on the whole it has been sanctioned and is recommended in the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Certainly it is an ancient and time-honored custom to visit the tombs of loved ones to pray for them, distribute alms in their name, and in general to affirm the memory of the deceased in the mind and heart of the living. As suggested by Ghazali the visitation of graves is a desirable thing, for it instills the remembrance of death and acts as an admonition. To visit the tombs of the righteous in order to obtain blessing and a lesson is desirable likewise. (Gazzali 1999, 112-113) Special visits are made to the tombs of the *walis* to seek some form of intercession, favor, or blessing. This may involve telling the saint about one's problems, asking a particular favor, or simply obtaining blessing from being in the presence of one of God's blessed ones. (Smith-Yazbeck 2002, 186) Saint cults are found in the religions like Jews, Christianity and Buddhism. (Sangent1990) This convention cannot be upheld despite efforts deployed by Muslim preachers

### CONCLUSION

90 % of the population of Turkey is Muslim. The affect of the religion is clearly seen in the Turkish tradition. Death ceremony is an important tradition which is closely related to religion. All religions, especially Islam accepts human being as holy. Therefore, death people are regarded as respected. Human being is made of spirit and body. The feature of human being is coming from his holy spirit. Because of this "holy Spirit", the body of human being is considered as respectable. So, death people are considered that they were alive.

Death ceremony is an important sign of respect to human beings. In such occasions, respect ceremonies are made for both spirit and body. Thus, the title of this study is "The Physical and Spiritual Anatomy of Death in Turkish Culture". In each religion and region, there are some differences in death ceremonies. These differences come from the fact that all religion and region esteem human being in different ways. For this reason, though both are Muslims, the death and funeral customs of Arabs and Turks are different. Those differences arise from local cultures.

In Turkish culture, the source of the death ceremony is mainly composed of Islamic tradition and pre-Islamic culture. Certainly, non-Islamic (and non-Turkish) cultures cannot be ignored here.

However, the influence of the pre-Islamic religion is also seen in some cases during the disposal ceremonies, like burning fire or incense in the room or people lit a fire after the burial ceremony around the burial place or at home in order to prevent disturbing by the souls of others. Yakut Turks who, are still adherents of their pre-Islamic traditions, conserve such customs. For example, to cover the eyes



of the newly dead person with a piece of leather is also observed between the non-Muslim Turks in Siberia. According to their beliefs, a deceased is able to see around him/her and if they do not close the eyes, the dead calls and takes someone it knows. (Kalafat 1990, 61) In South Eastern Anatolia, they cover the dead person's eyes so as not to "stay behind the eye." It means he/she might be worried about the remaining family.

The understanding to stay "behind the eye" is an ancestral cult, as the soul is no affair of this world. It is an unworldly body. The soul's domain is the Hereafter. Consequently, some assume that the soul remains with the physical body for as long as a year after death. A ceremony on days like the first, the seventh and the fortieth after someone's death celebrates this. Such days were also celebrated with various ceremonies by the ancient Turks. The variable is the Islamic statement. Now the Qur'an will be recited in place of the elegy organized in the *yug*.

Turkey is divided to seven regions geographically; Marmara, Black Sea, Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, Southeastern Anatolia, Mediterranean and Aegean Regions. There is little diversity on the death customs among regions in Turkey. Diversity is based in the sects and ethnicity. For example, although Sunni and *Alawi* people are both considered Muslims, their death customs are different. For example, in some religion, *Alawi* people beautified the graves with flowers, vases and glasses. They even build a hearth for the dead person so as to make coffee. (Ornek 1971, 72-74) This manner is one of the commemoratives of the pre-Islamic funeral customs. This custom is available in the Protestant Christians. As a matter of fact, the Sunday, 23 November, in commemoration of the dead is basically the Protestant version of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. It is a day for people to visit cemeteries and decorate graves with flowers vases and glasses. For the *Ahl-i Sunah* (Sunni), which is the sect of the majority of Muslim Turks, Music and flowers, are not encouraged, like Jewish observance. (Lamm 1969)

*The Alawi* community in Turkey cherishes old Turkish traditions. There are predominantly no religious/Islamic implications. But death customs of *Sunnis* affect the religious/Islamic traditions.

Death customs are done for the living people. People must draw a lesson from the death customs. There is no benefit for died person except for *dua* (Pray, supplicate) and good deeds. A Muslim believes in that a person may continue to earn rewards for certain things even after his death. Good deeds, such as perpetual charity, are the ones that Muslims follow as rewards, even while the person is in the grave, such deeds like: useful knowledge, a good child that prays for him/her, a Mosque that he built, teaching Qur'an to another person, a house he built for public use, a water fountain or a river that he rented and made it free for people, or a

charity that he gave during his life while he/she was in good health; all are rewardable even after death. In this respect the Prophet said: "After the death of a person his actions stop, except three things that he leaves behind: First continuous charity; second a knowledge from which some benefit may be obtained; third a virtuous son who makes Dua/pray on his behalf". (Muslim 1992)

Most rituals of the *türbe* are non-theological, like the custom of tying trees. It is called the *hurafa*/superstition. This has no theological basis. Despite of this, all *turbes* are being visited by people in especially the central and eastern provinces of Turkey.

As known that, the relationship between people and nature seems to be still as the foundation of their rituals. For example, there is a custom of the tied of the cloth pieces to the trees of *turba*/shrine in the Turkish culture. According to Gungor it is a kind of beatifications. (Gungor 2002, 777) This tradition has survived to present days. The people see the light of day their needs, like marry, recover and well accepted of pray by God. This is a Shamanistic way. As suggested by Ozel, it is also Chinese way. (Ozel, 337)

As such, shamanism was documented and described by the earliest travelers in the various regions of Siberia and Inner Asia. Later, similar magical-religious phenomena were observed in North and South America, Indonesia, Oceania, and elsewhere. Because of their shared characteristics, there is every reason to study them together with Siberian and Inner Asian shamanism. Generally, shamanism coexists with other forms of magic and religion. (Eliade 1987, 8269-70)

In spite of the Islamic theologians, the death customs continued very richness and alive in Turkish people's modern life as in belief that the death customs are for the human life and his/her deceased. In fact people saw no harm to juxtapose their ancient beliefs and practices with the Islamic elements, since they do not make a distinction between them as Islamic, or non-Islamic. There are effects of globalization.

Culture is not static. It grows out of systematically and encouraged respect for selected customs and habits, like burial customs. Globalization demands some degree of structural changes in the various dimensions of a society. As can be expected, the effects of these structural changes on the normative and value systems of the non-Western societies are most dramatic. Globalization is a standardization of the contents of cultures of the world, moving into the European Community and the United States.

Correlatively to globalization, many of the Muslim Turkish traditions like burial customs have the worst of the significance and attraction. Many people, especially in the Western cities, lack interest in traditions of burial customs. But customs prevail in central and east Turkey.

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