

## FILIPINO MUSLIMS' DEATH RITUALS

According to an article titled "Islam in the Philippines," which was published in *Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People: A Timeline of Philippine History*, the religion was introduced to the Filipinos by early missionaries who traveled to the country for the purpose of teaching and guiding people "to the right path" through Islamic beliefs known as *makhdomin*. Among those missionaries was Rajah Baguinda, a prince from Sumatra who arrived in the Philippines in 1390. He was accompanied by a group of men who also practiced the faith.

Rajah Baguinda eventually settled down in Buwansa (which later became the first capital of Sulu), where he established a Muslim community with his son-in-law, Sharief Hashim. Together they delivered sermons on the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (monotheism) to erase polytheism, animism and idolatry.

Today, Muslim Filipinos or Moros make up five percent of the Philippine population. Many reside in Bangsamoro, a region in the southern part of the Philippines that include the provinces of Basilan, Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Palawan, Sarangani, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay, Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Ih'gan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa and Zamboanga.

The Moros are broken down into ten ethnic subgroups that are differentiated by the language they speak. They are the Maguindanaoans from North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces (these groups make up the majority of Filipino Muslims); the Maranao from Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte; and the Tausug from the island of Sulu. The others are the Banguingui, Samal and Bajau from Sulu; the Yakan of Basilan and Zamboanga del Sur; the Ilanon and Sangirs of Davao; the Melabugnans of southern Palawan; the Jama Mapuns of Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi island.

Filipino Muslims view themselves as having separate identities because of the difference in their languages and political structures, but yet "share the essentials of Islam," specifically through burial rites. Following the death of an individual, the body is washed in order to "physically cleanse the corpse." A cloth is placed on the remains while in the bathing process. This step is followed by water being poured over the body while the cloth is still on it. The method, style and accessories used to wash the remains vary from time to time and place to place.

Once the body has been bathed, it's then wrapped in a onepiece shroud (usually white) called a *kafan*. The main purpose of the cloth is to wrap the body in a respectful manner so that the genitals aren't showing. The style in wrapping the body as well as the material used to cover the corpse also differ from time to time and place to place, but white is mostly the color that's preferred because it signifies simplicity. During the funeral, the community gets together for the *Janazah* prayer, a series of prayers for the forgiveness of the dead, which are held not in a mosque, but in a courtyard or public square. The process is similar to the way the five daily prayers are done, but with no bowing (*Ruku*) and prostrating (*Sujud*). Traditionally funeral prayers are conducted by the imam (prayer leader) who stands in front of the dead facing away from the worshippers; prayers are said in silence.

When burying the dead, the body should be laying sideways with his/her face directly touching the soil while covered in the white cloth, according to Muslim scholar Nagasura T. Madale, Ph.D. Islam prohibits cremation and only allows ground burial. The deceased must be buried facing west, perpendicular to the Qibla (towards Mecca). The body is put into the ground without a casket. The grave must not be sealed with cement. An open space must be allowed so that when it rains, water sips down to the corpse. The grave must also be raised no higher than 12 inches from the ground. Tombstones have to be kept simple; sometimes graves are left unmarked or decorated with a wreath. In the Philippines, a plant known as a kilala is often placed in the middle of a dead person's grave.

The mourning period in Islam lasts for three days. However, it may be extended when late mourners arrive beyond the three-day period, says Loren Halilah Lao, a Maranao Muslim from the Philippines. The grieving period among Muslims calls for them to receive visitors and condolences and to avoid flashy clothing and jewelry. Widows must mourn for four months and 10 days, and must not remarry or leave their home. "Under the Islamic law, the rationale behind this idda or waiting period is to determine paternity in case the widow is pregnant and wishes to contract a new marriage," explains Lao. Crying for the dead is allowed, but must not be expressed through wailing, shrieking, beating one's chest and cheeks or breaking objects.

"The belief of the Muslims is that the louder the cry of the people over the deceased, the more the dead will suffer. Crying should be done in moderation," states Lao.

\*\*Sources: Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People: A Timeline of Philippine History; www.islamawareness.net/Asia/Philippines/ftlipinos.html; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\_funeral; <http://islam.about.com/cs/elderly/a/funerals.htm>.

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