

# The Use of Nine Types of Water in Cleansing the Deceased Local Wisdom of The Malay Community in Tronoh, Perak

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## ABSTRACT

Death holds significant meaning in Malay culture, marking the final phase of life and the first step toward the afterlife. As a sign of respect for the deceased, the Malay community places great emphasis on ensuring the funeral process is conducted flawlessly, adhering to syariah principles and local traditions. One notable practice is the use of nine types of water during the cleansing of the deceased, a custom commonly observed by Muslim undertakers. This study examines the purpose and significance of this practice within the Malay community's funeral rituals in Tronoh, Perak. It draws upon various sources, including online journals, classical Arabic texts, and two key manuscripts: Sabil al-Muhtadin and Bughyah al-Thullab. Interviews and library research further support the analysis, with qualitative data thematically reviewed. The findings highlight variations in the use of the nine types of water and identify four key functions: purifying the deceased, removing spiritual or mythical influences, addressing the effects of sorcery-related practices, and providing spiritual and physical healing for the deceased. This study underscores the interplay between religious obligations and cultural wisdom in Malay funeral traditions.

**Keywords:** local Fiqh, nine types of water, local wisdom, funeral rituals, cleansing of the deceased.

## INTRODUCTION

The Malay community is steeped in tradition and other cultural aspects. This community truly values its tradition which has been passed down from one generation to the next. The Malay community has numerous practices for all types of occasions which include festivals, weddings, birthdays, certain months of the year, and death. This community has a deep respect for these occasions which are considered special which is a reflection of the values of this particular people. Death is also considered a specific event with its own particular funeral rituals. The funeral ritual is also a sign of respect to the deceased and to show moral support to the family of the deceased. Generally, the funeral process is divided into three phases: the suffering phase, the sakaratul maut phase or dying stage, and post-death. The use of the nine types of water is one of the most important processes in the cleansing of the deceased. It is used to ensure the body of the deceased is thoroughly cleansed and purified before the shrouding process. Besides that, the excess water will be used in the healing process of certain ailments such as fever, headache, as well as rejuvenating a dull complexion. Moreover, the excess water will also be used for spiritual cleansing such as cleansing an individual from any spiritual disturbances and badi of the deceased.

These practices are symbolic in their own way. Thus, the main objective of this research is to elaborate on the symbolic uses of the nine types of water from the perspective of local wisdom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Cleansing of the Deceased

The cleansing process of the deceased involves using water to ensure that the deceased is devoid of any excrement, dirt or anything that inhibits water from cleansing the body. In the Malay community, it is of the utmost importance that the deceased is free from any kind of excrement, pus, mucus, dirt, and anything that inhibits water from cleansing the body such as paint, tattoo, bandage, gum and so forth (Al-Shirazi, 1992: Volume 1, pg. 416-418). The use of the nine types of water in the cleansing of the deceased is derived from this particular practice (al-Fatani, t.th.: Volume 2, pg. 10; al-Banjari, t.th.: Volume 2, pg. 70).

### Cleansing of the Deceased from the Fiqh Perspective

According to Muslim scholars, in Islam it is considered as *Fardhu Kifayah* to cleanse and purify the deceased before the burial (Wizarah Auqaf, 1989: Volume 12, pg. 6). Meanwhile, according to Al-Tahtawi (2019: pg. 77-80) it is obligatory to cleanse the deceased based on *Jumhur Ulama* or majority of Islamic scholars. However, some scholars from the *Malikiah* sect have a different opinion on the purpose of this cleansing process either it is to physically purify the deceased or to spiritually cleanse the deceased characterised as *taabbudi* or comprising the definition of clean and *taabbudi*. According to Ibnu al-Arabi al-Maliki the cleansing process comprises the definition of clean and *taabbudi* whereas according to al-Maziri this process is considered as purifying the deceased before meeting the Creator.

Al-Ghaith (2019: pg. 60-69) had introduced the cleansing process of the deceased which has been widely practised in the Arab countries. This cleansing process is almost similar to the one practised in the Malay community except for a few steps related to the local wisdom. The *bidara* water and *camphor* water are used in the cleansing process in the Malay community. The *bidara* water consists of a cup of *bidara* leaves mixed with 4 litres of *mutlak* water while the *camphor* water consists of a cup of two crushed pieces of *camphor* mixed with 4 litres of *mutlak* water. It is recommended that the amount of water used in this cleansing process is based on the physique of the deceased and the amount of dirt on the body.

Al-Hamd (1432H: Volume 3, pg. 13-15) has stated that the *bidara* leaves used in the cleansing process should be crushed first and only then mixed with *mutlak* water. The use of *camphor* water is to embalm the dead body, prevent insects from entering it and most importantly to make the dead body fragrant. According to the Islamic *Sunnah*, the deceased will be cleansed between 3 to 5 times but if there is a need, it can exceed 5 times. Based on an authentic *Hadith*, *camphor* water should be used in the final process of this cleansing ritual to provide the maximum impact. Al-Tawati (2010: Volume 1, pg. 608-609) has introduced 3 types of cleansing based on *hadith*. The first type of cleansing of the deceased involves the following: washing the hands 3 times, cleansing any excrement found, washing the whole body, washing the nose and mouth, washing the teeth, performing *ablution*, washing the head 3 times, washing the right side of the body 3 times and then the left side also 3 times. The second type of cleansing the deceased involves the use of *bidara* leaves and soap which is meant to wash and purify the deceased. The third type of cleansing of the deceased involves the use of *camphor* water and fragrance. If there is a necessity, the *camphor* water and fragrance will be added until the deceased is thoroughly cleansed and purified. According to Al-Shirazi (1992: Volume 1, pg. 416-418) in *al-Muhazzab* stated that during the cleansing stage, the *douching* process should be done to cleanse the body of any excrement. If this *douching* process is not conducted, it is feared that the excrement might accidentally be excreted during the *shrouding* stage and will spoil the *shroud*. After the *douching* process, the cleansing process shall start by washing the head of the deceased first and then followed by the entire body. This is followed by performing *ablution* on the deceased. The cleansing process also involves the washing of the fingers and the teeth. The nails are also washed but not cut. Then it is followed by the washing process which will be done 3 times. Each washing process will begin by washing the head, beard, teeth, the right side of the body, then the right side will be slanted right and left to ensure that the back is also thoroughly washed. It is recommended that the first washing process should

involve the use of the bidara water as it is meant to cleanse the entire body of the deceased. The final cleansing stage will use camphor water meant to preserve the deceased. However, according to Al-Shirazi there is khilaf among ashab al-Shafii pertaining to the issue of whether the bidara water is considered as one wash or otherwise. Abu Ishak stated that the wash is considered as one wash while others do not and believe that the mutlak water should be used between 3 to 5 times or even more depending on the necessity.

However, based on the abovementioned elaboration, the use of the nine types of water was not indicated as part of the practice of the cleansing process of the deceased in the Malay community. Only Al-Tawati (2010) and al-Shirazi (1992) stated that the Malay community have used the nine types of water in the cleansing process of the deceased. Al-Muhazzab by al-Shirazi is the most important reference in the fiqh of the shafii sect as practised by the Malay community. The steps involved in the cleansing process of the deceased are almost similar but the only difference is the number of cleansings involved and the use of natural and local elements.

Saipolbarin et.al. (2018: pg. 280) in his explanation of Arabic lexicology involving the use of camphor water agrees with viewpoint of al-Zahabi who stated that the purpose of camphor water should be used in the last step of the cleansing process as a means to prevent any smelly odour and flies from hovering the dead body, to preserve the deceased and to prevent the decay of the body. This research focuses on the use of camphor water, limits the discussion on lexicology based on the Al-Quran, and does not discuss the aspect of the nine types of water. However, this research does discuss the purpose of camphor water as a significant part of the nine types of water used by the Malay community. Yasnel (2018: pg. 36) stated that the practice of cleansing the deceased in Indonesia does not involve the use of the nine types of water. It is concluded that the cleansing process involves 2 stages: to cleanse and purify the body and to evenly pour the water over the deceased.

### **The Nine Types of Water according to the Classic Fiqh text of the Malay Community**

The nine types of water refer to a process whereby the cleansing of the deceased involves specific steps which include the use of: mutlak water, bidara water, and camphor water. It is referred to as nine types of water as it involves nine times of washes of the deceased. Although it involves nine times it is still in accordance with the sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) which involves three times of washes. The nine types of water as practised by the Malay community is derived from the Sabil al-Mutadin text by Sheikh Arsyad al-Banjari and also the Bughyah al-Thullab text by Sheikh Daud al-Fatani. Both texts have been the main reference by scholars and still widely used by Muslims in the Malay Archipelago. Muslim undertakers also use these texts as their reference and the majority of these undertakers refer to the cleansing process of the deceased as the al-Banjari and al-Fatani cleansing methods. In Sabil al-Muhtadin, the al-Banjari cleansing involves two methods (t.th., Jilid. 2, pg. 70):

“It is understood that the three-time purification process is similar to the nine times purification process and both processes involve two methods. The first method involves the use of bidara water and followed by water only. Also, it is important not to use the same water container used for the bidara water. The bidara water should be used in three washes while water is used only in one wash. This is considered compulsory. Next, the deace is to be washed with the bidara water and then washed with water twice to ensure that any excess of the bidara water is washed off. This process is repeated twice. These nine washes are accounted as two washes with water and the second time is considered as sunat menigai. On the other hand, the second method involves the deceased to be washed with the bidara water and then washed with water once to ensure that any excess of the bidara water is washed off. This process is repeated thrice. In total, the deace will be cleansed six times. This is followed by washing the deace three times with water whereby the first time is considered compulsory, the second and third time is only deemed sunat menigai. The second method is considered the better method than the first one.”

Both methods are proposed by Sheikh Daud al-Fatani in his Bughyah al-Thullab text (t.th: Volume 2, pg. 10):

“It is sunat or highly recommended during the cleansing process of the deace the bidara water be used first and then with water to ensure the excess bidara water is washed off. This is followed by the washing of the deace with khalis water starting from the head to the toes of the deace. This process is done three times. Next, the deace will be washed with bidara water, followed by water to wash off any excess bidara water,

which finally followed by the khalis water. This consists of six washes which is then followed by cleansing the decease with bidara water, followed by water to wash off any excess bidara water, and finally followed by the khalis water. These nine times of cleansing are referred to as nine types of water. The use of khalis water is deemed obligatory while the others are deemed as *sunat menigai*. The action that has the most blessings is to cleanse the decease with bidara water, followed by water to wash off any excess bidara water and this process is repeated twice. These six times are considered *sunat*. The following cleansing stage involves washing the decease with water starting from the head to the toes thrice. The seventh time is considered as *sunat* while the eighth and ninth times are *sunat menigai* just like the sixth time.”

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the available literature which includes online journals, classic Arabic texts, the common practice related to the cleansing process of the deceased, and two manuscripts that will be the primary source of reference. These two manuscripts are *Sabil al-Muhtadin* dan *Bughyah al-Thullab*. This research also utilises the interview method as well as library research. There are 2 interviewees who have 20 years of experience related to the funeral process. The details of the interviews are as follows:

1. Respondent 1 (2024). Interviewed at 10 am on 26th January 2024 at the Tronoh Mosque, Perak.
2. Respondent 2 (2024). Interviewed at 12 noon on 26th January 2024 at the Tronoh Mosque, Perak.

The qualitative data that has been compiled is analysed thematically to produce a summary of the Malay community local wisdom related to the use of the nine types of water used in the cleansing process of the deceased of the Malay community.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### The Nine types of Water Technique in the Current Practice of Cleansing of the Decease

The findings indicated that 2 respondents had a different practice of cleansing of the decease than the one recommended by *al-Banjari* dan *al-Fatani*. Although these respondents did use the nine types of water, there was a slight difference in the cleansing method used by them. The method used by them involves 3 washes of water mixed with *sintok* aimed at eliminating the foul odour, dirt, and to ensure that water will thoroughly cleanse the decease. In this method, the douching process is also done to eliminate all excrement from the dead body. This is followed by washing the top of the head until the toes and the right side of the body is given precedence over the left side. When this is done, the body will have to be tilted slightly to ensure the body is thoroughly cleansed. In total, there are 3 washes which are considered as 1 cleansing process and also the first stage. This is followed by the second stage which will involve 3 washes; just like the first stage. However, the main purpose is to use *mutlak* water to wash the decease. Lastly, the third stage involves 3 washes: the first wash involves the use of rose water mixed with sandalwood, the second wash uses bidara water, and the third wash uses camphor water. The difference is when the undertaker uses a different method whereby *sintok* water is used instead of soap to eliminate all kinds of dirt on the dead body and to purify it. However, nowadays most undertakers use bidara water and camphor water as a means to preserve the dead body in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). However, *al-Fatani* and *al-Banjari* mainly use the bidara water to eliminate all kinds of dirt on the dead body and to purify as well as being in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11).

### The use of the Nine Types of Water according to Local Wisdom

The Malay community puts great importance upon all aspects of life. The holy Al-Quran, al-Sunnah as well as the guidance from religious scholars have become their reference in life. In the matter of funeral proceedings, the holy Al-Quran, al-Sunnah, the *ijtihad* of religious scholars as well as the local wisdom have become the main sources of guidance. The current cleansing process of the decease is in line with the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). As in the case of *Ummu Atiyyah* and the women who were involved in the cleansing process of the child of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) that had passed away:

Wash the body three to 5 times, or even more than 5 times, if necessary, with water mixed with bidara leaves while the last wash must involve the use of camphor water.

(HR. Bukhari, no. 1253; Muslim, no. 959)

The above-mentioned hadith is the main reference for the undertakers of the Malay community. In the cleansing process of the decease, the main items used are mutlak water, camphor and bidara. The cleansing methods are often derived from the classic texts of fiqh that relate to the above-mentioned hadith. The religious scholars have unanimously decided that the cleansing process of the decease is considered as complete once the following are done: the intention is made, the elimination of dirt from the dead body, and the thorough washing of the decease. However, there are a few sunat or non-compulsory actions such as washing the deceased in an odd number, cleansing the teeth of the decease, praying, using bidara leaves and camphor, scenting the decease to eliminate any foul odour in ihram, and performing ablution on the decease prior to washing the body. The nine types of water play a significant role in the Malay community due to its function and purpose. The main purpose of introducing the use of the nine types of water by the religious scholars is to ensure that the decease has been thoroughly cleansed off any undesirable elements and dirt before the shrouding process and prayers for the deceased are performed. Thus, the decease is cleansed and purified. The main function that is characterised by local wisdom is the steps involved in the cleansing process of the decease and the specific functions of the bidara and the other above-mentioned elements. The undertakers have perfectly followed the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in this matter which made it more widely accepted by the local community (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11).

The practice highly recommended by al-Fatani and al-Banjari is when the bidara water is used in the initial step of the cleansing process of the decease, followed by washing the body with mutlak water, and this process is repeated. This practice is the easiest method as the preparation of the bath water will use a different container. In the past, water had to be carried in buckets as there was no modern piping system like the present. In addition, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also highly recommended the use of bidara leaves for menstruating women as these leaves will refresh and cleanse the body. This is narrated in the following hadith:

From Syukbah dari Ibrahim bin al-Muhajir he said: 'I heard Safiyyah was told by Aisyah that Asmak had asked Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) about bathing for women after their menstruation period is over. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "You need to take water and bidara leaves. Use them to cleanse and purify yourself. Pour the water onto your head while gently massaging it into the scalp. Then pour the water to the entire body and use cotton scented with fragrance to cleanse the body. Asmak asked; 'How do I wash it?' Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Subhan Allah, wash with it". Then Aishah said: 'You must eliminate all excess blood with cotton'. And she asked Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) about the junub bath. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "One needs to use water to cleanse and purify oneself with it. Then pour some water on the head while gently massaging the scalp until it is absorbed. Finally, pour water onto the body." Aisyah said; 'The best of women are the Ansar women as they are not shy to ask questions related to religion.'

(HR. Muslim, no. 332; Ahmad, 6/149)

The Malay community has been using the bidara leaves in line with the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Bidara leaves also possess antipyretic properties to reduce fever and as a painkiller while also possessing antioxidant and antibacterial properties and can be used as soap and beauty and health product (Ekanursyahfitri, 2017: pg. 10; Fauziah, 2016: pg. 2; Samirana et. al, 2017: pg. 18; Nandang et. al., 2018: pg. 11). Besides that, the bidara leaves also moisturise the skin (Yusri et. al., 2017: pg. 75) and are able to refresh the dead body which will ensure that it is thoroughly cleansed and fresh before the cleansing process which involves the use of the mutlak water three times. The nine types of water used by the Malay community has a symbolic purpose intending to break any spiritual connection to any type of black magic or supernatural elements widely practised by the community in the past. There are 9 types of black magic namely: sorcery to cause a rift in a marriage and to make a wife hate her husband; sorcery to make someone fall in love using a love potion, sorcery to make someone appear desirable to the opposite gender such as susuk, sorcery to cause insanity and hallucination; sorcery to cause depression and feeling suicidal; sorcery to cause impotency among men and unexplained

bloating of the stomach, sorcery to make someone go to a certain place; sorcery to cause bleeding such as santau; and sorcery to destroy an upcoming nuptial by making the soon-to-be wedded couple unable to answer during the nuptial process (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11).

The excess water from the nine types of water used by the undertaker is used by people practising black magic. Most people practising in black magic will use items like the shroud from the decease, the soil from the grave, and the excess water from the cleansing process of the decease. However, in the use of nine types of water, the bidara leaves are used to eliminate the dirt from the dead body. People involved in sorcery or black magic will try to obtain the excess bidara water to use it for evil purposes. Therefore, it is crucial that mutlak water be poured over to eliminate all traces of the excess bidara water. The excess water of the nine types of water is considered to possess healing powers such as: to help grieving family members overcome depression over the demise of their loved ones, to cure a person of high fever, skin diseases, headaches, freckles and leg pain. The excess water will be used to wash the affected area and to bathe the person afflicted with the disease (Mayasari, 2014).

## DISCUSSION

From the discussion of the nine types of water, it can be deduced that there are 4 main functions of these 9 types of water. The main function is to wash and purify the decease with the use of bidara leaves, sandalwood and sintok roots. Moreover, this is in line with the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Malay community have used the bidara water as it contains certain properties such as antipyretic, antibacterial and antioxidant. The use of bidara water has been widely used among the Malay community. Moreover, the local wisdom also highly recommends the use of the sintok root and powdered sandalwood to complement the use of bidara water. Sintok root is mainly use as it will eliminate the dirt from the decease while aiming to rehydrate and reinvigorate the skin of the decease. However, the powdered sandalwood is mainly use to prevent any insect from entering the cavity of the dead body and to stop any bleeding of the decease due to a serious injury prior to death. In certain areas particularly islands or any place where it is nearly impossible to procure any bidara leaves, henna leaves are used instead. In Sabah, coconut milk is used to replace the bidara water as the former has the same purpose as the latter. Moreover, coconut milk is also used to eliminate the dirt from the decease. Besides that, henna leaves are also used to stop any existing bleeding and pus oozing from the dead body. It is important to note that the use of sintok wood and sandalwood water used in the funeral process by the Malay community do not contradict Islam and the holy Al-Quran as they are not prohibited as stated in the translation below (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11):

‘And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all, from Himself; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect’

(al-Saathiya: 13)

‘Do you not see that Allah has made what is in the heavens and what is in the earth subservient to you, and made complete to you His favours outwardly and inwardly? And among men is he who disputes in respect of Allah though having no knowledge nor guidance, nor a book giving light.

(Lukman: 20)

‘And what He has created in the earth of varied hues most surely there is a sign in this for a people who are mindful.’

(al-Nahl: 13)

The use of other natural elements besides the bidara leaves in the cleansing process of the decease have also been widely practised. The purpose of using them is to eliminate the foul odour of the dead body, to stop any existing bleeding and the oozing of pus while preventing insects from hovering and entering the cavities of the decease. The use of bidara leaves has become the local uruf or local custom. In addition, since the use of bidara leaves, sandalwood, coconut milk and sintom root are in no way in contradiction with Islamic teachings, it is

permissible and thus it is deemed as uruf sahiih. In the matter of using henna leaves, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a Hadith has mentioned the use of these leaves for its healing properties as stated below (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11):

‘From Salma Ibn Rafi’, by the master Ubaidullah, that his grandmother Ummu Salma Rafi, maula the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: ‘Whenever the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had an injury, the Prophet (pbuh) will apply henna on the afflicted part.’

(HR. Ibnu Majah, no. 3505)

The second function of the nine types of water has a more symbolic purpose in curing spiritual ailments of the decease. The cleansing process using the nine types of water is based on the Sunnah and several verses of the holy Al-Quran is meant to eliminate whatever spiritual practices of the decease. In addition, it is a common practice among the Malay community to use the bidara water in the ruqyah process. In this particular process, the person afflicted by a certain ailment will be cleansed with water mixed with bidara meant to cure the person in question. However, the main purpose of using the bidara water in cleansing the decease is to stop any prior agreement that the decease may have made with an evil entity to ensure that the latter will stop disturbing the family of the decease upon his demise (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11).

Thirdly, the decease will be cleansed with bidara water and mudlark water on an alternate basis as the mudlark water will eliminate the excess bidara water in the soil. This is important as the ones practicing black magic will try to get this bidara water that has been mixed with the dirt from the decease to use this water for an evil purpose in black magic. Generally, the ones who practice black magic in the Malay community will often use all kinds of dirt particularly from the shroud of the corpse. The fourth, is the use of the excess water from the nine types of water for the purpose of healing ailments affecting the family members or anyone in need. The family members of the decease will use this excess water to wash themselves to ensure that they do not miss or grieve over the decease. On the other hand, it is highly recommended that the undertaker or anyone that has been affected by the Badi of the decease use this excess water. In addition, another use of this excess water is to be used to wipe and wash the affected parts of an ill person as it is believed to possess curative powers (Muhammad Yusri, 2024:pg 1-11).

## CONCLUSION

This research emphasised on the relationship between the four kinds of local wisdom and the use of the nine types of water in the cleansing process of the decease. The philosophy and symbolism about the nine types of water have been thoroughly explained. It has also been widely practised by the local community in Tronoh, Perak. It is recommended that future research be conducted on a larger number of respondents from various states because of the different cultures and practices of each state.

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## Interviews

1. Respondent 1 (2024). Interviewed at 10 am on 26th January 2024 at the Tronoh Mosque, Perak.
2. Respondent 2 (2024). Interviewed at 12 noon on 26th January 2024 at the Tronoh Mosque, Perak.