

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís

Perhaps the most vital hallmark of Baha'i life is the signal responsibility adherents have to independently examine issues where no specific guidance is offered and derive suitable answers or solutions informed by this search. Such is the case with questions raised by advance directives.

While our Writings are quite specific regarding burial issues (such as no embalming or cremation, and the body should be buried no more than an hour's travel distance from where the death occurred), similar sources do not determine the choices we make while living:

It is neither possible nor desirable...to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfill his true mission in life...he will pattern his life according to his Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations....Therefore, every believer must continually study the sacred Writings...striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine Guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.

From a letter dated 17 October 1968 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

Specific proscriptions surrounding burial and death do not, however mean that Baha'is harbor any particular view when approaching advance directives. The Baha'i teachings firmly establish the intrinsic agreement between science and religion, so there is nothing to contravene any individual from leaving any or all parts of his or her body for research or transplant purposes – quite the contrary. A letter from Shoghi Effendi [the Guardian of the Faith] dated September 6th 1946, said "There is nothing in the teachings which would forbid a Baha'i to bequeath his eyes to another person or for a hospital; on the contrary it seems a noble thing to do."

We have not come across anything specific in the writings on transplants of hearts and other organs or regarding the time of death, and the Universal House of Justice [the elected spiritual governing body] does not wish to make any statements on these points at this time.

From a letter dated 23 September written by the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

And

“As to the Baha'i viewpoint on the removal of withholding of life support in medical cases where intervention prolongs life in disabling illnesses, nothing has been found in the Sacred Text specifically on this matter. In such cases decisions must be left to those responsible, including the patients.”

From a letter dated 31 May 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

So, while much regarding the advance directives is left to an individual's conscience, a caution all Baha'is would seek in instances when organ or body donations did occur is that when dissection occurs, the body must be accorded appropriate respect: “keep in mind that since the body was once the temple of the spirit it must be treated with respect even though there is no further connection between the two.”

From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer,
March 18, 1975