

INFORMATION PAPER  
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3. Guidelines by Religion or Denomination:

**a. Roman Catholic:**

Sacred Scriptures are handled with dignity. When it comes to a point where it is damaged beyond use, i.e. torn pages, pages missing, etc., it, being blessed, is to be disposed of with dignity. It should be burned and then the ashes buried.

**b. Protestant:**

Protestant theology does not place sacredness in the page and ink of texts; therefore, there is no doctrine or guideline across denominations. Most denominations have not even considered the question. However, the value of certain Bibles comes from their owner (a historically significant figure or revered family member) or because of genealogical records that they contain. The following is representative but not exhaustive:

**(1) Methodist:**

The United Methodist Book of Worship, which contains official rituals and liturgy, includes consecrations for new buildings, the pulpit, baptismal font and Lord's table. However, there isn't a service for disposal of these types of items should they be replaced. The General Board of Discipleship offers a "Service for Disposal of Old Bibles or Devotional Books" – it is a service and not a policy or doctrine

**(2) Latter Day Saints (LOS):**

A search through many years of the Church Handbook of Instructions (these are books with guidelines for local leaders) and no directive in the disposal of religious texts and/or artefacts was found.

**(3) Presbyterian:**

There is no doctrine or guideline other than treating the book with respect

**(4) Assembly of God:**

There is no official Assembly of God policy on this [Glenn Gohr, the Assemblies of God Director of Archives]

**c. Orthodox:**

Old religious books, Bibles, icons, vestments, etc. that are no longer serviceable are generally burned or buried in Orthodox Christian custom. Orthodox clergy are aware of how to dispose of such items properly. Only an Orthodox priest should dispose of unserviceable Communion items – chalices, antimensia, spoon, etc. There are really no written guidelines in this regard – it's just what's done.

**d. Jewish:**

All three traditions agree that sacred books and religious items (prayer shawls, torah scrolls, etc) are buried if they cannot be repaired and are completely unserviceable. This is done normally once a year in a plot opened for such a purpose at a local Jewish Cemetery. In locations that are not near any Jewish community, items should be sent to a local Jewish community or one of the endorsing agents for disposal.

In a combat situation, if they couldn't be shipped somewhere, then they should be buried where they are.

**e. Hindu:**

Deities and other sacred items such as *sastras* (scriptures) are considered as non-different from the Lord. Old remnants are technically called *nirma/yam* or *nirma/ya prasadam* (mercy). They are disposed of in reverential ways usually by immersion in clean water (river, lake, sea), burial (in a clean place) or burning.

Note that items that are still usable need not be destroyed or discarded. They can be sent to the next of kin in the case of belonging to a deceased Vaisnava/Hindu or cremated with them. They can be given to other Vaisnavas/Hindus if the next of kin does not want them. Sacred books or pictures that are damaged or destroyed in some way, rosaries (*japa-ma/a*) that are broken and cannot be restrung, old, worn or broken sacred threads, sacred flowers or foodstuffs that are stale or old (unless the flowers are specifically dried and can be preserved) should be disposed of in the above ways.

In the case of a Deity (sacred icon) that is physically damaged - with the exception of sacred *sila* (stones) - one first of all does the ritual of *visarjanam* or praying to the Lord to leave the Deity. There does not seem to be any specific procedure for immersing, burning or burying items except for Deities (icons):

"If one has to immerse a Deity then he should first take off all cloth and ornaments and immerse the Deity within one's heart, after displaying the *visarjani mudra* (hand gesture). O my Lord, I have worshiped You and Goddess Laksmi (the Lord's divine consort) with devotion. O husband of Kamala (the Lord's divine consort), please enter my heart and rest there.

"After praying in this way, one should offer (ornamental ritualistic) shoes to the Lord and then immerse Him (in water), along with His associates (this refers to other attendant Deities), after performing the appropriate *pranayama* (preliminary breath control) and *sadanga nyasa* (preliminary ritualistic purificatory hand gestures) and displaying the *visarjani mudra* (hand gesture)."

**f. Buddhist.**

There is no set or official way of how to dispose of sacred Buddhist materials. Think each tradition or culture has their prescribed ways of how to dispose of such sacred material. If a Buddhist priest or Buddhist lay person is available, they can recite a Buddhist scripture (sutra) in front of the items to be disposed of (as an expression of gratitude) and then dispose of them. In many instances, the material is usually burned and then the ashes are placed in the ground. However, if it is not possible to burn the material, you can place the items in a bag (so that they will not be seen by others) and then place it in the dumpster for recycling if recyclable OR place in the dumpster for throwing away. Everyone realizes the sacredness of the texts and teachings BUT sometimes we must deal with these items in a practical manner, especially when it comes to disposing of old and unusable items.

**g. Muslim.**

With regards to getting rid of unwanted religious and Islamic literature, the great classical Hanafi jurist (faqih), Imam al-Haskafi (Allah have mercy on him) states:

"Books that are no longer benefited from, one should wipe away the names of Allah, His Angels, and His Messengers, and burn the rest. There is also nothing wrong with casting them into a flowing river as they are (i.e. without wiping away those names) or burying them, and this (burying them) is better." (Radd al-Muhtar ala al-Durr al-Mukhtar, 5/271)

Thus, if one decides to dispose of religious literature, the best thing would be to bury it by wrapping it in something pure first, in a place where people would not normally walk. It would also be permitted to tie the books and papers with something heavy and cast them into a flowing river. Alternatively, the literature may be burnt, but in this case, only after erasing the names of Allah, His Angels and His Messengers.

Disposing of Unusable Copies of the Qur'an

## APPENDIX A

As far as old and unusable copies of the Qur'an are concerned, it is not permitted to burn them unless there is no other way to dispose of them. The great Hanafi Imam, Imam Ibn Abidin (may Allah have mercy on him) states:

"If a copy of the Mushaf (qur'an) becomes old and it is difficult to read from it, it should not be burnt in fire. This is what Imam Muhammad (m: student of Imam Abu Hanifa) pointed out and this is what we take. It will not be disliked to bury it. It should be wrapped in a pure cloth, and a Lahd grave (m: grave that has a incision in the side wall, customary in hot climate countries where the earth is solid) should be dug, because if a Shiq grave (m: grave with a straight opening, common in cold climate countries due to the earth being soft) is dug and the copy of the Qur'an is buried, it will entail the soil falling on top of the Qur'an which is a form of disrespect, unless a slab is placed as a roof. .. " (Radd al-Muhtar, 5/271)

In light of the above, there are two methods of disposing of an unusable copy of the Qur'an:

- (1) Wrapping it in a pure piece of cloth and burying it respectfully in a place where people (normally) do not walk about. In cold climate countries (such as the UK), one may dig a Shiq grave, but a slab should be placed first and over it the soil.
- (2) Fastening the Qur'an with a heavy object like a stone and then placing it respectfully in flowing water.

If one is able to implement the above two methods, it would not be permitted to burn the copy of the Qur'an. However, if the above two methods are difficult to carry out, then one may burn the Qur'an and bury or drown the resulting ash.

If the pages of the Mushaf have become old and worn out and thus torn due to reciting/reading them much, for example, or it becomes non-conducive to benefit from (that particular copy), or if there are found therein mistakes due to negligence when writing it, or printing and/or publishing errors, all of which cannot be corrected; then it is permitted to bury it without burning it. It is also permitted to burn and then bury it in a place that is far removed from rubbish, trash, paths and walkways. (Doing this) will safeguard it from any type of degradation and debasement, as well as a protection for the Qur'an so that there does not occur any confusion, distortion or dispute due to the spreading and circulation of copies of the Qur'an that have printing and/or publishing errors.