1824 - When is it permissible to turn off the life support systems of a person who is thought to be dead?

the question

Many doctors hesitate to decide the right time to turn off the life support systems of a person who is clinically dead. The doctor has two conflicting feelings: he may think that he is prolonging the agony of the dying person, and that if he turns of fthe life support system, he will be giving the person the relief of dying. On the other hand, however, he fears that by turning the life support systems off, he is depriving the person of the opportunity to continue living. When is it permissible to turn off the life support systems in the case of people who are clinically dead?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

In sharee'ah, a person is considered to be dead and therefore subject to all the rulings concerning the deceased, when either of the two following signs are noted:

1. When his heartbeat and breathing stop completely, and the doctors decide that they cannot be restarted.

2. When all the functions of his brain stop completely, and experienced doctors and specialists state that this is irreversible, and his brain has started to disintegrate.

In these circumstances, it is permissible to turn off life support systems, even if some parts of his body – such as the heart, for example – are still functioning artificially with the help of these machines.