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RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Required Daily Observances

Daily Prayer. Prayer for the Jew evokes a sentiment, a way of relating to God, a mood that is embedded in one's soul. Prayer cannot be confined to moments of inspiration or desperation – praying only when moved by events or need or fear. Judaism attempts to make prayer a natural, comfortable event, a day-to-day happening. Meaningful prayer is communication with God. In this way, God becomes accessible, almost a conversation partner. Not only is an intermediary between man and God undesirable, it is unnecessary. God can be found at home, in prisons, everywhere.

The daily ritual of prayer consists of morning, afternoon, and evening prayers.

- The most appropriate time for the morning prayer, or *shachris*, is from sunrise until about 10:30 a.m. When necessary, morning prayers can be recited from 72 minutes before sunrise until about noon. For the traditional Jew, about 50 minutes are needed for morning prayers. Once prayers begin, no interruptions are permitted until they are concluded.

- Afternoon prayer, or *mincha*, may begin at about 12:30 p.m. until sundown. When necessary, afternoon prayer may be extended until 40 minutes after sundown. No interruptions are permitted. Fifteen minutes are needed for the afternoon prayer.

- The evening prayer, or *maariv*, begins at nightfall and may be said the entire night. No interruptions are permitted. At least 15 minutes are needed for the evening prayer.

Although it is permissible to worship in private, Jewish tradition has always considered public worship preferable; every effort to provide congregational prayer should be made. Be sure to treat requests for congregational prayer in the same manner as any other Chapel program. If time and space are available and equity is taken into consideration, congregational prayer can be scheduled.

Security note: Daily Prayers

- Prayer three times a day is required. Once the prayer has begun, no interruptions are permitted.
- Inmates should ensure that no official activities such as counts are taking place during their prayers. If a recount is called, the prayer must be interrupted until the count has been cleared.

The Prayer Book – *Siddur*. The Jewish prayer book, called a *siddur*, is more than just a book of prayers. It is a repository of the principles of Jewish faith and a testimony of the aspirations and hopes of the Jewish people throughout time. It is a reminder of laughter and gaiety, of grief and sorrow. It provides insights into daily Jewish living as well as festivals and special occasions.



The Torah Scroll. Reading from a sacred parchment scroll constitutes an important part of Sabbath and Festival services. The Torah scroll is also read at Monday and Thursday morning services. Reading from the scroll fortifies a Jew's adherence to the external laws it contains. A Torah scroll is a very sacred item and must be treated with the greatest respect. A secured and dignified area should be assigned for its custody. It

must be kept in a standing position in a cabinet, locker, ark, etc. If no scroll is available, a *Chumash* (Torah in book form) may be used instead.

A Torah scroll is very expensive; the average cost is about \$25,000. In most institutions, it is not possible to have a Torah Scroll, but it is appropriate for the contract rabbi to bring the Torah for special occasions.

Torah Study. Torah study is one of the most important commandments. “And you shall meditate on it by day and by night.” This requires a Jew to set aside personal times for study every day. This daily *mitzvah* of Torah study, often called “learning,” is a dominant feature of Jewish life.

Torah study is not simply a matter of scholarship and academic excellence. Jewish tradition regards Torah study as a form of worship that is crucial to the survival of the Jewish people. Observant Jews will request a number of religious books to enable them to study on a regular basis. Jewish law requires that religious books may be disposed of only by actual burial.

Maimonides, the great Jewish scholar and rabbi of the 12th century, writes: “Every man in Israel has an obligation to study the Torah – whether he is rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old and without vigor. Even if he is poor and needs to beg from door to door, and even if he has a family to support, he is obligated to set aside time by day and by night to study Torah”.

Jewish tradition treats books as though they are living scholars themselves. If a sacred book falls to the ground, Jewish people pick it up tenderly and kiss it.

Tallis. During morning prayers men wear a religious shawl called a *tallis*. The *tallis* has eight-stringed tassels on its four corners, which provide it with religious significance. In addition to the prayer *tallis*, an observant Jew wears at all times a smaller four-cornered garment (*tallis katan*), with similar tassels, under his shirt. It covers the shoulders, chest, and back. Inmates in transit should be permitted to retain these articles.

The history of the prayer shawl goes back to Moses. Because of one man’s disobedience, God commanded the people to put fringes with a thread of blue on their clothes to remind them that they must obey His law (Numbers 15:32-41). From this injunction and through various stages of development comes the modern prayer shawl or *tallis* worn in synagogues today.

Tefillin. The Torah uses concrete everyday objects to remind Jews of their religious and moral obligations and to prod them in the right direction. *Tefillin* provide Jews with a

