



A CORRECTIONAL
INSTITUTION'S
GUIDE TO ISLAMIC
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES



CAIR

Council on American-Islamic Relations

The Council on American-Islamic Relations is a non-profit, membership organization dedicated to presenting an Islamic perspective on public issues.

CAIR Research Center conducts research on the American Muslim experience. Dr. Mohamed Nimer is the director of research and author of CAIR guides to Islamic religious practices.

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"Oh you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be [against] rich or poor; for God can best protect both. Do not follow your desires, lest you swerve from doing justice; and if you distort or decline [to do justice], verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do."

Quran, 4:135

GLOSSARY OF MUSLIM TERMS

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|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Allah</i> | Arabic word for God. |
| <i>Ashura</i> | Name of a religious observance occurs on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim lunar calendar. |
| <i>Eid</i> | A day of festivity, major religious holiday |
| <i>Eid Mubarak</i> | Blessed day of festivity. |
| <i>Ghusl</i> | Showering. |
| <i>Hadith</i> | Sayings, actions, and approvals of the Muhammad. |
| <i>Prophet</i> | Muhammad. |
| <i>Halal</i> | Permissible by Islamic law. |
| <i>Hijab</i> | Clothing Muslim women wear in public. It is generally loose-fitting and includes a head covering. |
| <i>Iftar</i> | Break-the-fast. |
| <i>Ihtilam</i> | Nocturnal emission. |
| <i>Imam</i> | Prayer leader. |
| <i>Jum'ah</i> | Friday (prayer). |
| <i>Khutbah</i> | A sermon. |
| <i>Kufi</i> | A cap worn by some Muslim men. |
| <i>Lialat al-Qadr</i> | Night of Power. |
| <i>Qiblah</i> | The direction of Mecca, which Muslims face during prayer. |
| <i>Qur'an</i> | Islam's scripture, sometimes spelled Koran. |
| <i>Ramadan</i> | The month of fasting. |
| <i>Shahadah</i> | The testimony of faith. |
| <i>Suhoor</i> | Pre-dawn meal. |
| <i>Wudu</i> | Ablution, or ritual washing before prayer. |
| <i>Zabiha</i> | Halal slaughter. |

Most inmates adhering to the Islamic faith, usually do so after incarceration. In federal institutions Muslim inmates account for more than 5 percent of the prison population, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). In state institutions the percentage may be much higher.

The information contained in this booklet is designed to assist chaplains, religious program coordinators, correctional officers, and administrators in formulating and implementing policies that will help create a culturally sensitive environment and facilitate rehabilitation in the country's prisons. It will also serve as a guide to the religiously mandated practices of incarcerated Muslims and their visitors. The publication, however, does not cover the concerns of inmates who follow creeds such as the Nation of Islam, Five Percenters, Moorish Science Temple, Druze, Bahai, and Ahmadiyya.

Correctional facilities typically require inmates interested in attending religious services to declare their faith of choice. Such requirement is usually justified on security grounds. Inmates are not free to move within the confines of prison walls. Correction officers must account for the whereabouts of inmates all the time. Because of the lack of experience many correctional employees have about Islam, they may wonder what Islam and Muslims

are. This publication does not aspire to provide a comprehensive definition of Muslim life but it does attempt to highlight the beliefs and practices relevant to the prison environment.

THE ISLAMIC CREED

For a person to become a Muslim, he or she must pronounce the two statements of faith, called Shahadah: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah (the Arabic word for God), and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger." The Muslim creed is simply a belief in six core elements: The One God; the angels; the divine scriptures, which include the Torah, the Psalms, the Bible, and the Qur'an, as they were originally revealed; the Messengers of God, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, who was the last prophet; the Day of Judgment, when people will receive the reward (Heaven) or punishment (Hell) for their deeds on earth; and supremacy of God's will.

Islam stresses that all believers are brothers and sisters who should work together to promote the good and forbid the evil. Thus, the Muslim concept of group solidarity assumes not only a positive collective will, but also an individual commitment to good deeds. Islam commands morality in personal life as well as justice and equity in relations between people.

To help the believers sustain the disciplined life Islam prescribes, the Qur'an makes obligatory on Muslims a number of practices including prayer, fasting, alms giving and pilgrimage. Hadith collections, which offer the details of the Prophet Muhammad's practice of the faith, consist of his sayings, actions, and approvals. Islamic devotions are meant to increase God-consciousness and to offer the believer an opportunity to periodically reflect upon his or her life with the intention to turn away from wrong doing in favor of the straight path.

DAILY PRAYER

Islam urges "God-consciousness" in the individual's life. To that end, Islam prescribes that believers perform these prayers at the following times each day:

1. Morning Prayer (Fajr) may be offered from break-of-dawn until just before sunrise.
2. Noon Prayer (Zuhr) may be offered from just after midday until afternoon.
3. Afternoon Prayer ('Asr) may be offered from late afternoon until just before sunset.
4. Sunset Prayer (Maghrib) may be offered from sunset until darkness.
5. Night Prayer (Isha) may be offered throughout the night hours.

Muslims usually keep prayer timetables calculated for specific geographic locations. If the facility's imam is unable

to secure printed prayer schedules, they can be easily obtained from local mosques. The time it takes to perform washing and the daily prayer is usually about 15 minutes.

During the prayer time, the Muslim is fully engaged. He or she may not respond to a ringing telephone or conversation. Supervisory staff should not take offense if the worshiper does not answer their call during the prayer. However, in the case of an emergency, the Muslim will respond to an announcement by stopping the prayer immediately.

During the act of worship, in both individual and congregational prayer, specific verses from the Qur'an are recited, and the Muslim will stand, bow and touch the forehead to the ground. Worship may be performed in any quiet, dry, clean place. During the prayers, the worshiper will face in a direction towards Makkah, called qiblah-which is generally northeast in America. Toilets and posters of living images should not be placed in that direction.

Because inmates may be required to pray in their dorms, the layout of cubes should allow enough space for inmates to fulfill the prayer requirement. Should the cost of accommodating such requirements in every cube be prohibitive, institutions may choose to allow Muslim inmates to perform their daily prayer in appropriate spaces in their own dorms. Muslim inmates would appreciate this, because in

normal conditions, according to Hadith texts, the reward for group prayer is multiplied. When such assemblies may cause a clear security concern, however, inmates may be required to perform their prayers individually.

FRIDAY CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

In Islam, Friday is the day for worship, called Jum'ah. This congregational event takes the place of the daily noontime prayer and includes a sermon, called the Khutbah, which is delivered by an imam. All efforts must be made to allow Muslim inmates to attend this service, as it is considered a religious obligation. The length of the service may vary, depending on the assessment of inmates' needs by imams. Some Friday congregational prayers may take about 90 minutes; others may last till the afternoon prayer. This is especially true in winter, when there is only about two-hour difference between the noon and the afternoon prayer times.

Correctional facilities usually assign a specific place for congregational prayer. The room should be free of any pictures of living creatures, although other artistic designs are acceptable. The room must be large enough for the number of worshipers attending the service. Islamic worship does not require total privacy. Muslims usually welcome others who may wish to learn about the faith. For the sake of orderly worship, however, such requests must

be cleared first with the Muslim prayer leader. When attending, visitors should not interrupt the imam during the sermon or walk in front of worshippers during the prayer. Muslim inmates may be required to sign an attendance sheet for each prayer service or study program they attend, just like other inmates do before attending their religious services.

QUR'AN AND OTHER LITERATURE

The Qur'an and Hadith are the most important sources of religious knowledge for Muslims. Inmates read these and other literature in study groups. If a correctional officer has cause to believe the Qur'an may contain any contraband, it may be inspected and, if needed, confiscated. Inspection and confiscation procedures should be made in the presence of the institution's imam or religious coordinator. Should Qur'ans be seized, they must be treated with respect. This way, correctional officers can demonstrate that they separate the actions of the inmate who violated prison rules from a holy scripture cherished by all Muslims. Following such an example of restrained behavior, correctional officers may advance the rehabilitative objective of the prison system. seventh month in the Islamic calendar. The Qur'an states that the Prophet Muhammad was taken by the power of God on a night journey from Mecca to the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. From there, he was then

taken to Heaven, where he received the order to start the practice of the obligatory daily prayer. Gatherings are conducted in which the story of the miraculous journey is told from verses of the Qur'an and the collections of Hadith.

CLOTHING

Islam prescribes that both men and women behave and dress modestly. Muslims believe that men and women should be valued as members of society who must be judged by their wisdom, skills and contribution to community, and not by their physical attributes. There are a number of ways in which Muslims express such teachings:

Kufi

Some Muslims wear a small head covering, called a Kufi. Hadith texts also require that in public men are always to be covered from the navel to the knee.

Hijab

When in public, Muslim women tend to wear loose-fitting, non-revealing clothing. In the presence of unrelated men, Muslim women wear attire known as hijab in observance of commands in the Qur'an and Hadith. This attire, which may vary in style, usually includes covering the hair, neck, and body, except the face and hands. This attire, which may vary in style, usually includes a scarf covering the hair.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

The Qur'an prohibits the consumption of alcohol, pork and pork by-products (such as lard and gelatin). Therefore, practicing Muslims are careful about the food they consume and how it is prepared. Muslims follow certain standards deemed halal (permissible) which are usually referred to as zabiha (halal slaughter) in the preparation of meat and poultry. Muslim inmates should be provided a non-pork diet, and foods containing pork products should be substituted with non-pork items.

MEDICAL ATTENTION

The dietary requirements apply to medical injections and tests when admitting, screening, or treating inmates-especially with regards to materials that contains gelatin extracted from animal sources. Also, alcohol free medications would be preferable to other alternatives.

MUSLIM NAMES

Converts to Islam often adopt Muslim names. Popular names include the name of the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. Common Muslim names may be hyphenated (even though in some spellings the hyphen may be dropped). The first part of the name may be Abd (or Abdul), which means servant. The second part may be

one of the attributes of God, which is mentioned ninety-nine names in the Qur'an. For example, Abdul-Rahim means the Servant of the Most Merciful.

STUDY GROUPS:

Reading the Qur'an and contemplating its meaning is an act of devotion. The Prophet Muhammad said that a Muslim is rewarded for every letter read from the Qur'an. The study of the Qur'an and Hadith is obviously a requirement for the proper practice of the Islamic faith. Weekly classes where the beliefs and practices are taught should be allowed. A Muslim chaplain or a qualified volunteer may teach such classes. Study sessions may normally last two to three hours. Inmates who desire to explore Islam should be allowed to attend study groups or instruction classes to learn about the faith. The study room should be large enough to accommodate the Muslim group, be quiet and clean, and have chairs, tables, and other essential equipment appropriate for study.

PRAYER RUGS

Muslim inmates should be allowed to have prayer rugs to make the daily prayers. A prayer rug is about the size of a large towel. The prayer rug may be searched as needed, but like the Qur'an should be treated with respect-never to be thrown away or stepped on. Inmates may be

issued a clean towel or blanket-weight cloth as a substitute for a rug.

REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

As the prison population grows in religious diversity, administrators of correctional institutions must increase their multicultural awareness. Faith-based rehabilitation programs must be voluntary. Inmates should not be forced to participate in functions designated for adherents of other faith groups. Examples of such devotional practices include confession, singing and playing music, and holding hands with a chaplain preaching or reciting religious material.

DEATH

It is essential that facility imams and family members (or the local mosque, if family members cannot be reached) know immediately when an inmate is dying. A dying Muslim inmate would appreciate help in turning his or her face toward Makkah (northeast in the United States), in accordance with Muslim practice. Muslims wash the body of the dead and bury him or her quickly. Cremation is not permissible and embalming should not be performed unless required by law. Inmates may have specified in their wills where they should be buried and who should handle their funeral and burial. Such requests should be accommodated.

AUTOPSY

Islam prohibits the mutilation of dead bodies because it shows a lack of respect for the dead. Unless required in connection with an investigation of a crime, an autopsy should not be performed.

BODILY SEARCHES

While Muslim females may want to stay fully covered in public, Muslim males will want to keep their bodies covered from the navel to just below the knees, and, when possible, an officer should let a Muslim inmate wrap a towel around himself when going to the shower. Muslim inmates may be searched with the same procedures as other inmates. Whenever possible, however, the officer doing shakedowns, including pat searches, should be of the same gender as the Muslim inmates.

MUSLIM VISITORS

Visitors of Muslim inmates may object to pat and other bodily searches by members of the opposite gender. Also, female visitors wearing hijab or face veil (which is called niqab) would be offended if asked to remove any clothing item before strangers from the opposite gender. However, they would not object to any required search procedure by a female officer in a private room.

MUSLIM COMMUNITY

OUTREACH

For more information and for referrals to appropriate agencies certifying Muslim chaplains, call the Council on American-Islamic Relations at (202) 488-8787. Also, check your local telephone directory for the nearby Islamic center to contact a local imam and a prison outreach officer.

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