

# GUIDELINES FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE



## UNDER THE RELIGIOUS SUPERVISION OF THE ZIEGLER SCHOOL OF RABBINIC STUDIES, AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

Updated January 30, 2013

### INTRODUCTION

Judaism is a millennia-old love affair between God and the Jewish people, taking the form of a *brit* (covenant). As with any committed relationship, proper intention (*kavanah*), while essential, is not sufficient by itself. For the relationship to flourish, our commitment must manifest itself in deeds, in *mitzvot*. Those deeds become commanded precisely to the degree that the relationship is felt to be significant. The more important the relationship, the more eagerly we seek to please the other. Perhaps this is what our tradition alludes to when the Sages teach, “One who loves the mitzvot is not sated with mitzvot (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:23).” God’s commandments are not burdens, nor are they imperious dictates. Instead, they reflect God’s love for us and our love for God. Conservative Judaism recognizes the important role that religious practice plays in the lives of individual Jews<sup>1</sup>. We respond to God and strengthen our connection to God through the mitzvot. But the significance of the mitzvot extends beyond the realm of the sacred. The mitzvot unite the Jewish people around the world and across the ages, forging us into a people with a purpose. Conveying God’s insistence on justice and compassion, the mitzvot also heighten our sensitivity to the aspirations and needs of all humanity and all of God’s creation. These guidelines reflect the religious mandates of Judaism. They are obligatory for students of the Zacharias Frankel College.

You have embarked on a path of learning, leadership, opportunities and responsibilities. We would like to spell out how we understand some of those opportunities as they specifically relate to religious practice. It is our hope that *taamei ha-mitzvot* — the meaning underlying the commandments — will be as important a part of your religious odyssey as the doing of the *mitzvot* themselves. God seeks the service of the mind and heart no less than the service of our hands. For the Zacharias Frankel community, the parameters of halakhic practice are established by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) of the Rabbinical Assembly and the CJLS’s decisions will undoubtedly guide your own practice as well<sup>2</sup>. A comprehensive Conservative guide for halakhic behavior is Rabbi Isaac Klein’s *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, a book that serves as the basis for Conservative /Masorti students’ practice, particularly in areas such as Shabbat and *kashrut*. The Dean, in consultation with the rabbinic leadership of the Rabbinical Assembly, Europe, is the Mara D’Atra for the Frankel College.

## THE GUIDELINES

### SHABBAT & HOLY DAYS

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Shabbat is particularly precious to Jews. In the words of *Pesikta Rabbati*, “Though the days of the week come as couples, the seventh day is alone. Who shall be its mate? Israel (23:6).”

Jews express the sanctity of Shabbat primarily through the performance of the imperative commandments that have for centuries filled Shabbat with ritual and joy, and through the prohibition of *melakhah* (commonly, but inadequately, translated as “work”). Rabbi Klein’s description of halakhic Shabbat observance, found on pages 78 through 94 of the abovementioned work, will prove very helpful to you. He addresses many of the issues concerning carrying, *muqtseh*, *shevut*, traveling, the use of fire, electric lights and automatic devices, the preparation of food, and use of electrical appliances. Driving on Shabbat and Yom Tov should be avoided, except in situations of Pikuach Nefesh, risk or potential risk to life. Wherever at all possible rabbinical students are expected to walk. Where this is not possible the use of public transport with a prepaid ticket may be permitted, especially in places where there are no electronic checks, but local rabbinic authorities and those of the College should be consulted. Walking on Shabbat as a way of experiencing *Oneg Shabbat* at its fullest.

As it does with Shabbat, the Zacharias Frankel College community delights in the observance of the Festivals and other Jewish holy days. Although carrying and cooking (for consumption on the Festival) are permitted on *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, *Sukkot*, *Pesah* and *Shavuot*, all other Shabbat restrictions apply. We observe *Yom Tov Sheni*, even for Israeli students who are in this country temporarily. Details of Festival observance can be found in Klein, pages 96 through 102.

### KASHRUT

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All rabbinical students are *shomrei kashrut*. This includes keeping a kosher home and refraining from eating non-kosher food outside of your home. Regarding eating food outside the home, there is a range of Masorti/Conservative opinions about what constitutes permitted practice, with some prohibiting eating in non-kosher restaurants, some eating only cold foods, and others permitting cooked dairy and *pareve* meals. Students are encouraged to be sensitive to the kashrut practices of other students, and to accommodate those practices when planning communal celebrations. European cities have very differing opportunities for eating kosher food out. Where kosher restaurants are available locally, these should be the first option; where they are not, vegetarian restaurants should be the second choice; where neither exist those students who do eat out should take care to ensure that the ingredients in the food they order are not offensive to kashrut. For a practical guide to kashrut, see Samuel Dresner and Seymour Siegel’s *The Jewish Dietary Laws*. Isaac Klein’s book is also helpful; cf. particularly pages 359-378.

### TEFILLAH

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Tefillah is a central component of our religious and spiritual life. Rabbinical students daven three times a day, and participate in religious life on campus, and in local communities, both on weekdays and on Shabbat. Blessings before and after all meals, as well as other appropriate blessings throughout the day, are important elements of our liturgy as well.

### MIDDOT TOVOT

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Judaism is profoundly concerned not only with ritual and learning, but equally with issues of character, integrity, decency and lovingkindness. Without these inner virtues and acts of caring, ritual observance become offensive to God.<sup>3</sup> As we learn in *Tanna de-Vei Eliyahu*, “Let a person first do good deeds, and then ask God for Torah. Let a person first act as righteous and upright people act, and then ask God for wisdom. Let a person first grasp the way of humility, and then ask God for understanding.” To function as Jews, let alone as Rabbis, *mentschlikhkeit* is an absolute requirement, and compassion, decency, honesty, modesty, kindness, gentleness and openness are prerequisites to religious observance. In the Frankel College community we understand that *mitzvot bein adam le-havero* (interpersonal commandments) are no less commanded than *mitzvot bein adam la-Makom* (ritual commandments). The *halakhot* regarding speech, *tzedakah* and respect for others are all critical to living as religious Jews.

Rabbinical students are perceived as religious leaders and role models from the very beginning of their training, and as such, need to model the values to which our God calls us. In that regard, intentionally hurtful speech, whether in the other person’s presence or behind his or her back, as well as deliberate plagiarism in writing, are incompatible with the values and calling of the rabbinate.

## FAMILY ISSUES

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Rabbinical school is a life-transforming experience. All rabbinical students undergo profound changes during their rabbinic training. For this reason, married students should share as much of their spiritual and communal journey with their spouses and children as possible. Rabbinical training is a time of profound spiritual transformation and growth and it is important to include the spouse (and children) in this process, both for the sake of family relationships, and in preparation for a communal role which will inevitably effect the whole family to a significant degree.

Just as rabbis are models of Jewish observance and values, so too, the rabbinic family often is seen as a standard of Jewish family life within the community. The Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of marriage/consecrated unions between Jews (straight or gay). Dating and/or marriage outside the faith is therefore seen as incompatible with the leadership role of a rabbinical student or rabbi. While we certainly believe that students have a right to make private and personal decisions about a wide variety of issues, living arrangements are inherently public, and therefore require a heightened sensitivity and awareness of the religious messages we communicate.

The Zacharias Frankel College is committed to fostering and maintaining an environment of learning, growth, and observance. Students must avoid all unethical and unprofessional personal conduct. Sexual harassment, which usually involves persons of unequal power, authority, or influence is particularly abhorrent and will incur a response of the utmost seriousness. Members of the Frankel College are encouraged to file complaints about sexual harassment with the appropriate administrative office of the College, or with appropriate law enforcement officials. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated and can result in suspension or expulsion.

The Zacharias Frankel College welcomes students regardless of gender or sexual orientation, in accordance with the teshuvot of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Discriminatory treatment or actions based on factors such as an individual's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religious practices, age, disability or sexual orientation, or other categories protected by law, are offensive and prohibited at the College.

## MIKVEH

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There is a mikveh in Berlin, which is available for all students, male and female, to use for *tohorat ha-mishpakhhah* or for spiritual expressions of renewal. (Mikva'ot are also available in Paris, London and many other European cities.)

## A FINAL WORD

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We not only respect, but also rejoice in the unique gifts and qualities of each of our students. We also understand that each of us has deeply personal ways of expressing our commitment to God and to Jewish tradition. Yet when all is said and done, the Zacharias Frankel College is both a university and a community. For Jews, community is also essential. We learn together and grow in observance as a community that is open, honest, searching and supportive. Communal standards of observance strengthen our own personal commitments and prepare us all for the work we will do as Rabbis. The College's fundamental commitment is to ensuring that the *brit* between God and *Am Yisrael* flourishes.

We are devoted to producing outstanding compassionate, learned, and inspirational models who will be able to add to the greatness of Torah in the challenging decades that lie ahead. We are also committed to our students. The Faculty is there to help and support students and to encourage them in all areas of their personal development. We want to enable them to graduate from the Zecharias Frankel College with the faith, knowledge, and passion that will enable them to commit their lives to the service of God, Torah, and the Jewish people.

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<sup>1</sup> See Elliot N. Dorff, *Mitzvah Means Commandment*, New York, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Summary Index: The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards*, The Rabbinical Assembly, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See the Haftarah selection for Yom Kippur morning.