

# A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER'S GUIDE

to Islamic Religious Practices



## INTRODUCTION

The information contained in this booklet is designed to assist law enforcement professionals when interacting with Muslims. It can also guide you in formulating and implementing policies related to the religiously mandated practices of Muslims.

The information contained in this guide relates to Islam as practiced by a majority of the American Muslim community. There are a number of smaller sects of Islam with variations in theology and practice. Staff at a local Islamic center or mosque can help to clarify the sincerely held religious beliefs of local Muslims.

This guide is designed to be read as need arises. As such some text may seem redundant.



## ISLAM IN BRIEF

Islam is a faith system and comprehensive way of life. Its name comes from the Arabic root word *salaam*, which means peace. The term Islam itself means “to achieve peace through submission to God.” A Muslim is a follower of Islam. Muslims see Islam as a continuation of Judaism and Christianity, the other Abrahamic faiths. Arabic is Islam’s founding language. Prayers are recited in Arabic and many common terms come from the language. The Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him], who Muslims believe is God’s last prophet, provides Muslims with an example of the ethics and best practices of a good life.

### The faith is built on five pillars:

1. **Declaration of belief in a monotheistic God.** Allah is Arabic for “The One God.”
2. **Prayer.** Since prayer is an aspect of Islam you will likely encounter if you interact with Muslims, it is discussed at length below. See Prayer & Practice.
3. **Charity.** After a Muslim has paid their required expenses such as food and shelter, they are mandated to offer approximately 2.5 percent of what remains to charity. *Zakat* is the Arabic term for this charity.
4. **Fasting.** Since fasting is an aspect of Islam you will likely encounter if you interact with Muslims, it is discussed at length below. See Ramadan.
5. **Pilgrimage:** Once during their lifetime those Muslims who can afford to do so and are healthy must make a pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam’s holy city located in present-day Saudi Arabia.

## PRAYER & PRACTICE

Islam prescribes that believers pray five times daily. The goal is to ensure Muslims remain connected to and conscious of their creator. Muslims frequently use a small prayer rug to ensure they are performing their worship on a clean surface.

## TIMING OF THE FIVE DAILY PRAYERS

Prayer times are determined by the position of the sun. Muslims usually keep prayer timetables, easily obtained on the internet, which are calculated for specific geographical locations. Once a prayer's window comes in it takes 10-15 minutes to complete the ritual ablution and prayer.

The five daily prayers and the windows for performing them are the following:



**Morning prayer (Fajr)** Dawn, before sunrise.



**Noon prayer (Zuhr)** Midday, after the sun passes its highest point, until afternoon.



**Afternoon prayer (Asr)** Late afternoon until just before sunset.



**Sunset prayer (Maghrib)** sunset until full darkness.



**Night prayer (Isha)** darkness until midnight.



## Call to Prayer

The adhan, or call to prayer, announces the arrival of prayer time and a slightly altered version is recited as prayer begins, both in Arabic. The call to prayer is said out loud, sometimes on a speaker and it takes approximately two minutes to complete.

What law enforcement may encounter: A community member may create a call for service under either “suspicious” activity or a noise call. Responding LE may encounter a person performing the call to prayer in or outside of the Mosque. Speak to the person performing the adhan after they are finished, and advise them of the call for service. The call to prayer is similar to church bells ringing during the day. If LE would not ask a church to stop this activity such a policy should be applied consistently to other places of worship.

## RITUAL ABLUTION OR WUDU

Prayers are preceded by a ritual ablution called wudu, which requires the washing of the hands, face, and feet with clean water. It can be performed in any facility that has running water. In emergencies where running water is unavailable, wudu can be performed with clean water in a bowl.



What law enforcement may encounter: You may get a call for service under “suspicious” because the caller may find the activity strange due to their lack of knowledge of this Muslim custom or due to an implicit or explicit bias. When ablution is being performed, you may see men/women washing their face, hands, arms, and feet before getting ready to pray.

## **PERFORMING THE PRAYER**

The prayer itself includes specific recitations from the Quran and physical components of standing, bowing, and touching one’s forehead to the ground. It is often performed on a prayer rug. (See **Religious Items** below.) All of this is done while facing toward Mecca. In North America, this means the person will face generally northeast. During prayers, except in cases of emergencies, the penitent cannot respond to questions. The individual or congregation will wait to respond until prayer is finished because one is not supposed to look around during the prayer and is required to concentrate on the prayer by looking down to the ground and blocking out all other activity as respect for God. Worship can be performed in any quiet, dry, clean place where there is adequate space for an individual to perform the required motions associated with prayer. Bathrooms are not considered appropriate spaces in which to perform prayer. The prayer can generally take approximately five to 10 minutes. Muslims may pray in many different places or forms. For example, you may notice them praying while seated in their vehicle or with a prayer rug by their vehicle, in a quiet space at work, in a park, or any other setting.

**During prayers, except in cases of emergencies, the penitent cannot respond to questions.**

What law enforcement may encounter: When prayer has begun, you will notice that all the men/women in the congregation will face the same way and follow the Imam's (prayer leader) lead. During prayer, there will be synchronous movements and recitation of the Quran. This is the same for all five prayers in the day or special prayers associated with Muslim holidays. The people in the mosque may not answer any questions by LE during prayer. Law enforcement should wait to address their concern until the prayer is over, unless it is an emergency requiring immediate attention.

### **Friday Congregational Prayer**

Friday is the day for congregational prayer called *Jummah*. There is a sermon, or *khutbah*, delivered by an imam, followed by congregational prayers. An imam is simply a prayer leader and can be selected from among congregants. These services are considered a religious obligation for those who are physically capable, and thus all efforts should be made to allow Muslims to attend. The length of the service is generally around 30-60 minutes.

Based on differences in theology, various Islamic sects may prefer to worship separately.



What law enforcement may encounter: The Friday prayer is the most important prayer of the week for Muslims. The sermon is given by the imam before the prayer begins. This is the only prayer in the week that has an obligatory sermon before the prayer is performed. You may notice a larger crowd attending this particular prayer on Friday's, which may cause traffic or parking issues.

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### RELIGIOUS ITEMS

#### Prayer Rugs

Muslims often use a rug or mat to cover the ground on which they are praying. A prayer rug is approximately the size of a large towel and is often printed with Islamic symbols. A prayer rug may be searched as needed, but should never be thrown, stepped on, or put in a dirty place. It should be treated with respect as a sacred object. Detainees may be issued a clean towel or a blanket-weight cloth or sheet as a substitute for a rug. If a rug or blanket is unavailable, a Muslim may use a clean, flat object such as cardboard.

What law enforcement may encounter: Muslims may become alarmed if you step on a prayer rug, or in the prayer area of a mosque while wearing shoes. Unless it is an emergency, it is a good practice to ask if you should remove your shoes when entering prayer spaces.

## Prayer Beads and Common Phrases

Prayer beads, known as “Misbaha” or “Tasbeeh” in Arabic, are used by some Muslims for devotional practice. Common phrases recited on the prayer beads include "Subhan Allah" (Glory be to Allah), "Alhamdulillah" (Praise be to Allah), and "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is the Greatest). The use of prayer beads varies among individuals and cultures.

Some of the other common terms you may hear are “Astaghfirullah” (seeking Forgiveness from God), “Insha Allah” (God willing), “Masha Allah” (thankful for God willing it).

What law enforcement may encounter: Hearing these terms by some who lack knowledge of the terms can cause a call for service under suspicion due to the widespread stereotypes of Muslims.

## Religious Texts

The Quran is considered by Muslims to be God’s word as transmitted to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel. Hadith are Prophet Muhammad’s word and actions. Compilations of these words and actions, such as Sahih al Bukhari or Sahih Muslim, are considered an important source of religious knowledge for some Muslims.



What law enforcement may encounter: The Quran is the most sacred text and is written in Arabic. It's common to encounter someone reciting the Quran in its native Arabic, oftentimes in passionate tones and loud voices.

CAIR Recommendation: Should Qurans or Hadith texts be seized, they must be treated with respect. This applies to both Arabic originals and English translations. These items should not be placed on the floor, tossed, thrown, or otherwise damaged. If an officer has cause to believe a Quran may contain any contraband, it may be inspected and, if needed, confiscated.



## CLOTHING AND DRESS

Muslims generally practice modesty in their dress. This can mean that both men and women may ask for accommodations to either not uncover parts of their body or not wearing tight fitting outfits. For example, many Muslim men will not wear shorts that come above their knees.

### Kufi

Many Muslim men choose to wear a small cap, called a kufi, as a symbol of their modesty and connection to God. There are no religious requirements that kufis be any color.

### Beard

Some Muslim men choose to grow beards in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad. Several law enforcement agencies, such as the New York Police Department, have made accommodations for staff who adopt beards for religious reasons.

### Hijabs

Many women choose to wear a hijab, which typically refers to a headscarf, wrapped around the head, covering the hair, ears, and neck. Women may also choose to wear long sleeves and/or long pants.

What law enforcement may encounter: Muslim men and women have clear guidance on how to dress. You may encounter men and women dressed and groomed a certain way based on their gender.

## RAMADAN

Ramadan is Islam's holy month. It is a time of fasting, prayer, reflection, and spiritual growth. Islam uses a lunar calendar. As a result, each year Ramadan's start date changes in relation to the Gregorian calendar. Muslims may use different methods to determine when a lunar month starts. You should check with local Muslim organizations for guidance on when Ramadan starts in any given year.

## Ramadan Fasting

During the month of Ramadan, abstaining from food, drink, and other pleasures during the daylight hours is obligatory for those who are physically and mentally capable. Islam exempts the very young, very old, those with health issues, and other conditions from the practice. Pregnant, lactating, and menstruating women may also not fast.

Fasting Muslims may also choose to forego medications during the daily fasting period, to the extent that their health will not be harmed.

Before sunrise, Muslims eat a morning meal known as suhoor. At sunset, the fast is broken with a meal known as iftar. Traditionally, fasts are broken with dates and water.

What law enforcement may encounter: If you hold regular meetings with community members you may find the Muslims declining food and drink. Since Muslim men and women who are fasting are not drinking, eating or taking any medication, you may encounter someone who is weak or not well due to their fast. Law enforcement staff should be afforded the time to eat during the windows for eating noted above, particularly just after sunset. Detained Muslims should be provided with breakfast before dawn and a double portion of food, the equivalent of lunch and dinner, after sunset.



## Ramadan Prayer

Muslims may observe a special prayer during the night called Taraweeh. During this prayer, the prayer leader will recite one-thirtieth of the Quran each night, so that the entire holy book is recited by Ramadan's end. This generally takes up to two hours each evening.

What law enforcement may encounter: Traffic at mosques may be unusually heavy at night during Ramadan. Like Friday prayers, you may notice a significant difference in the amount of people congregating at the mosque during the month of Ramadan, in particular the nightly prayer. After the nightly prayer, local restaurants that stay open late often fill with Muslims enjoying normal social routines after a day's fast. You may also see lights on in Muslim homes during patrol prior to sunrise so they can eat and drink to start the fast for the day, especially if the neighborhood has a large Muslim population.

## HOLIDAYS

Islam uses a lunar calendar, and as a result, each year the dates for the below holidays change in relation to the Gregorian calendar. You are advised to check with local Muslim leadership or institutions for guidance on when Ramadan starts in any given year.

### Eid al-Fitr

Ramadan culminates in Eid al-Fitr (Festival of the Fast Breaking), a joyous celebration. An Eid prayer, a modified form of the congregational Friday prayer, is performed as a community.

### Eid al-Adha

The second Eid is celebrated on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month and is called Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice). Eid al-Adha coincides with the completion of the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Just like at Eid al-Fitr, this Eid prayer is performed as a community.

## Ashura

For Shi'ite Muslims, Ashura is observed to mourn the killing of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and dozens the Prophet's [peace be upon him] family members and companions at the Battle of Karbala.

What law enforcement may encounter: Prayer during holidays draws the largest crowds. You will often see parks and convention space rented out to accommodate the influx of people that gather during these particular prayers.

A note on larger crowds: CAIR's recommendation when dealing with larger crowds for Friday prayer (jummah) and holidays such as Eid, is to prepare for the events with local Muslim leadership wherever possible. It is a best practice to educate your local congregants and leadership at the mosque on better traffic and parking practices at another convenient time before the event. It is likely that the police may have to temporarily relax the parking rules to accommodate the congregants as a courtesy to the religious institution, just as they would to any other houses of worship such as a church or synagogue.

## SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

Any of the above-mentioned items or the activities listed in the introduction to Islam can result in a call for service from a caller who lacks knowledge of Islamic culture and practices. An officer who is unfamiliar with routine Islamic practices can also assume there may be suspicious activity afoot if they come across such activities, as these activities are wrongfully associated with terrorism in the media with Hollywood historically creating a strong but false stereotype of both Muslims and their customs. The media plays a crucial role in feeding implicit biases to the American public and law enforcement against Muslims. The main purpose of this document is to assist the officer in being able to recognize these activities and customs so they can properly address the situation at hand. None of the activities or customs mentioned in this document are indicative of suspicious activity or criminality in itself.

CAIR is particularly interested in addressing meritless “suspicious activity” calls when the caller is merely uninformed, has a bias against Muslims in general, or has bias against one Muslim in particular.

Responding to these calls for service is when officers have the greatest potential for violating the constitutional rights of Muslims, which can result in furthering gaps between law enforcement and the Muslim community.

Just like any other call for suspicious activity, start with asking, “What exactly is suspicious?” and “Why?” Specific common-sense questions can allow an LEO a good understanding of the caller’s concern and mindset. Investigate the legitimacy of the call before and at the scene to see if there is anything suspicious going on or if the caller is contacting the police because of their implicit or explicit bias. For example, they heard some phrases in a foreign language or saw some people who looked/dressed a certain way or were gathering at a particular time or forming larger crowds.

On scene, advise the targets of the call which provided your reason for being there, unless of course it jeopardizes safety or the integrity of the investigation, if some merit has already been established.

A courteous and sincere attitude goes a long way in fostering trust with the public. Accusatory tones, cynical attitudes, and rude behavior by law enforcement instantly erode the trust and credibility of the responding or investigating officers. A sense of fear and defensiveness does not automatically translate into wrongdoing or “something to hide”.

Unfortunately, sometimes Muslims who have not had the best experiences in the past can shape negative attitudes towards the police. A courteous, professional encounter or service can change the image of police for Muslims and go a long way in building mutual trust.

## **ENTERING PLACES OF WORSHIP OR MUSLIM HOMES**

Muslims consider a mosque a sacred space. As a rule, if you treat a mosque in the same manner as you would entering a church or synagogue you are on solid ground.

There are a few unique aspects to being in a mosque that are worth being aware of:

1. Prayers spaces are open, with no furniture, and usually carpeted.
2. It is customary to remove one's shoes when in these spaces to keep the prayer area clean. You may notice people praying all around without their shoes on. Shoes are left by the door and away from the carpeted prayer area.
3. If you come during a time that is not a designated prayer time you will encounter people worshipping individually or in small groups at different paces. This down time is not synchronous and is normal.
4. Women are usually asked to cover their hair in prayer spaces; the leaders of an institution will inform you of their policy.
5. Men and women are usually separated in prayer spaces. The leaders of an institution will inform you of their policy, but it is possible male staff may be asked to go to the men's section of a mosque while female staff may be asked to go to the female section of a mosque.

Items 1,4, and 5 can also apply to Muslim homes.

Noise call regarding the adhan: The adhan, or call to prayer, is a short recitation and done during normal hours except for the first prayer of the day, which is pre-dawn (fajr). Speak to the person performing the adhan after they are finished, and advise them of the prompting call.

For investigations, arrests, and active shooter scenarios: CAIR defers to your agency policy and training in confronting these specific situations.

## PROCESSING AND LODGING

### Modesty and Cultural Issues

Islamic modesty and respect often mean avoiding physical contact between men and women who are not related to each other. It also means avoiding revealing parts of your body to members of the opposite sex.

### Body Searches

Avoid searches by staff who are not of the same sex as the person being searched. In cases where disrobing, including removing a hijab, is necessary, care should be taken to ensure that only persons of the same sex are in the room with the person being searched.

What law enforcement may encounter: You may encounter requests for same-sex body searches. It is important to note that this request is made because of their sincerely held religious beliefs of modesty.

If someone of the same sex is not available, the search must be the least intrusive to achieve reasonable needs to maintain safety of all and stay consistent with departmental policy. Indeed, the search of a person who is being released soon with a summons requires less intrusiveness than someone who is being booked to be jailed.

## DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

You may encounter requests for different food by some Muslim arrestees and inmates. This request is based on what is allowed to be consumed and what is not allowed; as Muslims have dietary restrictions. Muslims do not consume alcohol, pork, and any pork by-products or derivatives. Muslims also follow certain standards in slaughter and preparation of meat and poultry; this is called halal.

Islamic dietary restrictions are like kosher requirements. It is not the case that an item is halal only by virtue of being non-pork. Some objectionable food items include:

- Pork and pork by-products such as pig-derived pepsin. Lard in any product.
- Animal shortening in bread, puddings, cookies, cakes, donuts, etc. (Vegetable shortening is acceptable.)
- Animal-based gelatin in Jell-O, desserts, candies, marshmallows, chocolates, etc.
- Blood and blood by-products.
- Alcohol and food ingredients containing alcohol, such as vanilla extract and Dijon mustard, or sauces prepared with alcohol.

Some Muslims may also find the consumption of fish without scales, such as catfish, to be objectionable. However, most varieties of fish, soy products, vegetables, etc. are considered halal by default.

## **PHOTOS AND IMAGES**

The most prominent issue in processing has been the order by law enforcement to Muslim women to take off their hijab to take identification pictures for processing. Many women may object to the use of photos which show their hair and areas normally covered by a hijab. Across the country, prisons and jails—along with other public and government-funded spaces—do not require that Muslims abandon their sincerely held religious belief for booking photos or other identification. You can take and use covered photographs instead of the uncovered ones. Forcing Muslim women to remove their hijab for processing photos will possibly make the agency liable for civil rights violations.



## GLOSSARY OF MUSLIM TERMS

**Adhan:** Islamic call to worship, recited at prescribed times of day.

**Allah:** Arabic word for God, translates as “The One God.”

**Eid:** A major religious holiday; a day of festivity.

**Halal:** Permissible by Islamic law.

**Hijab:** Clothing many Muslim wear in public; generally, loose-fitting and includes a head covering.

**Iftar:** Fast-breaking meal at sundown during the month of Ramadan.

**Imam:** Spiritual leader.

**Jummah:** Friday congregational prayer service.

**Khutbah:** Sermon delivered during Jummah prayer.

**Kufi:** A small round cap worn by some Muslim men.

**Quran:** Islam’s holy scripture; also, sometimes spelled Koran.

**Ramadan:** Holy month of fasting, during which Muslims abstain from food, drink, and sensory pleasures from sunrise to sunset.

**Shahada:** The declaration of faith: “There is no god but God and Mohammad is the messenger of God.”

**Suhoor:** Meal eaten before dawn during the month of Ramadan.

**Wudu:** Ritual ablution or washing before prayers.

**Zakat:** A required charity generally equivalent to 2.5 percent of a Muslims income after they have paid their basic living expenses.

**CAIR's vision** is to be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding. **CAIR's mission** is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims. La misión de CAIR es proteger las libertades civiles, mejorar la comprensión del Islam, promover la justicia, y empoderar a los musulmanes en los Estados Unidos.

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