



GUIDELINES FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

ZIEGLER SCHOOL OF RABBINIC STUDIES GUIDELINES FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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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, called *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 Jewsⁱ. 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 Ziegler School.

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 *ta’amei 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 Ziegler 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 wellⁱⁱ. 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 Ziegler students’ practice, particularly in areas such as Shabbat and *kashrut*, as well as Rabbi Martin S. Cohen’s *The Observant Life*. Rabbi Elliot Dorff is the *posek aharon*, final decision maker for matters of Halakha, for the Ziegler School.

THE GUIDELINES

SHABBAT & HOLY DAYS

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, will prove very helpful to you. The Rabbinical Assembly’s *The Observant Life*, pages 98 – 136 will also prove helpful. They address 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.

Briefly, ZSRS students are expected to celebrate Shabbat by not only elevating the imperative ritual commandments like candles, Kiddush, and other aspects of Oneg Shabbat, but also by refraining from some of the very activities that define our weekday lives. E.g., cooking, laundry, creating and/or extinguishing fire, writing, typing, emailing, social media, texting, and monetary transactions, all of which are forbidden.

The Conservative Movement has different opinions on the use of electricity and electronic devices, from full permission and limited permission, to fully prohibited. For those who use electricity and any electronic devices, it should be noted that they are only permitted for activities that are inherently permitted on Shabbat, like turning on or off lights, or reheating already cooked food.

Travel in an automobile on Shabbat is also an area for which the Conservative Movement has different approaches. For those who do travel in an automobile, this permission extends to traveling for distinctly permitted Shabbat/mitzvah purposes only, most notably synagogue services. If anyone has questions about these activities, please be in touch

with the ZSRS Deans and Faculty.

Note, however, that much of Los Angeles, including the American Jewish University, the Pico-Robertson area and some of North Hollywood are within an *eruv*, where carrying on Shabbat is permitted. Given the range of views authorized by the Conservative Movement, some view driving to and from synagogue as a permissible concession to the realities of contemporary life, and others view it as forbidden. Both positions are supported by the Law Committee, although the Ziegler School encourages students to walk on Shabbat as a way of experiencing *Oneg Shabbat* at its fullest.

As it does with Shabbat, the Ziegler 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 as a sanctified Yom Tov day in every way. Ziegler students spending time in Israel tend to follow the custom of the community they are living in. For some that means full Yom Tov Sheni observance. For others it might mean a modified public/private observance. For others that means the *hag-period* ends after the first day. Details of Festival observance can be found in Klein, pages 96 through 102, as well as pages 137-238 in *The Observant Life*.

KASHRUT

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 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. Given that Los Angeles has many restaurants with rabbinic certification, students are encouraged to be sensitive to the kashrut practices of other students, and to accommodate those practices when planning communal celebrations. 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. The pages on Kashrut from *The Observant Life* will also be helpful, pages 305-338.

The Ziegler School recognizes that many of our students and community members are also part of a larger community/family some of whose members may not observe many of these mizvot or they observe them in a limited way. This diversity often creates interpersonal tensions regarding personal observance and maintaining important relationships. The Ziegler School administration and faculty will be a valuable resource for you as you navigate paths to best maintain the halakhic integrity of your special status as a rabbinical student while affirming the very real implications of an observant and obligated lifestyle in the wider Jewish world.

TEFILLAH

Tefillah is a vital component of our religious and spiritual life. Rabbinical students pray three times a day, and participate in religious life on campus, particularly in daily *Shacharit* and *Minchah* services. Students also participate actively in *Arvit* and Shabbat services in the congregations of their choice. Blessings before and after all meals, as well as other appropriate blessings throughout the day, are principal elements of our liturgy as well.

The American Jewish University's *Minyan* is egalitarian. However, while all men wear tefillin, some women in the Ziegler community wear *tefillin*, while others choose not to, for reasons that you will study as part of the Ziegler School. Of course, even those women who do not wear tefillin become sufficiently familiar with the mitzvah of *tefillin* to be able to teach it to others.

MIDDOT TOVOT

Judaism's focus on religious deeds could easily slip into rigidity, judgementalism, and hypocrisy, were it not for the extensive attention our tradition pays to issues of character, integrity, decency, and lovingkindness. Without these inner virtues and acts of caring, ritual observance becomes offensive to God.ⁱⁱⁱ 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 decency, honesty, modesty, gentleness, and openness are prerequisites to religious observance. In the Ziegler School 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.

In that regard, deliberate plagiarism is incompatible with the values and calling of the rabbinate. Involving as it does,

the sins of *hasagat g'vul*, *g'neivah*, and the violation of *b'shem omro*, the School maintains a zero tolerance to any act of plagiarism.

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.

FAMILY ISSUES

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 (regardless of gender or orientation). At present, the Conservative Movement considers marriage outside the faith to be incompatible with the leadership role of a rabbinical student or rabbi.

The Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies is committed to fostering and maintaining an environment of learning, growth, and observance. This environment must be free of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a discriminatory practice that is a violation of Halakhah and Jewish values (among them human dignity). It is unethical, and unprofessional. It usually involves persons of unequal power, authority, or influence but can occur between persons of the same status. Sexual harassment is illegal under Title VII of the 1980 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments. Sexual harassment is a gross violation of Jewish and professional ethics. It should be regarded and treated as such by members of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies. The policy of the Ziegler School is to condemn sexual harassment. Members of the Ziegler School are encouraged to file complaints about sexual harassment with the appropriate administrative office of the American Jewish University, or with appropriate law enforcement officials. Sexual harassment has no place in the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at any organizational level – formal or informal. It will not be tolerated and can result in suspension or expulsion.

The Ziegler School welcomes qualified students regardless of gender or sexual orientation. 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 Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies.

A FINAL WORD

We respect and 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, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies is a school 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 Ziegler School's fundamental commitment is to ensure that the *brit* between God and *Am Yisrael* flourishes. We are devoted to producing outstanding, learned, and inspirational models who will be able to add to the greatness of Torah in the challenging decades ahead. We are also committed to our students; we want to help them grow and to graduate from the Ziegler School with the faith, knowledge, and passion that will enable them to commit their lives to the service of God, Torah, and the Jewish people.

ⁱ See Elliot N. Dorff, *Mitzvah Means Commandment*, New York, 1996.

ⁱⁱ See the *Summary Index: The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards*, The Rabbinical Assembly, 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ See the Haftarah selection for Yom Kippur morning.