

A Summary of Guidelines Pertaining to the Obligatory Prayers...

1. Bahá'ís are required to recite any one of the three Obligatory Prayers daily, and are free to perform more than one if desired.¹
2. The Obligatory Prayers are binding on men and women on attaining the age of maturity, which is fixed at 15 years of age.²
3. The Obligatory Prayers should be offered individually³ and in private,⁴ either silently or out loud.⁵
4. When saying the Obligatory Prayers one should face the Qiblah (The Point of Adoration), which, for Bahá'ís, is turning towards the Shrine and resting place of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, near 'Akká, Israel.⁶ The Universal House of Justice has indicated that to identify which direction to face from your location is "...to fix the shortest distance from a given point on the earth to Bahjí...."⁷ You can do this merely by placing a string on a globe so it touches your location on one end and Bahjí on the other, and then tightening the string so there is no slack. This will illustrate quickly the shortest route between the two points and the direction of the Qiblah from your location.
5. Ablutions, consisting of washing the hands and the face with water, are to be performed before each Obligatory Prayer.⁸ If the weather is too cold, warm water may be used.⁹ If one has just performed ablutions for another devotion there is no need for them to be renewed for the Obligatory Prayer.¹⁰ However, one must perform ablutions for an Obligatory Prayer even if one has just bathed.¹¹ If no water is available for ablutions or if use of water is physically harmful, instead of washing with water, one is to repeat five times: "*In the Name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure,*" and then proceed with devotions.¹²
6. The Medium and Long Obligatory Prayers include certain gestures and positions that are to be performed during the offering of the prayer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that "in every word and movement of the Obligatory Prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain."¹³ Shoghi Effendi further explains that the few simple directions given by Bahá'u'lláh for the recital of certain prayers not only has a spiritual significance but that they also help the individual "to fully concentrate when praying and meditating."¹⁴
7. In the extreme northern and southern regions of the earth times for the Obligatory Prayers may be determined by clocks instead of sunrise and sunset.¹⁵ Believers living in these regions should refer to their National Spiritual Assembly for further guidance on this matter.
8. The Short Obligatory Prayer is preferably offered while standing and should be offered at noon, which means the interval between noon and sunset.¹⁶
9. The Medium Obligatory Prayer should be offered in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.¹⁷ Morning is considered that period from sunrise (or even as early as dawn)¹⁸ until noon; noon is that period of time from noon until sunset; and evening is from sunset until two hours after sunset.¹⁹ Certain physical gestures and the recitation of specific verses are to accompany the performance of ablutions for this prayer, and these ablutions must be performed each time the prayer is offered during the day.²⁰ It is permissible to use a chair when instructed to sit during this prayer, however, sitting on the floor is considered preferable and more fitting.²¹
10. The Long Obligatory Prayer should be offered once in a twenty-four hour period "at whatever time one findeth oneself in a state of humbleness and longing adoration,"²² or, "...at those times when one feeleth himself in a prayerful mood."²³
11. Bahá'ís are exempt, but not prohibited, from offering the Obligatory Prayers if they are ill or 70 year of age or over.²⁴ Women during their menstrual period can exempt themselves from the Obligatory Prayer as well, provided they perform their ablutions and repeat ninety-five times between noon of one day and the next: "*Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty.*"²⁵ Believers are further exempt who find themselves in danger or in a condition of insecurity where saying the Obligatory Prayer is impossible.²⁶ However, upon attaining a place of safety and security Bahá'ís are to perform a certain prayer to compensate for each Obligatory Prayer missed on account of insecure circumstances. This prayer consists of ablutions, followed by a single prostration [to kneel and bow the forehead to the ground] for each prayer missed, while during the last prostration saying: "*Glorified be God, the Lord of Might and Majesty, of Grace and Bounty.*" If one is unable to perform the prostration, to say only: "*Glorified be God,*" is sufficient. Following the necessary number of prostrations, one is to be seated cross-legged—men and women alike—and eighteen times repeat: "*Glorified be God, the Lord of the kingdoms of earth and heaven.*"²⁷

KA = *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*

LOG = *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*

DG = *Directives from the Guardian*

IOPF = *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*

¹ KA, pp. 146-47

⁸ KA, pp. 26, 126, 132

¹⁵ KA, p. 172

²² KA, pp. 130-31

² KA, p. 146

⁹ KA, p. 122

¹⁶ KA, p. 146

²³ IOPF, ¶XI

³ KA, p. 23

¹⁰ KA, p. 125

¹⁷ KA, p. 98

²⁴ KA, pp. 22-23, 171

⁴ LOG, p. 542, #1836

¹¹ KA, pp. 112-13

¹⁸ KA, p. 168

²⁵ KA, pp. 23-24

⁵ LOG, p. 460, #1502

¹² KA, pp. 171-72, 181

¹⁹ KA, p. 146

²⁶ KA, p. 174

⁶ KA, pp. 145-146

¹³ KA, p. 167

²⁰ KA, pp. 126, 180-81

²⁷ KA, pp. 24, 125

⁷ BWC, email, 19 June 2002

¹⁴ KA, p. 167

²¹ LOG, pp. 468-69, ¶1536