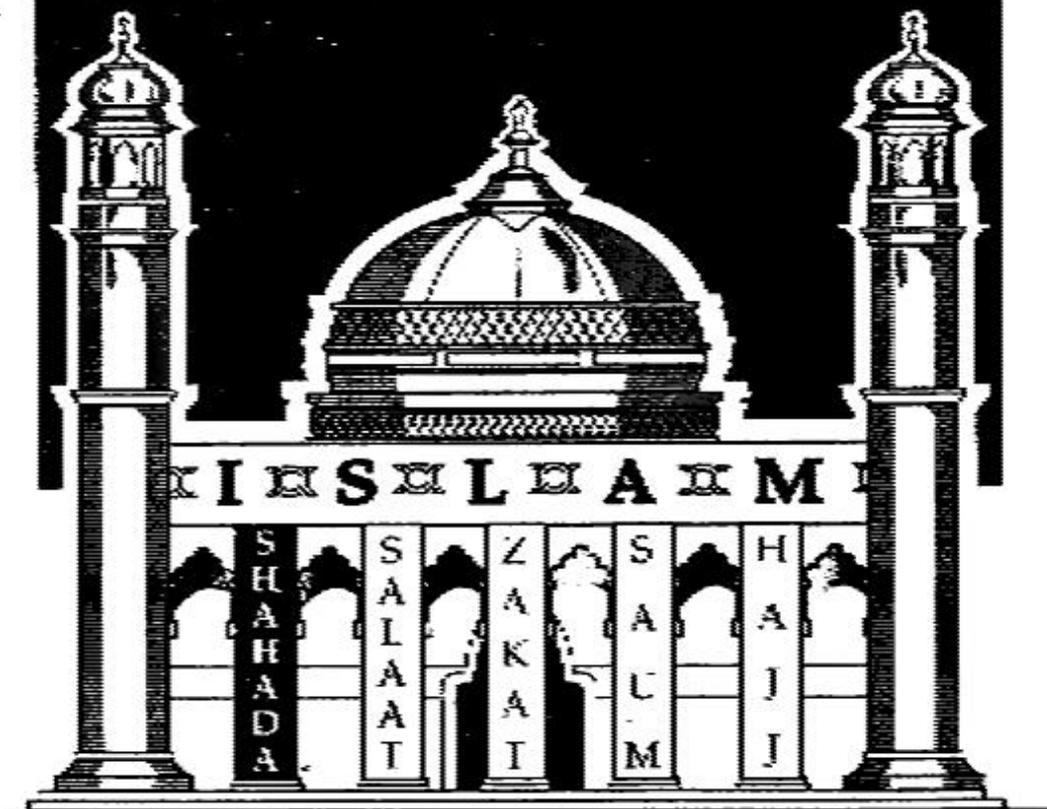


Staff Development  
Package



# Islam



## The Five Pillars – Shahada –

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## The Five Pillars - Shahada

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ

### Shahada

(All words within the text in **bold** are in the glossary)

All the conceptual structures and understandings of a Muslim's way of life are founded on the essential truth of the existence of One God. None of the other five requirements of faith can have any truth without this basic concept.

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### The Six Requirements of Faith

- God
- Angels
- Books
- Messengers
- Afterlife
- Divine Destiny

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Similarly, when it comes to putting their faith into practice, the first requirement for a man or woman is to recognise their belief in God and voice it before others. In Islam this is done with a specific set of words called the **Shahada**.

### The Meaning of Shahada

Shahada comes from a root word in Arabic which has a simple yet subtle meaning. It means to 'observe' or 'witness', or 'to have seen', and also the voicing of that observation, 'to testify'. It also contains within it the understanding that one should be prepared to die rather than deny the truth one has seen, 'to be a martyr'. The freedom to affirm that one believes in the existence of God is the essential individual freedom without which life is not worth living, a freedom that must if necessary be fought for even at the cost of one's own life.

The Prophet said: *"I have brought nothing more important than Shahada."*



## The Five Pillars - Shahada

For a man or woman to be considered a Muslim, it is sufficient to make the shahada just once, though in practice a Muslim will repeat the phrase many times each day, not only in the formal salaah. In fact, it is probably the most frequently repeated phrase of all the phrases used by humanity. The sincerity of the one who says it is not to be questioned by others and there is a story, popular among Muslims, of an incident in one of the early days of Islam when the Muslims had to fight for their freedom to worship:

During a hard fought battle, one of the idolaters of the Quraish was losing badly to his Muslim opponent, and when finally at his mercy cried out the words of the shahada, but too late, for the victor despatched him with a blow of his sword anyway. When questioned later as to why he had killed a fellow Muslim, he replied that the man was insincere and had only said the shahada to save his life. The Prophet said *“When you cut him open did you see into his heart?”*

Shahada

The shahada is subtle, complex and compact, and to do it justice, it is essential to look at the way it is phrased in Arabic:

*“La ilaha illa ‘Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah”.*

The shahada is actually two witnessings (in Arabic “shahadatan”),

firstly that there is no god but God,

and

secondly that **Muhammad** is His messenger.

The first witnessing also splits into two parts, the negation (“nafy”) and the affirmation (“ithbat”). Firstly “There is no god”, uses the Arabic word for “a god”, one god of many, like a god from the Greek pantheon. Then the shahada recognises one exception and affirms the existence of “The God”, the One God other than Whom there is no god, (known in Arabic as “Allah”). This word goes back to the origins of the Arabic language itself, and its use is not restricted to Muslims, the same word being used by Arab Christians as the name by which to call upon God.

“Allah” is the proper name of the Absolute Divinity, but the name does not in any way define what is named, as Allah is beyond our capacity to delimit and define. Thus in



## The Five Pillars - Shahada

answer to the question “Is there a God?”, the shahada neatly avoids confusion and argument over definitions of what is meant by the word God in the first place, denying any preconceptions by first responding with a negation. Of course there is no god – if not God.



Shahada

With acceptance of the first part of the shahada, man is cast into an endless ocean of the Eternal, the Creator of the Universe which itself is beyond our limitations of comprehension. So in the second part of the shahada, Muslims are given a vessel to save them from drowning in that vast sea of the infinite and the absolute.

In the statement that Muhammad is the messenger of God, the Muslim recognises his position as a vessel through which to see the Will of God, and an example for mankind to follow. His message is preserved in the **Qur'an**, still preserved in completeness and used by Muslims on a daily basis. Muslims follow his example by accepting the **Five Pillars** as being essential to their lives, as well as shaping their lives around the moral virtues that he exemplified.

### The Shahada in Life

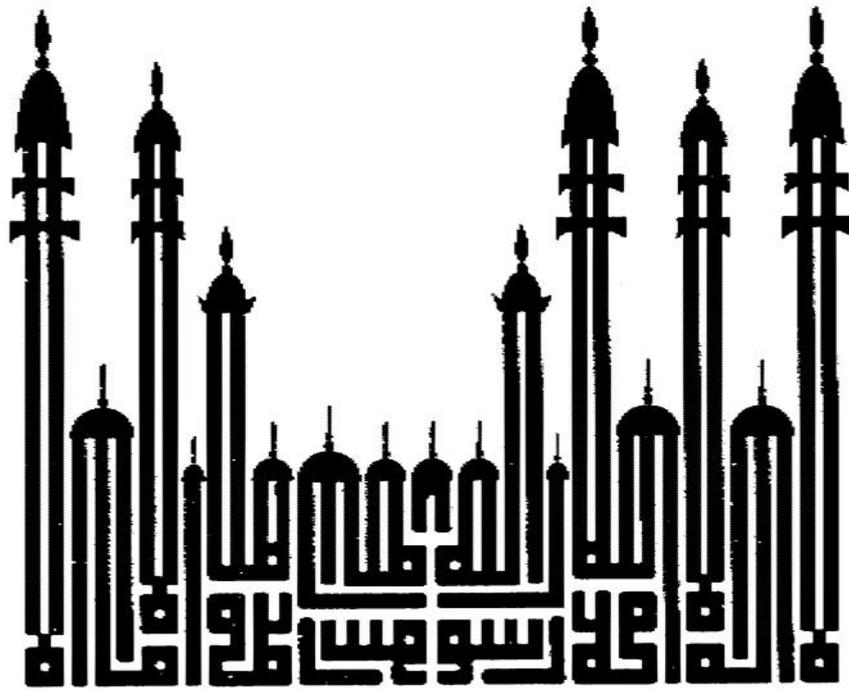
As there can be no Islam without shahada, it can really be considered as the start of a Muslim's life. But after that, the shahada is more often used at the end of something. At the conclusion of the **salaat** a witnessing is made just before leaving the prayer offering peace and mercy upon all, and also after each set of two **rakahs**. Shahada will be used at the conclusion of the **Wudu**, and most will have heard the two witnessings at the heart of the Azan and the shahada that trails away into echo at the end. A sequence of **Dzikh** repetitions will often be brought to a close with the shahada, and the first shahada especially is often used as a dzikh itself, its constant repetition being a rehearsal for the moment of death, when Muslims hope it will be the last words on their lips.

Calligraphic representation of the shahada can be seen displayed wherever there are Muslims. Carved in wood or engraved in brass, painted on mirrors, printed on Eid cards and calendars, it is everywhere. It can be seen in a mosaic panel in



## The Five Pillars - Shahada

Glasgow Central Mosque, in an embroidered fabric hanging on someone's living room wall, on an embossed plastic sticker decorating the door of the fridge in the local kebab house, or glimpsed inside a briefcase. For a few pence, some mosques sell calligraphies of the shahada printed on self-adhesive rainbow plastic, and these can be seen stuck to the dashboards of many a car or van, all placed there as a reminder of the eternal context of a Muslim's life.



Shahada  
(mirrored)