

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

SHAHADAH - THE TRUE TESTIMONY

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WHAT DOES SHAHADAH MEAN LINGUISTICALLY?

SHD - Root

Shiin-Ha-Dal =

Told/gave information, to be present, give evidence/testimony, to witness/see, bear witness.

Mushhad - time or place of being present / of giving or hearing evidence, meeting place.

Mashhuud - that which is witnessed.

Therefore, the Shahadah in this context means: 'To know and believe without suspicion as if **'witnessed'**'. It is a testimony of faith for Muslims and basically takes the following forms:

SHAHADAH FORMS

(1) Sunni Muslims:

Ash hadu an laa ilaha illallhu wa ash hadu anna muhammadar-rasulullah".

"I bear witness that there is no deity but God (Allah), and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (Allah)"

Another version reads with the appendage:

" muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluhu".

"Muhammad is a servant and a messenger" (of God)

(2) Shi'a Muslims:

Shi'a Muslims add the following appendages to the above basic recitation:

Ali un wali ul la

“Ali is the friend/representative/care taker of God (Allah)”

Other Shi'a - Ismaili, Fatimids, Dawood Bohra's add the optional appendage to complete the Shahahda as follows:

Ash-hadu -an-la-ilaha illal-laha, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammad an Abdo-hu wa Rasulo-uhu
wa ash-hadu anna Moulana Ali-un-Waliullah

"I bear witness that there is no deity but God (Allah), and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's (Allah's) servant and His Messenger **and I bear witness that Ali is God's (Allah's) 'Wali', 'representative' .**"

It is felt by the Shi'a that this appendage is not compulsory as Ali's 'Walayat' is obvious and self evident and need not be expressed as obligatory.

ALL THE ABOVE TESTIMONIES ARE NOT FOUND IN THE QURAN

This core attestation of faith for Muslims, the first recognised 'pillar' of Islam is not found anywhere in the Quran as a **statement**.

THE ACTUAL SHAHADAH TAUGHT BY THE QURAN

According to the Quran, the **only** Shahadah supportable is 'la ila ha il-allah' (There is no Diety **except** Him (God)) or 'La ila ha ila howa' (There is no **Lord except Him**). This is the testimony that God Himself takes. This is the testimony that the angels also take and those taken by 'people of understanding / knowledge'

003:018

“**There is no God but He (Arabic: La illa ha illa hu):** That is the witness of God, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no God but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise”

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ

La illa ha illa hu

In the Quran, many messengers are named and expressly stated as messengers of God. Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) is addressed in his capacity of his 'ministry' as a Messenger and Prophet of God and **only** 4 times by name (3.144; 33:40; 47:2 and 48:29). Each time his name is identified it is to inform the reader that 'Muhammad' ^(pbuh) is the messenger of God and not anyone else. This also avoids the possibility of any erroneous claims developing after the demise of the Prophet as to the true identity of the Prophet and to whom the Quran was revealed.

All prophets and messengers of God preached the same message of Islam and took the testimony of 'One God'.

003:067

Abraham (Arabic: Ibrahim) was not a Jew nor a Christian but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.

إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا

Muslim(un)

Ibrahim

Illustration - Joseph Islam

002:285

"The messenger believes in that which has been revealed to him from his Lord and (so do) believers. Each one believes in God and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers - **We make no distinction between any of His messengers** - and they say: **We hear, and we obey.** (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord. Unto Thee is the journeying"

SO HOW DOES ONE BECOME A BELIEVER IF THEY DO NOT PROCLAIM 'SHAHADAH' IN THE TRADITIONAL MUSLIM WAY?

True faith is not simply based on a ritualistic public proclamation of a particular form of 'Shahadah' in the midst of a congregation. Nor indeed is it formally completed by handing out certificates!

True faith is a matter of inner belief and can only be manifested outwardly by practice based on one's own volition and not forced or to be seen by others.

In the end only God knows the true condition of one's faith.

060.010 (Part)

"...O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees, examine (and test) them (Arabic: fa-im'tahinuhunna) : God knows best as to their Faith (Arabic: Allahu a-lamu bi- imanihinna): if ye ascertain that they are Believers, then send them not back to the Unbelievers ..."

How does one test them, what would constitute the proof? Is there any guidance from the Quran?

009.010 -11

"In a Believer they respect not the ties either of kinship or of covenant! It is they who have transgressed all bounds. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then are they your brethren in religion. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge"

Therefore one understands the following actions as proof of one's belief.

- Establish Prayer
- Pay the Poor Due (Zakat)

Belief therefore, has far more to do with **practice** as opposed to a simple ritualistic public proclamation.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Having noted the above, claiming a shahadaha (testimony) in the traditional manner (**There is no diety but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God - Arabic: La illaha illala muhammad-a-rasullallah**) is perfectly acceptable in that the testimony is **absolutely true** from a Quran's perspective even though it does not appear in one collective form in the Quran.

003:086

"How shall God guide a people who disbelieved after their belief and (after) they had **borne witness (Arabic: wa-shahidu)** that the Messenger was true and clear arguments had come to them; and God does not guide the unjust people."

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ

wa-shahidu

However, proclamation does not automatically render one a believer other than it confirms the truth and one's public proclamation of that truth. At what stage 'real belief' enters the heart is only a matter which God can decide.

049:014

The desert Arabs say, "**We believe! (Arabic: Amana)**" Say, "Do not say you **believe (Arabic: tu'minu)**; but only say, '**We have submitted our wills to God (Arabic: Asalamna)**,' as belief (**Arabic: I-imanu**) has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not deprive you anything of your deeds: for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

Please see related article [1] below.

CORE BELIEFS OF A MUSLIM AS DEFINED BY THE QURAN

002:285

"The messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers; they all believe in God and His angels and His books and His messengers; **We make no difference between any of His messengers;** and they say: We hear and obey, our Lord! Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course"

004:136

"O you who believe! believe in God and His Messenger and the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Book which He revealed before; and whoever disbelieves in God and His angels and His messengers and the last day, he indeed strays off into a remote error"

From the above verses, it is clear that belief constitutes:

- Belief in one God (no partners)
- God's Angels
- God's Scriptures
- God's Messengers (Making **no** distinction between them)
- The journey's end to the Lord (Last Day)

THE ONLY TESTIMONY IS THAT OF GOD

God is ever living, omnipotent and his ever living presence can be **witnessed** in his continuous creation on earth and every action that is being carried out within the whole universe at His command. This witness is based in the context of reality, the present.

That is what one witnesses - God's existence through his portents, the veracity of the message that has reached one and the submission one makes to Him in true obeisance as the one true God of mankind and the Universe who has **no** partners.

004.135

"O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, **as witnesses to God**, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that ye do"

WITNESS OF GOD IS INDEED THE GREATEST WITNESS

006:019

Say: What thing is the weightiest in testimony? **Say: God is witness between you and me;** and this Quran has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other God's with God? Say: I do not bear witness. **Say: He is only one God**, and surely I am clear of that which you set up (with Him).

TESTIMONIES OF THOSE ACCEPTING ISLAM DURING THE TIME OF THE MESSENGERS

In the following examples from the Quran, we note three clear testimonies that were uttered during the ministries of the messengers. We note that in neither testimony is there a ratification of any messengership along with the name of God. This challenges the much held notion that such a testimony as recited today is an **absolute requirement** in 'deen' (religion) in order to become a Muslim.

027.044

"It was said to her "Enter the palace" but when she saw it, she deemed it to be a great expanse of water, and uncovered her legs. He said "Indeed it is a palace made smooth with glass" She said "My Lord! Indeed, I have wronged myself, **and I submit with Solomon to God, the Lord of the worlds**"

The testimony noted above is one of a combined testimony with Solomon^(pbuh) to the Lord of the worlds. We do not note the familiar format "There is No Deity except God and Solomon is His messenger".

The absence of ratifying messengership is also noted in the next testimony. Once again we note a combined testimony and not one in the familiar **format** as recited today. (i.e. We believe in Allah and Moses is the messenger of Allah, where Moses^(pbuh) is the messenger in question).

007.120-122

"And the magicians fell down prostrate. They said **"We believe in the Lord of the worlds, Lord of Moses and Aaron"**

In the last example below, we note Pharaoh acknowledging the God of Moses.^(pbuh) Once again, there is no testimony which ratifies Prophet Moses^(pbuh) as the messenger of God in the format 'There is no Deity except God and Moses is His messenger'. Rather once again, we note a general testimony of One God with submission.

010:090

"And We took the children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in rebellion and enmity until when they were overwhelmed with the drowning he said **"I believe that there is no God except the One in whom the Children of Israel believe and I am of the Muslims"**

However, it is also to be appreciated that the above testimonies were '**qualified**'. Rather than asserting the belief in any 'One God', God was qualified as the God of Solomon, Moses, Aaron^(pbuh) or the Children of Israel.

This connected God with His true nature as opposed to the worshipping of any (false) Deity with attributes of a God incongruent with Islam's teachings.

In much the same way, the present day testimony of Muslims that there is 'No Deity but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger' '**qualifies**' the God in question and links it to the faith of Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) acknowledging all of God's true attributes.

Therefore, this once again supports the point made earlier that the present day testimony is perfectly acceptable in that the testimony is **absolutely true** from a Quran's perspective even though it does not appear in one collective form in the Quran. However, to assert that a testimony needs to

be uttered in a particular format **as an absolute requirement** in order to become a Muslim is **unfounded** from a Quran's perspective.

WITNESS OF GOD IS INDEED THE GREATEST WITNESS

006:019

Say: What thing is the weightiest in testimony? Say: **God is witness between you and me; and this Quran has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other God's with God? Say: I do not bear witness. Say: He is only one God,** and surely I am clear of that which you set up (with Him).

EACH ONE OF US HAS ALREADY TESTIFIED TO THE TRUTH OF ONE GOD

007:172

"And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them **bear witness (Arabic: ashhadahum)** against their own souls: **Am I not your Lord?** They said: Yes! **we bear witness (Arabic: Shahidna).** Less you should say on the Day of Resurrection: Surely we were heedless of this"

This 'testimony' taken from all souls at it's spiritual birth cements the concept that perception of the existence of a supreme power (God) is innately instilled as part of human nature (Arabic: Fitrat). It is this very instinctive cognitive ability that is either corrupted from the truth by human volition, or grows in accordance with truth.

091:007-10

"And a soul and Him Who perfected / proportioned it. And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who causes it to grow (purifies it), and he is indeed a failure who corrupts it (buries it)"

WHERE DOES THE TESTIMONY AS RECITED BY MANY MUSLIMS COME FROM?

Islamic secondary sources

It remains difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty exactly how and when the current forms of the recited 'Shahadah' would have become the norm. However, some narratives from the [Islamic secondary sources](#) remain incredulous to read:

(1) Abu Hurairah's Hadith where he is beaten by Caliph Umar and a shoe is presented as proof.

This hadith can be found in "Mishkat-ul-Masabeeh" which is an improved version of Masabih al-Sunnah. Al-Tabrizi (who died 741 AH). It is a more preferable text for those that do not want to delve into the intricacies of the science of hadith and is a commentary directed by 'Allamah Husayn ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Tibi, and it is this writing that has become known as Mishkat-ul-Masabeeh. It is considered by Sunni scholars as an important writing.

Note 29 included by the author is very interesting to note

ABU HURAIRAH: We were sitting around the Holy Prophet, and Abu Bakr and Omar were in the company, when the Holy Prophet rose up from our midst and went out, and delayed his return; and we feared his being alone, and became anxious lest any harm should happen to him from his enemies. So we all got up, and being the first to show anxiety, I came out to look for him, till I reached the garden wall of an Ansari²⁸ of the tribe of Bani Najjar. I walked round the wall hoping to find an entrance, but did not find any, when at last I saw a drain leading into the garden from a well outside. I made myself small and entered and waited upon the Holy Prophet. He said, "Is it Abu Hurairah?" I said, "Yes, O Apostle of Allah." He said, "How have you come?" I said, "You were amongst us, when you stood up and walked away, and delayed returning; at which we were alarmed lest any accident should happen to you while you were away from us, and we grew anxious, I being the first to do so. So I came to this garden and contracted myself like a fox entering his hole, and the rest are following me." The Prophet said, "O Abu Hurairah," and giving me his shoes said, "Take these my shoes, and whoever meets you behind this garden-wall and bears witness that there is no god but Allah, believing in it from his heart, give him the

glad tidings of paradise." The first person I met was Omar who said, "What shoes are these, O Abu Hurairah?" I said, "These are the shoes of the Holy Prophet who has sent them by me in order that whomsoever I meet and he bears witness with a sincere heart that there is no god but Allah, I should give him the joyful news of paradise." Upon which Omar struck me on the breast, so that I fell down on my back, and said, "Go back." I went back to the Holy Prophet and sought his protection with tears, while Omar followed close after. The Holy Prophet said, "What is the matter with you, O Abu Hurairah?" I said, I met Omar and gave him your message, whereupon he struck me on the breast, so that I fell down on my back, and told me to go back. The Holy Prophet then said, "What moved you to it, O Omar?" Omar replied, "O Apostle of Allah, may my father and mother be thy sacrifice!) didst thou send Abu Hurairah with thy shoes with the message that he should give the assurance of paradise to any one he meets, who bears witness from his heart that there is no god but Allah?" The Prophet said, "Yes." Omar said, "Do not do so, for I am afraid that people will rest content with this alone and abandon the active pursuit of righteousness. Therefore leave them alone, so that they may follow the practical injunctions of religion." Thereupon the Holy Prophet said, "Leave them to it then."²⁹ Muslim.

Note: 29

29. The inordinate length of the tradition and the petty details, such as their anxiety and alarm without any apparent cause, not finding a way into the garden except through a drain, the sending of shoes for no apparent reason and the thrust of Omar, cast doubt on the report, but the point of the story is the same as given in other reports mentioned above.

Source: [1]

(2) From the collection of the 40 Ahadith by Imam Nawai (1234-1278 AD) extracted from the Bukhari and Muslim Sahihyan

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ
رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ: شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ
إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ
الزَّكَاةِ وَحَجِّ الْبَيْتِ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ. رَوَاهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ
وَمُسْلِمٌ.

On the authority of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abdullah bin 'Umar bin al-Khattab, radiyAllahu 'anhuma, who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, sallAllahu 'alayhi wasallam, say:

"Islam has been built upon five things - on testifying that there is no Allah save Allah, and that Muhammad is His Messenger; on performing salah; on giving the zakah; on Hajj to the House; and on fasting during Ramadhan." [2]

[Al-Bukhari & Muslim]
Imam Nawawi's 40 Ahadith

In many Ahadith where Tashahud in prayer is mentioned with the Shahadah testimony and in many other examples of the Shahadah being established as a doctrine.

For example:

Al-Muwatta Hadith 3.56

Tashahud in the Prayer

Yahya related to me from Malik from Ibn Shihab from Urwa ibn az-Zubayr from Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abd al-Qari that he heard Umar ibn al-Khattab say, while he was teaching people the tashahhud from the mimbar, "Say, Greetings belong to Allah. Pure actions belong to Allah. Good words and prayers belong to Allah. Peace on you, Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings. Peace be upon us and on the slaves of Allah who are salihun. **I testify that there is no Allah except Allah. And I testify that Muhammad is His slave and His messenger.**"

'At-tahiyatu lillah, az-zakiyatu lillah, at-tayibatu wa's-salawatu lillah. As-salamu alayka ayyuha'n-nabiyyu wa rahmatu'llahi wa barakatuhu. As-salamu alayna wa ala ibadi'llahi s-salihin. Ash-hadu an la ilaha illa 'llah wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluh.'" [3]

There are many other references. They are all sourced from [Islamic secondary source literature](#) and are not found anywhere in the Quran.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is clear from the Quranic narratives that the only witness expressed by the Quranic narratives is 'There is no deity but God' (Arabic: La' illa ha ilallah'). This is the witness of all the angels and the messengers. This should also be the witness (Shahadah) of all true believers.

Indeed, there is a plausible argument that the contemporaries of Muhammad's^(pbuh) could bear witness (Shahud) to Prophet Muhammad's^(pbuh) messengership as they were in his presence, 'witnessing'.

However, for a believer today, witnessing Prophet Muhammad^(pbuh) is no different from witnessing Prophets Abraham, Noah, Jesus, Moses, Aaron, Solomon, David, Ishmael, Ishaq, Ibrahim, Saleh, Hud^(pbut) or any other messenger of God.

Alas, it appears that some neither have, nor ever will be satisfied with mentioning God alone in their testimonies as instructed by the Quran. Some include the Prophet and others include the Prophet's contemporaries such as Ali as an appendage.

Whether it is mentioning other Gods, or other's along with God, the tendencies of many worshippers remains the same.

Sadly, many Muslims today put their faith in saints and even the Prophet to intercede for them on the Day of Judgment.

039:045

"And when God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter shrink, and when those besides Him are mentioned, lo! they are joyful"

064:013

"God! There is no God but Him: and on God let the Believers put their trust"

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

Related Articles:

- (1) [Muslim and Mu'min \(Believer\) - The Difference](#)
- (2) [Intercession and the Prophet's Help](#)

REFERENCES

[1] MISHKAT-UL-MASABEEH, Translation by Capt. A.N. Matthews, Revised and Edited, with Notes By: F.K.Khan Durrani, B.A. - Tabligh Literature Company, Railway Road, Lahore. Volume 1 Chapter 1, Page 19-20

[2] IMAM NAWAWI'S FORTY AHADITH. [online], Available at: <http://fortyhadith.iiu.edu.my/hadith03.htm> [Accessed 15th April 2011]

[3] MALIK'S MUWATTA, Book 3, Section: Tashahud in the Prayer, Number 3.14.56, University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement [online], Translation available at <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muwatta/003.mmt.html> [Accessed 15th April 2011]

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