

What is Shahada? The true meaning

The first pillar of Islam is the declaration of faith, known as the Shahada. It is when one declares: *"I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His servant and messenger."* This fundamental proclamation establishes the core of Islamic belief. It serves as the gateway to Islam (the faith).

As we discussed in the last article (Stillwater News Press, 03/15/25, C7), Islam is a purely monotheistic religion, and this declaration lays this foundational principle. The Shahada is significant because it establishes one's belief in monotheism by affirming that Allah alone deserves worship. Also, the Shahada acknowledges Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the final messenger of Allah, validating his teachings and example (called Sunnah). Furthermore, it represents a conscious commitment to follow divine guidance.

But what is the true meaning of the Shahada? Is there a deeper meaning attached to it?

Declaring the Shahada with sincere belief leads to achieving one of the greatest goals humans have always aspired to. The true meaning of the Shahada is *freedom*. This simple assertion achieves the utmost freedom possible, whether spiritual or personal. This confession of faith symbolizes freedom in very significant ways. By recognizing Allah SWT (Subhānahu Wa Ta'ālā, meaning 'Glory be to Him, the Exalted') as the ultimate authority, a

believer frees themselves from worldly subjugation, gaining true independence. It eliminates confusion between deities; acknowledging that Allah has established one's destiny brings clarity and purpose to one's life.

The Shahada enables one to grow while avoiding harmful behavior. It eliminates false worship by focusing on the Creator rather than the created. One is not attached to other creatures, be it humans, trees, animals, or planets. One is attaching himself to the One who created all others. It is also the highest manner of respecting a human person, for he (she) will worship and prostrate to none other than Allah, the One, the Only, the Self-Sufficient Master.

For the Shahada to be valid, it must be pronounced with clear understanding, made of one's own free will, declared with a heart full of conviction, and accompanied by the intention to fulfill its requirements. This declaration prepares the believer to receive divine guidance and fulfill the other pillars and obligations with a heart dedicated to Allah alone.

The Shahada affirms that no entity—whether a person, group, event, or authority—can ultimately determine one's fate. This rests exclusively with Allah, the Lord of the heavens and earth. Through this declaration, a believer acknowledges that all affairs are subject to divine will and decree. One is free from fear, one enjoys



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his freedom to express himself and say his free opinion fearing no punishment from anyone, because God (Allah) is the One who has destined our fate. It even means freedom for the non-believers. Allah SWT the Almighty says, **"There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower."** [Qur'an 2: 256].

The Shahada also confirms what Allah (with emphatic L, is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic) has declared for himself. Allah the Almighty says in the Qur'an: **"Allah bears witness that 'La ilaha illa Huwa' (There is no God (deity) but He), and the angels (also bear witnessed), and those having knowledge (also give this witness); (He is always) maintaining His creation in Justice. La ilah illa Huwa (There is no God (deity) but He), the All-Mighty, the All-Wise."** [Qur'an 3: 18]. It is important to notice that God (Allah) himself declares He is the One worthy of worship. It makes perfect sense—because before anything else

existed, Allah was there. He testified to His own Oneness and His right to be worshiped. Allah SWT has also declared that the only faith accepted by him is the one in which people submit themselves to Him alone, that is the religion of Islam. God SWT says, **"Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam. Those who were given the Scripture did not differ except, out of mutual jealousy after knowledge had come to them. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then surely, Allah is Swift in calling to account."** [Qur'an 3:19].

Recognizing that God (Allah) is One and the only One who is the creator, the All-Powerful, and the All-Knowing is a profoundly relieving truth. This awareness liberates the believer from the burden of confusion between many gods and from trying to please multiple deities or authorities. If there were more than one, each with potentially conflicting demands and expectations would destroy the creation. I have always thought about it, what if they fight against each other? I found the answer when I heard Allah, the Almighty, says, **"Allah has never begotten a son, nor is there any god besides Him. Otherwise, each god would have taken away what it created, and some of them would have gained supremacy over others. Glorified is Allah, far beyond what they describe."** [Qur'an 23:91]. The Almighty here gives us an example of the conflict and confusion that would

exist if there were many Gods. Instead of believing in many deities or supreme powers, one submits entirely to one's relationship with the single, supreme authority of the universe—the One Who has everything in His hand. Allah the Almighty says, **"Allah! La ilaha illa Huwa (There is no God but He). Surely, He will gather you together on the Day of Resurrection about which there is no doubt. And who is truer in statement than Allah?"** [Qur'an 4:87].

This monotheistic understanding establishes tranquility when followed by people. One feels his freedom because all creation acknowledges the same ultimate authority—One who is worshiped, respected, and obeyed by all. The implications become transformative when we further recognize that all people stand equal before God, regardless of their worldly status or position.

With this belief, why would someone of lower social status need to fear those of higher status? When everyone stands in the same line (or in lines) all next to each other, all doing the same actions, it makes it clear that social status has no role to play as all are equal and free from their worldly status. I still remember the day my university president, always surrounded by aides and secretaries, walked into the prayer hall. But as soon as we stood in line for prayer, all distinctions disappeared. At that moment, he was just another worshiper before God—no

ranks, no barriers, just equal before Allah. This awareness that we stand, as equal, before God dissolves unwarranted fear and subservience. Similarly, what justification could those in positions of power have for oppressing others, knowing that the ultimate authority—God Himself—is perfectly just and does not tolerate injustice?

This understanding of divine unity establishes a moral compass that guides human interactions. God not only upholds perfect justice but also strictly forbids oppression and wrongdoing against His creations. The awareness that every individual will ultimately be accountable to the same just Creator, Who knows all, is a powerful deterrent against exploitation and the abuse of power.

Furthermore, this concept of divine oneness creates coherence in one's life. The declaration of God's oneness thus extends far beyond theological doctrine—it restructures human relationships, establishes ethical boundaries, and provides a serene feeling of justice and equality. In recognizing the One God, believers find spiritual truth and a life with no fear from anyone.

So, what does *"Muhammad is his servant and messenger"* mean? We answer this next week.

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