

# shahadah

**“There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet.”**

Shahadah is the most important pillar of the Muslim faith. The Arabic word *shahada* means “to witness” or “to testify. To be a faithful Muslim, one must testify that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is God’s prophet. To become a Muslim, a single honest recitation of the Shahadah is enough.

In Muslim thought, every child is born a Muslim, with an inborn desire for goodness and truth. One’s upbringing in society can cause one to stray from the right path of worshipping the One God. When a person of another faith becomes a Muslim by reciting Shahadah, it is said that they have reverted (rather than *converted*) to Islam.



The words of the Shahadah are among the most common subjects of Muslim calligraphic art. Several national flags display the Shahadah:



Saudia Arabia

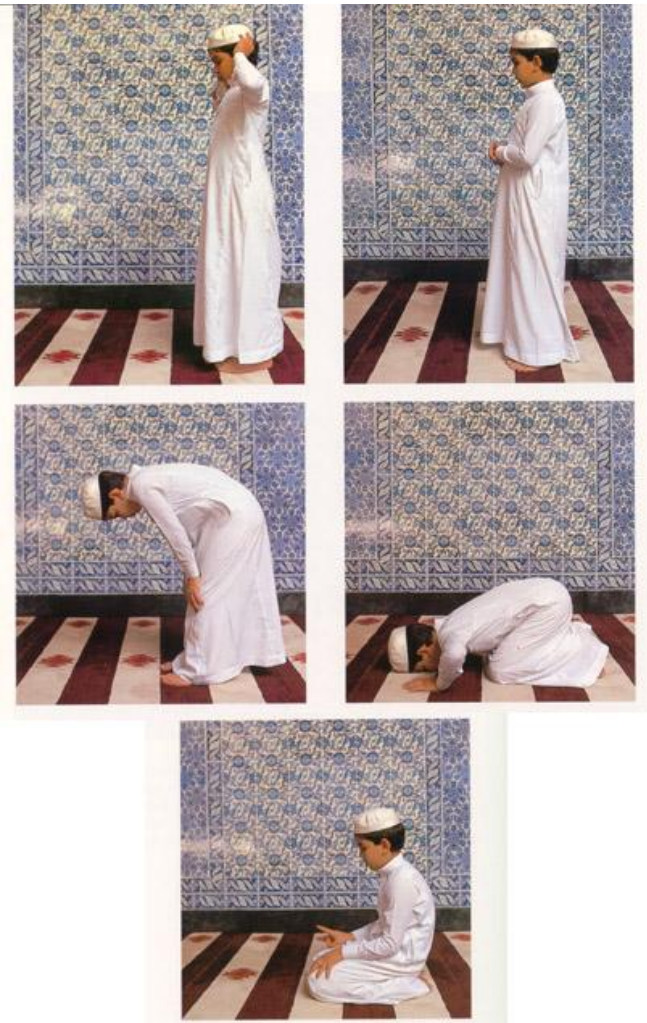


Afghanistan



Somaliland (not a recognized state)

# salat



**Salat** is the Muslim practice of prayer. Salat consists of five daily prayers: Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, and Isha'a. Fajr is performed at dawn, Dhuhr is a noon prayer, Asr is performed in the afternoon, Maghrib is the sunset prayer, and Isha'a is the evening prayer. All of these prayers are recited while facing the Ka'bah in Mecca. Muslims must wash themselves before prayer. The prayer is accompanied by a series of set positions including; bowing, standing, prostrating and sitting.

In preparation, the worshipper finds a clean place, washes hands and face and turns the mind toward God. The worshipper will stand quietly while reciting the first verses of the Qu'ran. The second part of the prayer ritual involves bowing low with hands on knees, as if waiting for God's orders. The third movement is to prostrate oneself on the ground, with forehead and nose on the floor and elbows raised, in a posture of submission to God. The fourth movement is to sit with the feet folded under the body. The prayers end as the worshippers turn to the left and right saying, "Peace be upon you, and God's blessing." This action reminds Muslims of the importance of others around them, both in the mosque and in the rest of the world.

Some Muslims pray on a special prayer rug. This is not required by the Qu'ran but it helps the worshipper to remain clean and pure during the prayer. Many prayer mats are woven with helpful images of mosques which indicate top versus bottom of the mat as well as pictured reminders about where to place one's hands and what to think on while praying.



# zakat



One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust.

The word Zakat means both 'purification' and 'growth'. Zakat is the practice of “the giving of alms” and it is required of all Muslims. A Muslim’s possessions are purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need. Like the pruning of plants, this cutting back is believed to encourage new growth by securing Allah’s blessings.

The Qu’ran doesn’t say exactly how much money Muslims must give to the poor, but later teachings specify 1/40 of one’s excess wealth. Sunni Muslims interpret the law to mean that everyone must give 2.5% of their excess wealth to the poor.

Shiite Muslims give 5%. Once you hit puberty, you’re considered an adult and zakat applies to your life. There is a minimum amount of wealth (a threshold of poverty) that draws the line between who must give and who may receive alms.

Historians attribute the rapid spread of Islam across Europe and the Middle East to the pillar of zakat. In the middle ages, wealthy landowners were forced to give some of their farmland to poor farmers, making Islam very popular with the peasant class. Zakat historically has often been a community-building, equalizing practice.

# sawm al-Ramadan

Sawm is the practice of fasting during the month of Ramadan. All healthy, adult Muslims must fast from sunrise to sunset, not eating or drinking anything during the day. Exceptions are made for people for whom fasting would be harmful, including the elderly, the sick, and women who are pregnant. Children are expected to fast all day once they hit puberty, but many begin practicing a half-day fast when they are young.

One must fast with intention. If a person simply avoids food and drink without making a mindful commitment to do so for the sake of his or her relationship with Allah, the fast doesn't count. The fast helps foster compassion for those who go hungry. It helps a person avoid distractions when praying to Allah. It shows obedience to God and earns the forgiveness of past sins.

Each evening during Ramadan, families break the fast together, first with a small meal of dates and water called *iftar*, then with a more substantial feast. The last night of Ramadan is a great feast called Eid al-Fitr.

If a Muslim accidentally breaks the fast by forgetting, he or she must continue fasting and add an extra day to the Ramadan fasting period. If a Muslim purposefully breaks the fast, he or she should pay a penance by fasting an extra 60 days or clothing and feeding 60 people in need.

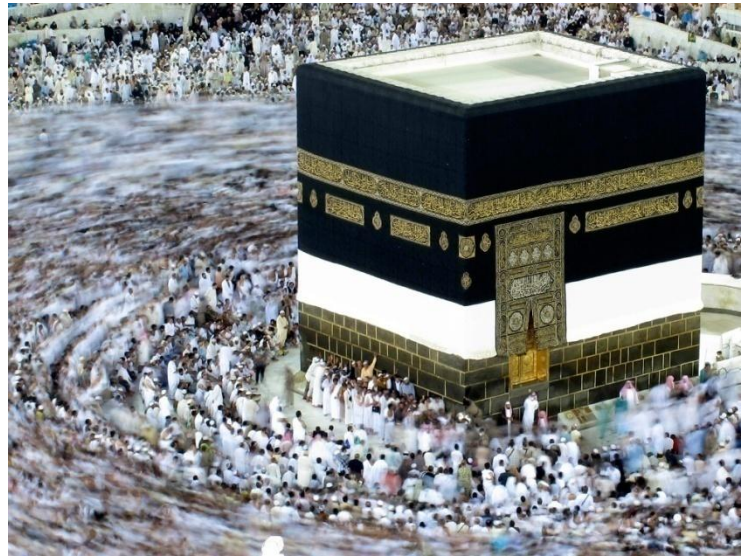
Because the Muslim calendar follows a different cycle than the Gregorian calendar of Western countries, the dates of Ramadan shift each year. In 2015, Ramadan was June 17-July 17. In 2016, it will be from June 6-July 5.



# hajj

The Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is one of the largest annual pilgrimages in the world, and is the fifth pillar of Islam, a religious duty that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime by every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to do so. The Hajj is a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and their submission to God. The pilgrimage occurs from the 8th to 12th day of the last month of the Islamic calendar. The Gregorian date of the Hajj changes from year to year.

Pilgrims join processions of hundreds of thousands of people, who simultaneously converge on Mecca for the week of the Hajj, and perform a series of rituals. Pilgrims generally travel to Hajj in groups, as an expression of unity. Some airlines have special packages for Muslims going to Mecca. Ships also take pilgrims to Mecca so they can perform Hajj.



During the Hajj, male pilgrims are required to dress only in the *ihram*, a garment consisting of two sheets of white unhemmed cloth, with the top draped over the torso and the bottom secured by a white sash; plus a pair of sandals. Women are simply required to maintain their *hijab* - normal modest dress, which does not cover the hands or face. Each

person walks counter-clockwise seven times around the Kaaba, the cube-shaped building which acts as the Muslim direction of prayer, runs back and forth between the hills of Al-Safa and Al-Marwah, drinks from the Zamzam Well, goes to the plains of Mount Arafat to stand in vigil, and throws stones in a ritual Stoning of the Devil. The pilgrims then shave their heads, perform a ritual of animal sacrifice, and celebrate the three day global festival of Eid al-Adha.

As of 2010, about three million pilgrims participate in this annual pilgrimage. Crowd-control techniques have become critical, and because of the large numbers of people, many of the rituals have become more stylized. It is not necessary to kiss the Black Stone, but merely to point at it on each circuit around the Kaaba. Throwing pebbles was done at large pillars, which for safety reasons in 2004 were changed to long walls with catch basins below to catch the stones. The slaughter of an animal can be done either personally, or by appointing someone else to do it, and so forth. But even with the crowd control techniques, there are still many incidents during the Hajj, as pilgrims are trampled in a crush, or ramps collapse under the weight of the many visitors, causing hundreds of deaths.

