



Accepting Islam at Cambridge Central Mosque

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Since opening the doors of Cambridge Central Mosque in April 2019, we have been blessed with a growing stream of enquiries from people who are considering becoming Muslims. To support this demand, we have produced the following short guide covering the practicalities and principles of what accepting Islam means. We hope you find it useful.

Taking my shahadah (testimony of faith) at Cambridge Central Mosque: What can I expect?

If you are interested in taking your 'shahadah' – that is to say formally entering Islam – at Cambridge Central Mosque you can contact us via the website at www.cambridgecentralmosque.org/contact.

An appointment will then be made for you either to take your shahadah or to discuss it with the mosque's imam, should you have further questions.

The shahadah or 'testimony' itself is a simple declaration of faith made in Arabic that translates as, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is His messenger.' When making the declaration the imam will recite the wording very slowly and ask you to repeat after him. The imam will also ask you to repeat the testimony in English.

When taking your shahadah you need two adult Muslim witnesses, in addition to the imam, to be present. The mosque can either provide these witnesses or you can invite your own witnesses, as you prefer.

In addition to the testimony the imam will also:

- Give a short talk during the session on the meaning and spiritual significance of the shahadah.
- Answer any questions you may have.
- Present you with a shahadah certificate and contact details for Cambridge's local convert group, the Cambridge Crescent.

Taking my shahadah: FAQs

When can I book a shahadah appointment for, how long will it take and where will it be?

Shahadah ceremonies generally take place at weekends between 1-6pm, although this may vary. Each appointment is a one hour slot (though the testimony of faith itself lasts only a few minutes) and takes place in the mosque's classroom. This is the same for both sexes.

Can I bring family and friends?

Yes, Covid-19 restrictions permitting (see later), we encourage you to invite any close family members or friends you wish to have present. Muslims, those of other faiths and none are all welcome. Please note that the mosque has an upper limit on the numbers it can accept, so please check in advance if you plan to bring a large party.

Are photographs allowed?

Anyone who visits the mosque is permitted to take photographs of the mosque and its gardens, though we would ask that you refrain from taking pictures of people engaged in prayer. The shahadah ceremony itself takes place in a private setting (unless otherwise agreed/discussed with the imam in advance) and is therefore not open to the public/other worshippers to take pictures/videos. Should you or your guests wish to take pictures/video footage at your shahadah ceremony you are welcome to do so. For any other queries regarding photography please contact the mosque.

Do I need to memorise the shahadah in advance?

There is no need to memorise the 'shahadah' or 'testimony' in advance, or worry about your Arabic pronunciation, as the imam will recite very slowly and guide you through the process on the day. However, if you still desire further guidance on the correct pronunciation, [please click here to view a step by step tutorial on taking Shahadah](#).

How should I dress?

There is no need to adhere to a certain dress code (for example, women are not required to wear hijab), however as you are entering a mosque, you are encouraged to dress appropriately.

What is the purpose of the shahadah certificate?

The certificate has no legal validity but is required as proof of entering Islam when travelling to perform Umra or Hajj (the lesser or the greater pilgrimage). It can also be used to ensure a convert is accorded a Muslim burial, or to support claims that the deceased's Will should be followed in accordance with the principles of Islamic inheritance.

The mosque retains a physical and digital copy of the certificate for its records.

Do you take my contact details? For what purpose?

When you take your shahadah we ask for your name, phone number and email address. This is for the mosque's internal records and also (if written consent is given) to pass on to the Cambridge Crescent Group, a local group set up to support those who have converted to Islam. We also ask that you provide a form of photo identification; please see below.

Do you require ID?

We ask that you bring a form of photo identification, such as a driver's licence, student ID or passport. This should be shown to the imam who will photocopy it for our records and use it to confirm your details and that you are aged 18 or over (please see below).

We do not share your details with any third parties.

Do I have to be aged 18 or over to take shahadah?

For safeguarding purposes, if you are under 18 you need parental or guardian consent to take your shahadah at Cambridge Central Mosque. However, this does not stop you from entering Islam informally. You can take your shahadah anytime, anywhere; please see below.

Do I have to take my shahadah with a qualified imam in a mosque?

You can take your shahadah anywhere with any Muslim man or woman. You need two adult Muslim witnesses to be present. This can be in someone's home or workplace, in a garden, on the beach or on a mountain. As the prophet Muhammad, God's Blessings and Peace be upon him, said (Sahih Muslim), 'The whole earth has been made a mosque for me.' The mosque is a fitting place, as it is a place of prayer and remembrance of God from morning till night all year round, and thus brings dignity to the occasion.

How has the process for taking shahadah changed in light of Covid-19?

At the time of writing (February 2021) shahadah ceremonies are being held online via Zoom due to the National Lockdown. Once the lockdown ends, it is very likely that the same policies will be put in place for ceremonies held at the mosque which includes everyone entering the mosque having to submit to a temperature check and providing contact details for NHS Track & Trace. Shoe bags and face masks are also required, as well as your own prayer mat should you wish to pray. If the mosque is required to make further adjustments due to any new government guidelines issued relating to Covid-19, you will be advised at the time of making your appointment. If you are unable to attend the mosque in person, we also continue providing this service virtually. Please ask for details when contacting the mosque.

Will the mosque provide me with further support, after I have taken my shahadah?

New Muslims are encouraged to visit the mosque to learn and practise Islam. Details of our prayer times and events (both physical and virtual) can be found online. We also encourage you to connect with our local convert group, the Cambridge Crescent. Established 10 years ago, the group is run by and for converts as well as those with immediate family members who have converted. To get in touch with the group please ask the mosque for details.

Accepting Islam: What does it mean?

Taking your shahadah symbolically ushers you into your new faith, representing a new beginning in a person's life, which can be both exciting and daunting.

For many new Muslims, one of the major struggles is learning about what you can and cannot do in your new life, as well as what obligations you need to fulfil, and how properly to fulfil them. Most notably, these include the obligations laid out within the five pillars of Islam (of which the shahadah is the first).

These are:

- Shahadah
- Prayer¹ (Salah)
- Paying Zakat (obligatory charitable donations/almsgiving)
- Fasting the month of Ramadan
- Performing Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca)

Should you wish to learn more about the five pillars and Islam in general, we have provided you with a list of suggested resources at the end of this document. Please see 'Recommended resources for new Muslims'.

However, we recognise that it is also in the details, such as whether and how to tell family and friends of your conversion, that new Muslims often need the most help and support. To help you navigate through this and other matters we have given some guidance below.

It is also worth bearing in mind that whilst the founding principles of Islam are not hard to understand or practise, the religion itself is as vast as the ocean. It is not possible for a person to master everything at once. Instead, consider that you are embarking on a lifelong journey of learning, that should be taken one step at a time.

Dietary Restrictions

Muslims can eat anything that is not specifically prohibited, or 'haram'. This is in the interests of cleanliness and health, and also out of obedience to God. Under Islamic law, the following foods are prohibited²:

- Blood
- Pork (as well as less commonly eaten meats, such as dog)
- The meat of any creature (excluding fish) that has not been slaughtered in line with Islamic principles (see below)
- Alcoholic drinks and narcotics

For meat to be halal or 'permissible' the animal must have been killed quickly and mercifully while mentioning the name of God. For more details on this we recommend referring to page 24 of *The Vision of Islam*, in our recommended reading list below.

¹ If you do not know how to pray the five daily obligatory prayers in Arabic and would like guidance, please contact Genc Hajdini (g.hajdini@cambridgecentralmosque.org) and he will be happy to arrange for you to receive instruction. Please also see the online resources section of this document on page 6 for a link to a YouTube video series on how to pray. There is no need for you to learn to pray before taking shahadah.

² See surat al Ma'idah 5:3-4 of the Qur'an.

Relationships

Perhaps one of the most common challenges faced by new Muslims is how to tell family, friends and colleagues of your conversion. The decision is a personal one, with some opting to tell people straight away, and others waiting until they feel ready. Whatever you decide, it is important that you feel able to deal with possible negative responses. We recommend that you join a local support group for converts, such as the Cambridge Crescent or SOFA New Muslims Circle³.

Taking a Muslim name

Many converts choose to take a Muslim name, symbolising the new beginning they have embarked on. This can be in addition to their birth/former name or instead of it, depending on the individual's preference. Some choose to name themselves after important Muslims in history, such as the prophets and their companions (e.g. Dawud, Bilal), whilst others choose names that reflect a divine attribute, such as Abd al-Rahman (Servant of the Most Merciful). Still other names may reflect a characteristic, such as Kareemah, meaning generous.

Typically, Muslim names have positive or sublime connotations, and may serve as the basis for developing one's character. Taking a new name is a big decision, however, and should not be rushed. Many converts decide never to take a new name, and this is also a perfectly valid position.

Recommended Resources for new Muslims

When you first enter Islam the amount of literature and information available can be overwhelming; additionally, it can be difficult to discern which resources are trustworthy, reliable and beneficial. We have therefore provided a list of recommended resources below as a starting point for those looking to learn more about their new faith:

Books

- The Qur'an. A new translation by M.A.S. Abdal Haleem. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- The Holy Qur'an. Translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, with Arabic text. The English and Arabic texts are printed in parallel at the top of each page with very helpful and extensive footnotes. The author quotes, and draws parallels from, the Bible and Shakespeare, which can be especially useful for those coming to Islam from a Christian background.
- The Essential Koran: Heart of Islam by Thomas Cleary. This introductory text uses easily comprehensible language to translate passages of the Qur'an, in an attempt to distil the faith's essence. Each section is presented with explanatory notes in a historical and logical order to reveal the depths of Islamic spirituality.
- The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (editor-in-chief). HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2017.
- Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources by Martin Lings. Whilst it is easy to be put off this book by the immense detail in the earliest chapters of names of Arab people, tribes and places (which can be hard for those not versed in Arabic), Lings' attention to detail is actually one of the book's merits. It is written as an historical biography, whereas it is possible to stumble across a number of books written about the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) that are pious miscellanies of his attributes, rather than true biographies.
- "Salah" The Muslim Prayer. This simple, clear book on how to perform the five daily prayers (with pictures) is available for £1.50 from IPCI in Birmingham (islamicvision.co.uk). Please note the title comes up if you search: 'Muslim prayer', not if you put in the whole title.

³ Run by SOFA Mosque London and SOFA College London at 1 Bradford Road, Acton, London, W3 7SZ, T: 0208 8740 0880, Email: info@thesuffafoundation.org.

- A Simple Guide to Prayer for Beginners by Batool Al-Toma. Published by The Islamic Foundation.
- Communicating with Allah: Rediscovering Prayer by Bassam Saeh. Translated from the Arabic by Nancy Roberts. The author explains a great deal about the Salah that is not apparent from a mere translation of the Arabic and is refreshingly aware of the tendency of practically everyone to recite the five daily prayers without paying proper attention.
- Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship by Al Ghazali. A selection of his writings; translated by Muhtar Holland and published by The Islamic Foundation.
- Being Muslim. A Practical Guide by Asad Tarsin. Published by Sandala.
- Vision of Islam by Sachiko Murata and William Chittick. Published by I.B. Tauris.
- The Book of Hadith. Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad from the Mishakt al Masabih. Translated by Charles Le Gai Eaton, Jeremy Henzell Thomas and Mahmoud Mostafa. Published by The Book Foundation.
- A Thinking Person's Guide to Islam by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad (Bin Talal, of Jordan.) At the time of writing this is unfortunately out of print, however if you are able to get hold of a copy you will find it to be a deep, well-balanced and very well-grounded book. Chapter headings include "What is the Qur'an?" "What is jihad?" "What is the heart?" and even "What is happiness?".
- Islam and the Destiny of Man by Gai Eaton. Published by The Islamic Texts Society. The aim of this beautifully written book is to explore what it means to be Muslim. Make sure you read the introduction which offers a fascinating insight into the author's own conversion to Islam.

Online resources

- Cambridge Muslim College (cambridgemuslimcollege.ac.uk/onlinelearning/). As well as running physical events, the college hosts an online learning platform, home to exclusive lectures and series.
- Cambridge Khutbas (cambridgekhutbasetc.blogspot.com/). Though sadly no longer updated, this site hosts many lectures by Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad (T. J. Winter) of Cambridge University and other speakers in Cambridge. More recent talks by Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad can be found on the Cambridge Muslim College site listed above, as well as on YouTube.
- Seekers Guidance (seekersguidance.org, formerly SeekersHub). This online resource provides more than 100 courses free of charge from qualified scholars.
- [Click here to view Houston Blue Mosque's 'How to Pray' Video Playlist](#) which covers how to pray the Fard (compulsory) as well as Sunnah prayers for all the 5 daily prayers.
- [Click here to access 'The Beginners Guide to Learning How to Pray Salah'](#) by the Mosque of Mercy, a comprehensive guide on learning to how to pray the 5 daily prayers.
- [Sheikh Ali Gomaa on YouTube](#). (Discoverable when searching using this heading: sheikh: Ali gomaa Forty Nawawi Episode (sic). There are 29 lectures about the forty hadiths of Imam Nawawi⁴, which Sheikh Ali Gomaa made each day during Ramadhan 2009, when he was still the Grand Mufti of Egypt. He speaks in Arabic, but fairly slowly, and there are English subtitles.

We also recommend keeping an eye on the mosque's website, cambridgecentralmosque.org, as well as visiting our YouTube channel, youtube.com/user/CambridgeMosque and Facebook page, facebook.com/CambridgeCentralMosque for live streams of the adhan (call to prayer), lectures and Qur'an recitations.

⁴ A revered authority in Islamic jurisprudence (631-676 A.H./1234-1277)

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Did We not expand for thee thy breast

and lift from thee thy burden

that weighed heavily upon thy back?

And did We not elevate thy renown?

For truly with hardship comes ease!

Truly with hardship comes ease!

So when thou art free, exert thyself;

and let thy desire be for thy Lord.⁵

⁵ Surat 'Al sharh'. Translation from 'The Study Qur'an. A New Translation and Commentary'. Please refer to recommended reading list.