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# The Definition and Purpose of the Muslim Word 'Subhanallah'

The phrase 'Subhanallah' comes from ancient times



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While there is no exact definition or translation in English, the term Subhanallah—also known as Subhan Allah—can be translated to mean, among other things, both "God is perfect" and "Glory to God." It is offen used when praising God or exclaiming in awe at His attributes, bounties, or creation. It can also be used as a phrase of simple exclamation—for example, "Wow!" By saying "Subhanallah," Muslims glorify Allah above any imperfection or deficiency; they declare his transcendence.

### **Meanings of Subhanallah**

The Arabic root word *subhan* means a sense of swimming or being immersed in something. Armed with that information, a wider view of the meaning of Subhanallah is a powerful metaphor that portrays Allah as a vast ocean and utter dependence upon him for all support—like being supported by the sea.

Subhanallah can also mean "May Allah be raised" or "May Allah be free of any deficiency."

"Or have they a deity other than Allah? Subhanallah [exalted is Allah above] whatever they associate with Him." (Surah Al-Isra 17:43)

Typically, the term is used to marvel not at ordinary good luck or achievement but rather at the wonders of the natural world. For example, Subbanallah would be an appropriate term to use when viewing a magnificent sunset—but not to thank God for a good grade on an exam.

## Subhanallah in Prayer

Subhanallah is part of a set of phrases that together make up the tasbih (prayer beads) of Fatimah. They are repeated 33 times after prayers. These phrases include Subhanallah (God is perfect); Alhamdulillah (All praise is due to Allah), and Allahu Akbar (Allah is greatest).

The command to pray in this way comes from Abu Hurayrah ad-Dawsi Alzahrani, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad:

"Some poor people came to the Prophet and said, 'The wealthy people will get higher grades and will have permanent enjoyment and they pray like us and fast as we do. They have more money by which they perform the haij, and Umra; fight and struggle in Allah's Cause and give in charity." "The Prophet said, 'Shall I not tell you a thing upon which if you acted you would catch up with those who have surpassed you? Nobody would overtake you and you would be better than the people amongst whom you live except those who would do the same. Say Subhanallah, Alhamdulillah, and Allahu Akbar 33 times each after every [compulsory] prayer." (Hadith 1:804)

# Remembrance of Purpose

Muslims also say Subhanallah during times of personal trial and struggle, as a "remembrance of purpose" and a refuge in the beauty of creation."

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe,' without being put to the test? No, we have tested those before them..." (Quran 29:2-3)

Believing that trials in life can become long and deplete their patience, it is during these times of weakness that Muslims say Subhanallah to help restore balance and perspective and put their minds in a different place altogether.

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