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Takbīr

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Takbīr

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Bibliography

The Arabic word *takbīr* (a gerund from the root k-b-r) means “praise, extolment, glorification, magnification, celebration.” In religious use, *takbīr* refers to the uttering of the phrase *Allāhu akbar* (God is the Greatest). The use of the verb in this sense appears in the Qurʿān in the imperfect active form *yukabbiru* in “He wants you to glorify Him because He has guided you” (2:185), and “He has subjected them to you, that you may glorify God” (22:37). The verb is also used in the imperative form *kabbir* (glorify your Lord; 74:3), and in both the imperative and gerund forms with God as the object in the Qurʿān in “glorify Him with glorification” (17:111).

In Muslim religious practice, *takbīr* is used in a wide range of contexts. The description of God as *akbar* (the greatest) is an expression of God's transcendence as a central Muslim epistemological principle. The word *akbar* is used in the *takbīr* in the superlative sense to convey the absolute, omnipotent, and noncontingent essence of God in relation to human beings.

Takbīr is used frequently in religious devotion and social practice. The Islamic call to prayer (*adhān*) and the call to commence prayer (*iqāmah*) both contain the pronouncement of *takbīr*. Prayer according to both the Shīʿī and Sunnī schools begins with the obligatory, consecratory expression of *takbīr*, *takbīrat al-iḥrām*. It is also recommended to recite *takbīr* after each of the postures assumed successively during prayer. According to the Imāmī Shīʿī school, it is recommended to end prayer by reciting *takbīr* three times.

A formula of *takbīr* is recited on the eve of the last night of fasting during the month of Ramadan with the confirmation that the moon of the month of Shawwāl has been sighted. It is recommended to continue the recitation of *takbīr* until the beginning of the prayer the following morning marking ʿĪd al-Fiṭr (festival of the breaking of the fast). Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have encouraged the recitation of *takbīr* throughout *ḥajj* rites, and more generally at the conclusion of a journey. Though there is disagreement over

the prescribed number based on variant *ḥadīth* texts, the funeral prayer has come to contain the recitation of *takbīr* four times in Sunnī contexts and five times in Shīʿī funeral rites.

In daily religious life and cultural expression *takbīr* has a wide range of usage, spanning all Muslim culture, ranging from commencing the lawful slaughter of animals, to expressing adulation and exuberance during a sermon or cultural performance, and conversely, even to communicating a sense of shock or distress upon learning of the death of a loved one.

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