

Takbirah al-Ihram

Allahu akbar {Allah is greater}

The first utterance which is obligatory for the pilgrims {*hujjaj*} to the House of God is the recital of *labbayk*¹ the recital of which signals the commencement of their *Haji* rituals and this state also makes a series of things forbidden for them.

In the same token, prayer commences with the recital of “*Allahu akbar*” {Allah is greater} and this makes such things as eating, drinking and talking, forbidden {*haram*} for the person praying. Thus, the first *takbir* (utterance of *Allahu akbar*) in prayer is called *Takbirah al-Ihram*.

Along the way to Mecca, the pilgrims repeat the recital of *labbayk* whenever they reach any upward and downward slope. This repetition is recommended or optional {*mustahabb*}. In every bending and standing upright, standing and sitting, it is *mustahabb* for the one praying to repeat the recital of *Allahu akbar*.

“*Allahu akbar*” is the first obligatory utterance in the morning.

It is the first phrase in the form of *adhan* and *iqamah* that a Muslim infant hears at the time of birth, and it is also the last phrase that is recited for the dead (in the prayer of the dead {*salah al-mayyit*}) before he is buried.

It is the only recital which is obligatory {*wajib*} in prayer as well as an essential pillar {*ruk'n*} of prayer.

It is the first sentence of the Muslim hymn, i.e. *adhan*.

It is the much repeated recital at the commencement of prayer, during the prayer and afterward, such that throughout the day the Muslim repeats it 360 times during the five daily obligatory prayers (not including the *mustahabb* prayers) as shown below:

1. For each of the five daily prayers, the *adhan* is recited and in every *adhan*, “*Allahu akbar*” is repeated six times (30 times in all).

2. For each of the five daily prayers, the *iqamah* is recited and in every *iqamah*, “*Allahu akbar*” is repeated four times (20 times in all).
3. Before the *Takbirah al-Ihram* in each of the five daily prayers, there are six *mustahabb takbir* and the seventh *takbir* constitutes that obligatory *Takbirah al-Ihram* (30 times in all).
4. The *Takbirah al-Ihram* at the beginning of prayers is repeated five times daily.
5. There is one *takbir* prior to every *ruku‘* {bowing down} in the 17 *rak‘ahs* {cycles} of the five daily prayers (17 times in all).
6. In each of the 17 *rak‘ahs* of prayers we have two *sujuds* {prostrations} for each of which it is *mustahabb* to recite *takbir*—before and after the *sujud* (68 times in all).
7. Every prayer has a *qunut* prior to which there is a *takbir* (5 times in all).
8. At the end of each of the five daily prayers, there are three *takbirs* (15 times in all).
9. After every prayer, we recite *takbir* 34 times as part of the *Tasbihat Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra* (‘a) (170 times in all).

Yet, what a pity that throughout our lives, we have not recited “*Allahu akbar*” with attention; for, if every day a person would recite “Allah is greater” with faith and perfect attention more than 360 times, he will no longer be afraid of any power, superpower or conspiracy.

Takbir in other prayers

In the *‘Id al-Fitr*² and *‘Id al-Qurban*³ prayers, not only in the prayers but also before and after the prayers, *takbir* constitutes all the chants.

In the *Salah al-Ayat* {Prayer for Signs},⁴ we have five *ruku‘* and there is *takbir* for each *ruku‘*.

In the *Salah al-Mayyit* {Prayer for the Dead} also, five *takbirs* essentially constitute a pillar of the prayer.

How we should recite the takbir in prayer

Islam has explained the etiquette for every action. In the recital of “*Allahu akbar*” some rules must also be observed such as the following:

1. During the recital of *takbir* in prayer, we should raise both our hands parallel to our ears in such a manner that once both hands become parallel to the ears, the *takbir* has already been recited. Imam ar-Rida (‘a) said: “The movement of the hands during the recital of *takbir* is effective in focusing the attention and having complete devotion and sincerity in supplication to God.”⁵

2. The fingers of the hands during *takbir* should be stretched together upward.
3. The palms of the hands must be facing the *qiblah*.

The traditions have described the raising of the hands during *takbir* as the adornment of prayer.⁶

The meaning of takbir

Allahu akbar implies that God is superior to all tangible and intangible, temporal and celestial beings.

Allahu akbar means that God is greater than that which one could describe.

ای برتر از خیال و قیاس و گمان و وهم

وز هرچه گفته‌ایم و شنیدیم و خوانده‌ایم

مجلس تمام گشت و به پایان رسید عمر

ما همچنان در اوّل وصف تو مانده‌ایم

O He who is beyond imagination, analogy, illusion, and fancy! The gathering was finished and our lifespan came to an end. Yet, we are still at the beginning of describing You based on what we have said, heard and read.

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says: "When you are reciting the *takbir*, everything must be insignificant in your sight except Him."⁷

That a person would recite the *takbir* with his tongue while his heart is attached to something else is a lie and a deception, and because of this, God takes the sweetness of remembrance {*dhikr*} from him.

Takbir in Islamic culture

The recital of "*Allahu akbar*" has been customary not only in prayer but rather in many affairs and situations. During the early period of Islam the Muslims used to recite the *takbir* both in times of

prosperity and adversity. For example:

1. During the Battle of the Trench {*khandaq*}, the Muslims came across a firm rock while they were digging the trench. The pick was broken but not the rock. The Prophet (S) came and crushed the rock with a blow. The Muslims recited the *takbir* in unison and right there the Prophet (S) said: "I saw the fall of the Byzantine and the Persian castles in the sparks and sparkles of the rocks."⁸
2. During the Battle of Siffin, 'Ali ('a) used to recite the *takbir* whenever he slew an enemy. By counting the number of *takbirs*, the Muslims would know the number of those whom he had sent to hellfire.⁹
3. On the night when Fatimah az-Zahra ('a) was sent to the house of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) (after the wedding), 70 thousand angels came down to chant the *takbir*.¹⁰
4. Our Holy Prophet (S) recited 40 *takbirs* over the body of Fatimah bint al-Asad (mother of Imam 'Ali ('a))¹¹ and 70 *takbirs* over the body of his uncle Hamzah.¹²
5. During the *Hajj* rituals, it is *mustahabb* to recite *takbir* with every stone that is thrown at the representations of Satan.¹³
6. In the *Tasbihat Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra ('a)* whose reward is equivalent to a thousand *rak'ahs* of *mustahabb* prayers, 34 *takbirs* are included.¹⁴
7. When the Holy Prophet (S) was born, the first sentence he was able to utter was "*Mubarakahu Allahu akbar*" {Blessed is He; Allah is greater}.¹⁵
8. When Mecca fell into the hands of the Muslims, the Prophet (S) entered the Masjid al-Haram, pointed to the Hajar al-Aswad {Black Stone}, and recited the *takbir*. The Muslims also recited the same *takbir* which brought fear into the hearts of the polytheists.¹⁶
9. We read in the traditions: "Whenever a certain thing astonishes you, recite the *takbir*."¹⁷
10. During the Battle of Uhud, one of the leading warriors among the infidels asked for a challenger. Hadrat 'Ali ('a) came forward and he dealt the enemy such a heavy blow that the Prophet (S) and the Muslims recited the *takbir* with a loud voice.¹⁸
11. The Holy Prophet (S) said to Hadrat 'Ali ('a): "Whenever you look at the crescent {*hilal*} or the mirror, or you encounter a problem, say *takbir* three times."¹⁹
12. "*Allahu akbar*" was the slogan of Zayd, son of Imam as-Sajjad ('a), who revolted against the 'Umayyad rule.²⁰
13. During the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (S) was awaiting the news of the death of Nawfal, one of the enemy chiefs. When he (S) was informed that Hadrat 'Ali ('a) had slain Nawfal, the Prophet (S) recited the *takbir*.²¹

14. When Hadrat 'Ali ('a) came to propose for Hadrat Zahra ('a), the Prophet (S) said: "You wait. I have to refer the matter to my daughter Fatimah. But when she was consulted, Hadrat Zahra ('a) remained silent and did not say anything. The Prophet said: "*Allahu akbar! Sukutuha iqraruha*" {Allah is greater! Her silence is her approval}.²²

15. During the battle against the *Khawarij* (Kharijites), when their commander perished, Hadrat 'Ali ('a) recited *takbir* and performed prostration, and all the people recited *takbir*.²³

16. A group of Jews embraced Islam and they said to the Prophet (S): "The previous prophets had successors. Who is the executor of your will {*wasi*}?" At this juncture, the following Verse of Guardianship {*ayah al-wilayah*} was revealed:

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ
وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾

"Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down."²⁴

The Prophet (S) said, "Let us go to the mosque." When they arrived, they saw a beggar who was glad because Hadrat 'Ali ('a) while in the state of *ruku'* in prayer had given him his ring. At that moment the Prophet (S) recited *takbir*.²⁵

17. Recital of *takbir* at the time of entering into the holy shrines of the infallible Imams has been enjoined. Similarly, before reading *Ziyarat Jami'ah*, we recite 100 *takbirs* in three stages. According to the late Majlisi, the reason for all these *takbirs* is perhaps for us not to indulge in extremism {*ghuluww*} with regard to the Imams ('a) as described in the sentences contained in the *Ziyarat Jami'ah*.²⁶

18. In his judgments, whenever Hadrat 'Ali ('a) identified the criminal, he would recite *takbir*.²⁷

19. Maytham at-Tammar was hung at the order of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad and then attacked with spears for the crime of siding with Hadrat 'Ali ('a). At the moment of his martyrdom, he was reciting *takbir* while the blood flowed from his mouth.²⁸

20. During the ascension {*mi'raj*}, the Prophet recited *takbir* at every heaven he passed by.²⁹

21. Jibra'il (Archangel Gabriel) ('a) was beside the Prophet (S) when Hadrat 'Ali ('a) came in. Jibra'il ('a) said: "O Muhammad! By God who appointed you as the Prophet! Compared to the dwellers of the earth, the inhabitants of the heavens are better and more familiar with this 'Ali. Whenever he recites *takbir* in the battles, we angels recite it along with him."³⁰

22. During the Battle of Khaybar, when the Muslims entered the fortress, they recited the *takbir* so much that the Jews had to flee.³¹

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1. Labbayk {Here I am}: In full, Labbayk, allahumma labbayk, labbayka la sharika laka labbayk, inna'l-hamda wa'n-ni'mata laka wa'l-mulka la sharika laka labbayk {"Here I am, O Lord, here I am, You indeed have no partner, here I am. No doubt, all praise and bounties are Yours, and so is the absolute Domain. You indeed have no partners, here I am"}. Recited in Arabic, it is the talbiyyah, proclaimed immediately after wearing the ihram (white garment) that signifies the beginning of the hajj rituals. {Trans.}
 2. Id al-Fitr: the Islamic feast marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. {Trans.}
 3. 'Id al-Qurban (Feast of Sacrifice): the Islamic feast marking the end of the Hajj rituals in the month of Dhu'l-Hijjah, which is associated with the offering of animals for sacrifice. {Trans.}
 4. Salah al-Ayat: obligatory prayer for signs or natural phenomena such as a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse, earthquakes, thunder and lightning, etc. {Trans.}
 5. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 727.
 6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 84, p. 351.
 7. Sirr as-Salah, p. 78.
 8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 190.
 9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 32, p. 60.
 10. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 104.
 11. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 35, p. 70.
 12. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 63.
 13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 11, p. 168.
 14. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 248.
 15. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 273.
 16. Tafsir-e Nemuneh, vol. 27, p. 307.
 17. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 127.
 18. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 20, p. 126.
 19. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 145.
 20. Zayd ibn 'Ali, p. 186.
 21. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, p. 281.
 22. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 93.
 23. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 41, p. 341.
 24. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:55.
 25. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 35, p. 183.
 26. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 99.
 27. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 40, p. 260.
 28. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 42, p. 125.
 29. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 86, p. 207.
 30. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 39, p. 98.
 31. Payambari va Hukumat {Prophethood and Governance}, p. 136.

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