

ISLAMIC TERMS (PART 1 OF 2)

Rating:

Description: A list of some of the most common Islamic words and phrases, their meanings and their significance.

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Objective:

- To understand and thus be comfortable using unfamiliar word.

Arabic Terms:

- Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- Ummah*- Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of colour, race, language or nationality.
- Surah* – chapter of the Quran.

Although Arabic is not the mother language of most of the world's Muslims, it is the language of the Quran and thus Islam. Therefore it is desirable for all Muslims to have a working knowledge of common Islamic terms. When learning to pray and when increasing your interaction with other Muslims you will come across many of these terms. Some of them might seem strange and incomprehensible but you will soon realise that they are used with ease and often. This is because the majority of common Islamic terms are in and of themselves *du'as*. The Arabic language serves to unite the Muslim *Ummah*; if two people speak entirely different languages they are at least united by their use of Arabic to remember and worship Allah.



1. **Assalam Alaikum.** This is the Islamic greeting. The first word, *Assalam*, is derived from the same linguistic root as the words Muslim and Islam, *sa - la - ma*, which means submission to the will of Allah and also encompasses the concepts of peace, security and safety. When a Muslim says *Assalam Alaikum* he is asking Allah to grant the receiver of the greeting protection and security. The

response is ***Wa Alaikum Assalam***, meaning, 'May Allah (also) grant you protection and security'. These brief Arabic words let Muslims know that they are among friends, not strangers.

When you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with what is better than it or (at least) return it equally. Certainly, God is Ever a Careful Account Taker of all things.”
(Quran 4:86)

Better Islamic greetings include, *Assalam Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah*, meaning, 'May Allah grant you protection, security and mercy', and *Assalam Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh*, which means, 'May God grant you protection, security, mercy and may He bless you'. Returning a greeting with something better would be, for example, after hearing the words *Assalam Alaikum* you would respond, *Wa Alaikum Assalam Wa Rahmatullah*.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, “**You will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I tell you about something which, if you do it, will make you love one another? Greet each other with Salam**”.[1]

2. ***Bismillah***. It is the beginning word of all but one *surah* in the Quran and it means 'I begin with the name of Allah'. It is a word you will often hear before a Muslim begins any task or action. When a Muslim says *Bismillah* he invokes Allah's blessings on whatever he is about to do, from big life changing moments to the mundane everyday tasks such as washing the hands or eating. By uttering the word *Bismillah* we bring Allah to the forefront of our thoughts and in doing so possibly prevent any sin that might otherwise come from our actions.

A Muslim is encouraged to say *Bismillah* before starting/doing anything, as it would bless that initiative.

3. ***InshaAllah***. It means Allah willing, or if Allah (God) wills it to be so. It is a reminder and acknowledgment that nothing happens except by the will of Allah.

And never say of anything, “I shall do such and such thing tomorrow.” Except (with the saying), “If Allah wills”. And remember your Lord when you forget and say, “It may be that my Lord guides me unto a nearer way of truth than this.”(Quran 18:23 & 24)

The word *InshaAllah* is used to emphasize that a human being has no knowledge of the future or the power to affect the future. Thus the speaker acknowledges that if something happens it is by the will of Allah alone. If a person intends to do something at a later time he will say *InshaAllah*, this is for a short period of time or a longer period. I will post that letter now, *InshaAllah*, or I will post that letter tomorrow, *InshaAllah*, or even, I will post that letter next year, *InshaAllah*.

The key to the correct use of this word is the intention. If a person intends to do something *InshaAllah* is the correct word. If a person has no intention of ever doing the action then using the word *InshaAllah* is deceptive and wrong. For example, if a person is invited to lunch but knows he has no intention of attending yet answers *InshaAllah* in order to appease the one issuing the invitation he has made a mistake. However if the person answers, yes *InshaAllah*, with the intention of attending unless he is somehow prevented, perhaps by car trouble or inclement weather, then the use is correct.

In this modern age many people have fallen into error by using the word *InshaAllah* incorrectly. For example, saying *InshaAllah* to a child when the parent has no intention of fulfilling the request is teaching the child that deception is acceptable.

4. ***Alhamdulillah***. It means, all praise and thanks is for Allah. When one proclaims this he is thanking Allah for His favours and bounties. However it is a word that encompasses much more than just thanks. It acknowledges that whatever the situation for which we are thankful is, it has come about only due to the bounty and blessings from Allah. It is a statement of appreciation meaning to praise and to worship and thus can be expressed as both a response and as a spontaneous act of remembrance.

Alhamdulillah is a word that you will hear often, under many different circumstances and in many situations. If you ask a Muslim how they are they will often respond with the word *Alhamdulillah*, meaning that no matter how they feel at that particular time they thank Allah and praise him. Perhaps you might thank a Muslim for their generosity and they will respond again with the word *Alhamdulillah*, meaning in this case that the thanks and praise belong only to Allah who has given them the means to be generous.

This is a comprehensive word that even the prophets used to show gratitude to Allah. Prophet Noah was commanded to express his gratitude, Allah said:

“... say, ‘All praises and thanks are due to Allah Who saved us from an oppressive people.’” (Quran 23:28)

Prophet Ibrahim also used the word saying:

“All praises and thanks are due to Allah Who gave me Ismail and Ishaq in my old age...” (Quran 14:39)

Footnotes:

[1]

Saheeh Muslim

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