

Three ways to the Divine

A (G) C#m (Bm) D (C) A (G) A (G)

Sub - han Al - Lah Sub - han Al - Lah Lah Al -

E (D) D (C) A (G) A (G)

ham - du - lil - lah Al ham - du - lil - lah Al - lah Al -

E (D) A (G) Bm (Am) E (D)

lah ho Ak - bar Al - lah ho Ak - bar

Words traditional
 Music and Dance Wali & Ariënne van der Zwan
 Chords between brackets are for guitar, capo II

Subhan Allah The Subtlety and Refinement in and around us
Alhamdulillah The Joy and Abundance in and around us
Allah Ho Akbar The awe-invoking Mystery in and around us

Tradition has it that the Prophet Muhammad gave the three wasifas SUBHAN ALLAH – ALHAM-DULILLAH – ALLAH HO AKBAR to his daughter Fatima, when she asked for help, as she couldn't handle the household. (See M. Lings: *Muhammad, his life based on the earliest sources*, Vermont 1983, p. 168). Lings cites Muhammad asking his daughter Fatima and his son in law Ali:

'Shall I not give you something better than that which ye asked for?'
 And when they [Fatima and Ali] said yes, he said:
 'Words which Gabriel taught me, that ye should say *Glory be to God* ten times after each prayer, and ten times *Praise be to God*, and ten times *God is most great*. And that when you go to bed ye should say them thirty three times each.'

Some scholars believe that the common Sufi practice to recite *wasifas* 33 or 99 times, goes back to this story.

The symbolism is clear: these three wasifas offer all help you may ever need. This is further emphasized in another tradition (*Hadith*), in which the Prophet told the Bedouin who struggled with the difficult Arabic of the Quran, that it would suffice to recite just these three *wasifas*, as they contain the whole of the Quran.

At the Mana Retreat in New Zealand (2007), we shared our morning practices with the group. The magic of the Mana Retreat Center, the ringing of the bell during our morning practices (always when we recited the three wasifas) and the group meditation deepened our attunement to these well-known phrases and offered an explanation why these three wasifas contain the whole of the Quran.

More recent, a melody and movements came that emphasized these meanings and also exemplified the spiritual paradox of gaining strength by letting go, that we have been working with for quite some time.

Subhan Allah



Subhan Allah is traditionally translated as 'Glory to God'. The root SABH means 'void', in this context referring to God being void or free of mistakes and flaws, the essence of goodness. From this traditional understanding arises the notion that 'God is pure'.

As absolute purity or 100% essence is unobtainable in this world where all is mixed and diluted, this quality of the divine is beyond the earthly realm. However, we can touch upon it in the atmosphere whenever refinement or subtlety enters. The more we attune to this refined atmosphere in and around us and the more we surrender to it, the more we are carried to the deeper meaning of SUBHAN ALLAH and to the Divine.

In terms of the Planets, the attunement is Neptune, the higher octave of Venus and the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty. In terms of the elements, the attunement is Ether, an attunement we cannot call upon or enter without Grace happening.

Alhamdulillah

The traditional translation of this phrase is 'Praise be to God'. It is the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew HALELU YA (the Christian Alleluia).



The root HAMD means 'praise'. This root is found in the Beautiful Name Hamid (the Praiseworthy) and in the name Muhammad, 'the praised one'.

As everything on earth comes from the Creator, all is praiseworthy and all Creation is a way to praise the One. Praise comes from the Source and through Creation returns to the Source. Creation in all its abundance and variety is an expression of praise: the whole world is a prayer rug (Quran 71: 19, translation Lex Hixon).

We can touch upon this quality of the divine by feeling the joy and abundance of the Creation in us and around us. This makes ALHAMDULLILLAH an expression of the immanent aspect of the divine.

In terms of the Planets, the attunement is Uranus, the higher octave of Mercury: the greatest Uranus act ever performed was the idea to create the universe. The abundant and seemingly superfluous variety as expressed in the creation story of Genesis and seen everywhere around us is another sign of this Uranian quality.

Allah ho Akbar

This well-known and often heard phrase addresses the greatness of the divine. The root of the word AKBAR is KABIR (the Greatest), again one of the Beautiful Names. The meaning is 'God is the greatest', but as there is only one God, beyond

الله أكبر

comparison, a more accurate rendering would be God is 'most great', 'greater than anything' or 'God is greater than...'.
This phrase is the Islamic equivalent of the first commandment in the Torah not to worship images or idols. As names are also images, the Jews traditionally do not utter the name of God, thus expressing the all surpassing or transcendent quality of the divine. Hence their tradition to sing *niguns*, meaningless less syllables that reach God where words with their meanings fail.

We can touch upon this quality when we are overwhelmed by awe (in the original sense of the word) or feel a mystery beyond our comprehension, too deep to even think about, a mystery we can only surrender to.

Spoken or sung, ALLAH HO AKBAR often creates a sense of fire. This fire attunement is to be avoided, as it brings the phrase under the sway of the nafs (ego) and leads to the idea that 'My God is greater (than yours)', an impossibility since the divine is beyond compare. To lift the phrase beyond the realm of comparison and nafs, Murshid SAM offered the translation 'Peace is Power'.

In terms of the Planets, the attunement is Pluto (the higher octave of Mars, the unconscious and the sense of deepest wonder and inevitability or Truth), which also deepens the connotation of surrendering. Surrender is the literal meaning of the word 'Islam', which shares its root SLM with the Arabic word for Peace (SALAM): Peace is Power.

The use of the three wasifas is not confined to Muslim communities. On Internet, (<http://on.rt.com/i27odi>) Sebastian Theodosios, Palestinian Archbishop in the Holy Land, talks about the use of Allah, Alhamdulillah and Allah Ho Akbar, in his Arabic speaking church:

We Christians also say Allahu Akbar. This is an expression of our understanding that the Creator is great. We don't want this phrase to be related to terrorism and crimes. We refuse to associate these words with massacres and murders. We speak against using this phrase in this context. Those who do, they insult our religion and our religious values. Those using these words while taking some unreligious, unspiritual, uncivilized actions are harming the religion. Allahu Akbar is an expression of our faith. One must not use these words for non-religion-related purposes in order to justify violence and terror...

For us, Allah is not an Islamic term. This is a word used in Arabic to indicate the Creator who's made the world we are living in. So when we say Allah in our prayers we mean the Creator of this world.

In our prayers and pleas, in our Orthodox Christian religious ceremonies we use exactly this word. We say, glory be to Allah in all times. We say Allah a lot during our liturgy. It's erroneous to think that the word Allah is only used by Muslims. We the Arab Christians say Allah in our Arabic language as a way to identify and address the Creator in our prayers.

Put together, the three wasifas offer us Ether and the three higher Planets.

If we attune to the subtlety and refinement of the divine, experience the joy and abundance of Creation and open up for the awe and sense of mystery underneath

all, we indeed have summarized the whole of the Quran (or any other sacred book for that matter) in these three sacred words.

Dance movements

1. Subhan Allah
2. Subhan Allah
3. Alhamdulillah (2x)
4. Alhamdulillah (2x)
5. Allah Ho Akbar
6. Allah Ho Akbar
7. Allah Ho Akbar

Dancers face line of direction, anti-clockwise. Arms in Mevlevi position (left arm over heart with left hand on right shoulder, right arm over left in the same way). This is a gesture of introspection, as practiced by the Mevlevi dervishes (the whirling dervishes) in their *sama*. By this gesture, the dervishes with their body draw the letters of the word ALLAH (see calligraphy above). The left arm comes first, as this is closest to the heart.

The unfolding of the arms – as a flower opening – at the ALHAMDULILLAH is also part of the Mevlevi *sama* (the ritual of the turning dervishes). The movements are a somatic expression of the spiritual law that one receives strength by letting go.

1. Step out with right on SUB-, left steps by on -HAN. Left steps in on -LAH, right steps by (caravan step).
2. Continue the same movement.
3. Turn right on the first ALHAMDULILLAH. Arms unfold and open up half way (shoulder height). Keep turning right for the second ALHAMDULILLAH, arms unfold completely now, raised in the air.
4. On the repetition, turn left and reverse the arm movements, ending up in Mevlevi position, facing center.
5. Step out four steps, starting with right. Upper body bows and arms come by the side, palms facing center, in a gesture of surrendering.
6. Step in four steps, starting with right, raising arms.
7. Side step anticlockwise, starting with right, left closing by. Hold hands at shoulder height in a gesture of strength. End by turning to line of direction and bringing arms in Mevlevi position, ready to start again from the top.