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### Embracing “Allahu akbar” — A Sacred Phrase

Within the Muslim community, “Allahu akbar” is a deeply meaningful phrase commonly used to serve as a constant reminder of God, or Allah’s eternal and immeasurable greatness. As a member of this close-knit community, the phrase is significant and held dear to me, expressing my faith and connection to my religious identity. However, the true meaning of “Allahu akbar” extends beyond its literal translation; rather, it’s an expression of gratitude, trust, and recognition of divine power and guidance.

Ever since I could remember, the words “Allahu akbar” have always been used naturally and effortlessly around me, incorporated within my everyday life. It’s heard in the call to prayer, recited during and after each prayer five times a day, as well as heard frequently in daily conversations amongst Muslims. Hence, this phrase is truly engraved in the community’s vocabulary. For instance, my father, like many other Muslims, uses this phrase in various life situations—whether good or bad—to demonstrate his reliance upon God. In Islam, this is known as *yaqeen*, a beautiful trust in Allah’s plan instilled within us.

One night, my father came home late from work due to his boss asking him to stay overtime. Although he admitted to my mother that he had been slightly annoyed about being late, he still stayed to get the job done. Later on, when my father finally made it out of the office, he noticed that the highway was unusually quiet, without the usual traffic. Turning on the radio to hear the news, he found out that he had just barely missed an accident that had

occurred a few hours prior. Therefore, the freeway, with all its delays and traffic, was over. Ultimately, my father ended his story with a smile saying, “‘Allahu akbar’, God is truly the best of all planners.” Times like these are reminders that there is great wisdom behind certain experiences we may face in our daily lives. We believe that everything in our life has a reason behind it, even if we don’t have the wisdom to understand such reasoning. Here, it can be seen that “Allahu akbar” is the source of comfort and appreciation in the face of life's trials. This demonstrates how individuals within my community use this phrase to acknowledge how reliant we are upon God and that we should leave everything up to Him.

In addition, my father felt as though he was saved, and as a way of thanking God, praised Him, by saying “Allahu akbar.” This scene emphasizes the beauty within the term, allowing faith to provide solace and resilience in the face of adversity. Nonetheless, “Allahu akbar” reinforces the importance of this phrase within both my personal experience and the larger discourse community.

“Allahu akbar” also offers an opposing narrative, one that shows how society and the media misinterpret and misuse the phrase. There are negative connotations attached to this pure term, often linked with hateful language and discrimination towards Muslims. Islamophobia is widespread, especially after the events that have occurred such as 9/11, and ongoing conflicts or wars in the Middle East. Many Muslims now face racism and bigotry against them due to the media and how they misrepresent us. In a way, our own term, “Allahu akbar” has somehow been weaponized against us. It has become almost taboo to say out loud in public, forcing individuals to be mindful of the environment they say it. There is a distinct difference between when Muslims use the words and when people other than the discourse community use them. From my personal experience, there have been several times where I’ve found myself in

difficult and scary situations, simply because I'm Muslim. In particular, I've had an encounter with an Islamophobic individual who used derogatory comments, including the use of "Allahu akbar" in an offensive way—reflecting those misconceptions and stereotypes.

It was an average bus ride home after a long day of school. Whilst making my way to the back of the bus to find an empty seat, I noticed a man staring and muttering something to himself, rolling his eyes and making annoyed expressions. My response was to ignore him, to get as far away from him as possible. After a couple of stops, the same man walked over to the rear door, avoiding eye contact, he began yelling hateful things targeted at Muslims. Words like "terrorist," "Arab," and "Allahu akbar" spewed out his mouth. In true New York City fashion, I ignored him once again. I knew this was all in an effort to intimidate me, to portray his biases. What truly shocks me is the ability for people to take a pure word, a word that is engraved in my everyday life, along with others in the Muslim community, and use it in such hateful ways. This situation highlights the challenges faced by the members of the Muslim community, who often experience prejudice and discrimination as a result of false representations of religious practices and beliefs.

Despite these challenges, "Allahu akbar" continues to remain a symbol of devotion and steadfastness within the Muslim community. The value the words carry exceeds the negative stereotypes and stigma projected onto them, as it is an embodiment of the core values of the Islamic faith, including thankfulness, and trust in Allah's plan. As a part of this discourse community, I find that the true expression of "Allahu akbar" acts to unify, bringing people together through shared religious and spiritual experiences.

For outsiders of the discourse community, it is vital to understand the significance of "Allahu akbar" by requiring an unbiased viewpoint that defies naive and shallow associations

made by the media. It is crucial to recognize the importance of this specific term, as well as the contexts and interpretations it has throughout the Muslim community. Hence, those outsiders will be able to appreciate and understand the spiritual and cultural meaning. Through the lens of “Allahu akbar,” the entire Muslim community can be depicted in a way that highlights the depth of our faith, the strength that comes from our connection to God, and the tenacity of our beliefs.

All in all, the term “Allahu akbar” is frequently used within the Muslim discourse community, as it is a deeply meaningful phrase to serve as a constant reminder of God’s greatness. As a member of this community, the phrase is significant and held dear to me, expressing my faith and connection to my religious identity. Despite the negative manner in which other individuals outside the discourse community use the term, it is vital to mention the resilience of the community, and that those things do not bring us down.

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