

ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY: 3AMMIYYA EXPRESSIONS

Expressions that include the word الله (God) are extremely widespread in the Arabic language, and many of these sayings are used by speakers of any faith, whether or not the speaker is particularly religious. While it may seem odd at first to use the name of God so often in speech, these expressions are a natural part of the Arabic language and play a large role in day-to-day interactions. Because they are so common, these phrases also appear regularly in calligraphy, and the phrases are easy to recognize even in calligraphic writing once you are familiar with how they look.

* Many of these phrases do not have an exact equivalent in English, and their literal translation sometimes is not the best way to understand their Arabic meaning and true usage. For this reason, we have given you the sense of the phrase first, and provided the literal translation in parentheses. You should keep in mind the sense of the word, not the literal translation, when thinking of these phrases. Remember that this is not unique to Arabic, as many languages have similar expressions (“God bless”, “God forbid”, or “Grüß Gott” in German), and it doesn’t always show religiosity even though it can at times do.

** In this the pronunciation guide in this table, capital “L” refers to the emphatic sound of the letter ل, while the lowercase “l” refers to the non-emphatic sound of the letter ل. For more information about the pronunciations of these letters, please see the Pronunciation tab in this module.

COMMON PHRASES USING الله

Arabic phrase	Pronunciation	English equivalent*	Usage in daily speech
الله	AL-Laaaah	So beautiful/cute!	This expression is used to express great admiration. For example, when receiving a gift that you really like, or at seeing a cute image.
الله عليك \ عليكي	AL-Laaaah 3aleek	Beautiful! Nice!	This expression is used to praise people for a good action or something that has been said/heard.
بِسْمِ الله	BIS-mil-la	(lit. In the name of God)	This phrase is said when beginning actions: before starting an important task (like an exam, a presentation, or a prayer), before eating or drinking, or at the outset of a journey (or even a short car ride).
الْحَمْدُ لله	al-HAM-du li-la	Thank God! Hallelujah! (lit. Thanks be to God)	This phrase is used as an answer to: كيف حالك؟ \ ازيك؟ \ كيفك؟ \ لا بأس؟ No matter how you are feeling, it is always proper to use this answer. This phrase is also used to express contentment and happiness in various circumstances.
ما شاء الله	**MAA-sha al-Lah	Wow! How beautiful! (lit. It is God's will)	This expression is said to praise talent or beauty, even if it may be exaggerated slightly. For example, after seeing your neighbor's daughter for the first time, you may use this phrase to mean “My God! She is beautiful!” or “Wow!”
إن شاء الله	IN-sha al-Lah	Hopefully (lit. God willing)	This expression is used exactly like “hopefully” in English, especially when a speaker is talking about something they plan to do in the future. It can also be used in order to avoid commitment to something.
سُبْحَانَ الله	sub-HAAN al-Lah	Wow! Amazing! (lit. Praise be to God)	This phrase is used to express awe or wonder at events or objects in nature, for example, a beautiful view (sunset, ocean, stars) or a natural phenomenon.