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## The meaning of *SaBiH* from The *Quran*

The Arabic word '*sabih*' (root: Siin-Ba-Ha) is commonly taken to mean 'glorify/extol/magnify'. In the following article, Quran occurrences are analysed in order to gain a better understanding. Sometimes significant points will be made, but also small observations which by themselves may not provide definitive insight, but taken together will hopefully provide a coherent view. Whilst reading this article, it is recommended to [open a new window](#) in order to lookup and study each verse cited, and its context. For further information, clickable links are given throughout the article.

For the purposes of accuracy/clarity direct translations are shown in **blue** font.

Abbreviations:

CAD = Classical Arabic Dictionaries

SBH = Siin-Ba-Ha

The root and its derivatives have the following meanings, taken from [Project Root List](#):

**Siin-Ba-Ha** = to swim, roll onwards, perform a daily course, float, the act of swimming, occupy oneself in: the accomplishment of his needful affairs or seeking the means of subsistence, business/occupation, those who are floating, went/travel far, being quick/swift. To praise/glorify/hallow/magnify, sing/celebrate praise, holy, declaring God to be far removed or free for every imperfection/impurity

### Some examples of words derived from verb form 1 "SaBaHa":

And He is the One who created the night and the daytime, and the sun and the moon, each/all in an orbit/rotation **floating/swimming/rolling**. [21:33]

Not proper for the sun that it overtakes the moon, and not the night can outstrip/forerun the daytime, all/each in an orbit/rotation **floating/swimming /rolling**. [36:40]

The noun "SaBHan" is reserved for God only and commonly occurs when something unbefitting of God is assigned to Him, or when the context discusses an attribute unique to God. This ties in with the meaning "declaring God to be far removed or free for every imperfection/impurity", for which "glory" is a reasonable translation. Some examples:

...**glory** be to Thee, guard us against the punishment... [3:191]

...they assign God daughters, **glory** be to Him... [16:57]

...God is only one God, **glory** be to Him... [4:171]

...**glory** be to our Lord, am I aught but a mortal... [17:93]

...**glory** be to God, Lord of the beings... [27:8]

...**glory** be to God, from what they associate... [59:23]

etc.

The noun "SaBHan":

...in the daytime thou has **occupation** prolonged. [73:7]

### Some examples of verb form 2 "SaBBaHa":

Only believe in Our signs/verses are those whom when they are reminded with them, they fall **acknowledging/sujjad\*** and **glorify** with praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant. [32:15]

\*see [link](#) for further explanation of term

The phrase 'SBH bi HMD' (glorify with praise) does seem to suggest a type/subset of SBH that is communicated somehow (e.g. by thunder 13:13, controlling forces 39:75, 40:8, 42:5). Of course, since God knows what is in our hearts/minds it may not necessarily mean it has to be a verbal communication.

*Whatever* is in the heavens and the earth **glorifies** God... [see 57:1, 59:1, 59:24, 61:1, 62:1]

Also: ...*every thing* **glorifies** with His praise but you do not understand their **glorification**. [see 17:44]

When referring to things 'glorifying with praise' in 17:44, the phrase "you do not understand their SBH" is interesting, as I, and perhaps others, would like to think that whilst we may not understand it we could at least conceptualise about the possible type of SBH things were doing. It is possible it is referring to the audience of the time only.

It may be interesting to note that the examples given of 'SBH with praise' seem to be related with communication, e.g. sound. Sound is essentially vibrations (i.e. kinetic energy) that travel through a medium, e.g. air. All atoms in the universe vibrate. We could speculate that every thing is communicating their SBH in the form of energy somehow. Interestingly, a recent theory called '[superstring theory](#)' is an attempt to explain all of the particles and fundamental forces of nature in one theory by modelling them as vibrations of tiny supersymmetric strings. Scientists are currently hunting for these strings.

Do you not see that *whoever* in the heavens and the earth **glorifies** God - and the birds with wings outspread? Each knows its **salat/bond\*** and its **glorification**. And God is fully aware of what they do. [24:41]

\*see [link](#) for further explanation of term.

Note that it is possible to see glorification/SBH of God, but due to the question being asked the implication is that seeing this SBH may require some deeper thought. If "whoever" (i.e. everyone) glorifies God then clearly SBH is not only restricted to something verbal or voluntary, as commonly thought. To my knowledge the only other terms that apply to everyone in this manner are "aSLaMa (to give over)" [3:83] and "[SuJuD \(give acknowledgement/recognition\)](#)" [22:18, 55:6, 13:15]. What these three terms seem to have in common is that they contain an inherent subordinate relation. In other words: A doing SBH of B implies A is subordinate to B. Birds with wings outspread is given as an example of SBH that can be seen. The obvious question to reflect upon is what makes this an example of SBH? It seems to me the bird is simply utilising how it is designed, in unison with the laws of nature, in order to function or achieve its desired result. This majestic expression of innate design harnessing the laws of nature could be regarded as SBH (as it glorifies The Creator of such design and laws). The same could apply to humans as mentioned in 24:41, thus explain the usage.

..And We subjected the mountains with David to **glorify** and the birds... [21:79]

One explanation of the above is that when David praised God by voice, the mountains and birds joined him, i.e. with echo and chirping respectively (see 34:10

"...mountains repeat/echo with him and the birds..." and also 38:19).

With regard to birds, note that the above SBH suggests something different to SBH of birds with wings outspread (24:41), thus, the bird is an exemplar of multiple forms of SBH (verbal and non-verbal), and is a creature capable of communicating by sound, like us. This is an important point to reflect upon.

If a human was to SBH like the bird with wings outspread, then the equivalent would be walking, running etc but this is only expressing ourselves through the laws of nature. One may argue that the bird is simply doing what it does out of instinct (inbuilt programming) and whilst humans have an inbuilt program to some extent (see 30:30), we can also choose to express ourselves through God's revealed law, e.g. by carrying out a commandment from The Quran, such as giving to charity, abstinence, feeding a needy person etc. Doing so could be classed as a type of SBH/glorification, and such an association seems to be present in the following verses:

20:30 (Moses said) "Aaron, my brother."

20:31 "Reinforce with him my resolve."

20:32 "And share with him my task."

20:33 "That we may **glorify/SBH** You plenty."

20:34 "And remember You plenty."

There is also a possible contrast being made in this verse:

And your Lord said to the controlling forces: "I am placing a successor on Earth." They said: "Would You place in it he who would corrupt in it and spill blood while we glorify with Your praise, and sanctify You?" He said: "I know what you do not know." [2:30]

One way to SBH God is with/by his name/attribute, see examples 39:4, 56:74, 56:96, 69:52, 87:1. Perhaps this is where the traditional practice of *tasbeeh* (a form of dhikr/remembrance that involves the repetitive utterances of short sentences glorifying God) comes from. This specific practice is not something that needs to be done, but is simply one possible form of SBH.

## Part 2

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With regard to timed SBH, i.e. when the command to SBH is given alongside times of the day, please see the following verses. Some of the same words/roots are colour coded for easier comparison, and the verses marked red are the ones referencing more than two times. Some occurrences of the Arabic word "thikr" (remember) are also considered due to their similar contexts.

PLURAL verb address:

33:42 **glorify** morning/**BKR** and evening/**ASL**  
 21:20 They **glorify** night and daytime, they do not tire. \*  
 48:9 **glorify** morning/**BKR** and evening/**ASL**  
 30:17 **glory** be to God when you reach the evening/**MSW** and when you reach the morning/Saad-BH

Technically SINGULAR verb address but context indicates wider application:

19:11 ...revealed/indicated to his people to **glorify** morning/**BKR** and evening/**ASL**  
 24:36 In houses/shelters that God has allowed to be raised and His name is remembered/mentioned in them. He is **glorified** therein morning/**GhDW** and evening/**ASL**

SINGULAR verb address:

40:55 **glorify** with praise in evening/**3ShW** and morning/**BKR**  
 41:38 those who are with your Lord **glorify** Him in the night and daytime and they do not tire. \*  
 50:39-40 **glorify** with praise before rising of the sun and before setting of the sun and from the night so **glorify** Him and after ends of the acknowledgement/SJD\*\*  
 76:25-26 remember/THIKR the name of your Lord morning/**BKR** and evening/**ASL** and from the night so give acknowledgement/SJD to Him\*\* and **glorify** a long night  
 7:205 remember/THIKR your Lord within yourself, humbly and (in) fear; and without loudness of words, in the morning/**GhDW** and the evening/**ASL**  
 52:48-49 **glorify** with praise when you stand/arise. And from the night so **glorify** Him and after the stars \*\*\*  
 3:41 ...**glorify** Him in the evening/**3ShY** and morning/**BKR**  
 38:18 We subjected the mountains with him to **glorify** in the evening/**3ShY** and sunrise/**ShRQ**.  
 20:130 **glorify** with praise of your Lord before rising of the sun and before setting of the sun and from hours of night so **glorify** and edges/sides of the daytime so that you may be pleased/satisfied.

\*these are the only verses from the above list that are disputed with regard to whom it refers to, i.e. humankind or *malaika* (controlling forces, -angels).

\*\* Since SuJuD can refer to a completion of a command, the phrase "...after the ends of the SuJuD/acknowledgment" likely refers to after completing any of the three prior timed SBH, see discussion of 4:102 in this [article](#) for further explanation.

\*\*\* this is the only usage of "...glorify with praise when you stand/arise..." [52:48] and there is interpretational variance with regard to what it refers to. Cross-reference of the verb form 1 "qama" suggests it most often means a physical "arise/stand" or metaphorical "stand" (i.e. observe). The prior context is directed towards those opposed to God's message, and since 52:48 is in the singular address and clearly referring to the messenger (read full verse) it possibly means whenever the messenger stands/arises to address an audience. Or perhaps more simply, whenever one arises after sleep. If it were to mean when one awakens early e.g. for 'salat al-fair' as some take it to mean, then this time-period will vary from person to person (i.e. when one awakes) and seems to be repeated later with "after the stars" which would be at morning twilight, so this redundancy makes me think it does not mean that. It could also refer to the additional night vigil, see 17:79, 73:20.

For the above roots, from [Project Root List](#):

**B-K-R**: beginning of the day, first part of the day, early morning, between daybreak and sunrise

**A-S-L**: evening, time before sunset

**3-Sh-W**: commencement of darkness, early night, dusk, evening

**L-Y-L**: night, evening

**Gh-D-W**: early part of morning, morrow, morning, time between daybreak and sunrise, first part of the day

**M-S-W**: To arrive/come/enter in the evening, Afternoon [counted from noon to sunset] (or noon to midnight), evening, after sunset

**Saad-B-H**: to enter upon the time of the morning

**Sh-R-Q**: sunrise

The phrases 'night and day' and 'morning and evening' in these contexts could be hyperbole (i.e. exaggerated statements not meant to be taken literally) implying frequent occurrence throughout the entire day, not necessarily every minute of the day or twice daily. See the examples of:

2:274 ...**spend in the night and day**  
 71:5 ...**invited my people night and day**  
 19:62 ...**provision in heaven morning and evening**  
 40:46 ...**exposed to fire morning and evening**  
 25:5 ...**dictated to him morning and evening**

However, for sake of argument, let us assume "morning and evening" is meant to be taken as a command to do SBH specifically at morning and evening (i.e. twice daily), we should note it is in the plural address, i.e. we can safely conclude it is applicable to us. When timed-SBH is mentioned at other than these two times it is in the singular address, thus may or may not be applicable to us.

It is commonly interpreted that the timed-SBH verses refer to the regular/timed [bond/salat](#) of the believers/mumineen. The timings possibly coincide, thus for sake of argument let us assume this is true: if so, we can say for certain it is twice daily (due to the plural address as shown above), and it may be at other times (due to the singular address). These other times may have been for the prophet only or for us as an optional extra (for example see 17:79, 73:20).

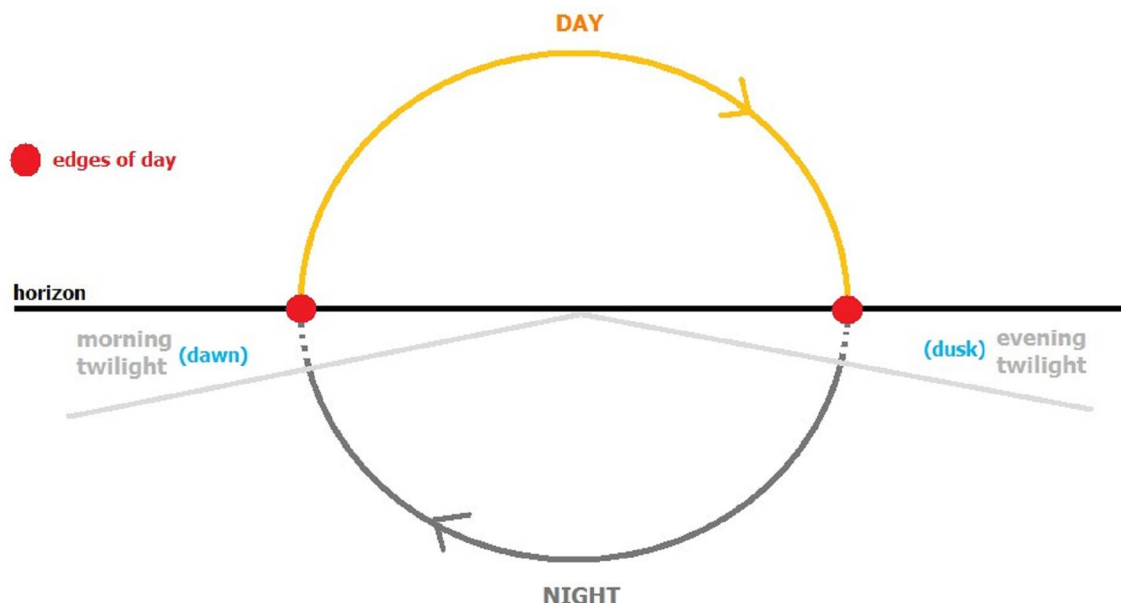
Whilst it may be easier to accept the phrases "night and day" and perhaps "morning and evening" as possible hyperbole, it seems more difficult to accept this when more specific times are mentioned for SBH, as in the singular address verses above. When taking these times into account, the result seems to suggest three time periods overall, as shown below:

1) before rising of the sun / after the stars / sunrise / morning  
 Approximate period: from dawn to sunrise

2) before setting of the sun / evening  
 Approx. period: before sunset to dark night

3) from the night / a long night / hours of night  
 Period: part of the night

A verse that requires careful consideration is 20:130 as it says "...and edges/sides (*atraf*) of the daytime so that you may be pleased/satisfied", and this comes after mentioning three times: before rising of the sun, before setting of the sun, and from the night. The word "atraf" is an Arabic plural meaning 3 or more edges/sides. In 11:114 the dual form of this word (tarafay) is used with reference to the daytime/nahar also, meaning "two edges/sides of the daytime". There are two obvious edges of the daytime, as shown in the diagram below:



If one had to select more than two edges of the daytime, then theoretically it seems either:

- 1) any point on the day/orange line could be regarded as an edge of the day, implying one can SBH/glorify at multiple times during the day, to satisfy oneself. Not unlike the message in 50:39-40.
- 2) multiple points close to the two edges.

In my view, it would most likely be (2) and the evidence and reasoning for this is as follows:

The meanings of the root of "atraf" do suggest the extremities/fringes/edges of the daytime at either end not any point throughout the whole daytime. From [Project Root List](#):

**Tay-Ra-Fa:** attack the extremity of the enemy's lines, extremity, edge, lateral/adjacent/outward part, side, border, end, newly acquired, proximity, fringes.

The 3+ edges of the daytime in 20:130 are used in a similar way to the 3+ proximal/close/adjacent parts (zulafan) of the night in 11:114, which are not at anytime during the night. Likewise, "atraf" are not at anytime during the daytime. See points 3 and 13 [here](#) for further explanation.

Whichever way it is taken, it could be argued there are multiple undefined edges beyond these two obvious edges, and that is the key point because that is the likely reason why "atraf" is used. For example, if it said a specific number of edges other than two, then these edges would not be identifiable in my opinion, unless explained elsewhere in The Quran.

#### Where could these multiple edges fit in?

It just so happens there has been some variance amongst those following The Quran with regard to when 'salat al-3sha' begins based on:

**Uphold/establish the salat/bond (at) *duluk al-shams*\* to the darkness of the night; and the quran/reading of dawn; indeed, the reading/quran of dawn is witnessed.** [17:78]

\*Arabic root: Dal-Lam-Kaf. This phrase is the starting point for one salat time period, see point 7 [here](#) for further discussion on this.

From [Project Root List](#):

**Dal-Lam-Kaf** = rubbing, squeezing, pressing, decline, sinking, become red, set, incline downwards from the meridian (sun). The phrase "*duluk-as-shams*" defined as "sunset" / setting of the sun / the sun became high, by Lane.

Two common interpretations have been to take "*duluk al-shams*" as "sunset" or "sinking/rubbing/pressing of the sun" (i.e. from when the lower edge of the sun disc rubs/touches the horizon). I have personally swayed between these two understandings. The primary signification of DLK is rubbing, and if this is coupled with 20:130 wherein it says "before the setting/departing of the sun" then this would fit. In other words, "*duluk al-shams*" can mean when the sun's lower edge rubs the horizon BEFORE sunset.

If we consider one undertaking 'salat al-fajr' (the salat of/at dawn) then it is easy to realise one may crossover timewise into some point after sunrise, due to concentration/focus and/or finishing recitation/reading etc. In other words, going from "before the rising of the sun" (i.e. dawn) to after the sun's rising, i.e. "edges of the daytime" in this instance.

Thus, the "edges of the daytime" could be incorporated under the 'salat al-fajr' and 'salat al-3sha' periods, especially so if one wished to extend these periods in length.

If we carefully re-read 20:130 with the only other two examples (50:39-40 and 76:25) which seem to mention more than 3 periods we note the following:

50:39-40 glorify with praise before rising of the sun and before setting of the sun and from the night **so** glorify Him **and** after ends of the acknowledgement/SJD  
 76:25-26 remember the name of your Lord morning and evening and from the night **so** give acknowledgement/SJD to Him **and** glorify a long night  
 20:130 glorify with praise of your Lord before rising of the sun and before setting of the sun and from hours of night **so** glorify **and** edges of the daytime so that you may be pleased.

Immediately after referring to 3 periods the connective particle **fa/so** is used and then what follows the coordinating conjunction **wa/and** seem to be additions and/or extensions.

"after ends of the acknowledgement/SJD" is undefined and implies SBH is not restricted to a set time or length.

And if we compare "a long night" in 76:26 with 17:79 and 73:20, we know that such time spent is variable and whatever is easy/manageable for one to do, assuming these verses refer to the same thing. Even if one thinks this refers to something separate the term "a long night" is still subjective/undefined.

Similarly, the "edges of the daytime" could be seen as undefined additions (i.e. at various points throughout the daytime) or extensions of the time-periods discussed earlier (salat al-fajr and salat al-3sha).

Due to the singular address in these verses, it is likely the messenger would be one to glorify/thikr more so than most, thus these verses simply recognise this. The reason for this may simply be as 20:130 says "...so that you may be pleased/satisfied/content". This reasoning is also mentioned elsewhere:

**The ones who believed and their hearts are relieved by the remembrance of God; for in God's remembrance the hearts are relieved.** [13:28]

An important point to note is that SBH does not seem to be restricted to certain times only, unlike the regular/timed **salat/bond** of the mumineen/believers (see 4:103). Like SBH, the word "thikr" is mentioned at specific times but it is also mentioned in general, see 3:191, 33:35, 33:41, 62:10. Note how 62:10 specifically says "remember/thikr God frequently" AFTER the salat/bond is completed, even though 20:14 says "uphold the salat/bond for My remembrance/thikr" - clearly showing remembrance of God can occur anytime.

In other words, whilst a timed-salat could be termed a SBH/glorification (or a thikr/remembrance), not all SBH/thikr is a timed-salat.

It also makes sense not to restrict one's SBH/glorification or thikr/remembrance of God to set times only, as this is very much an individual/personal thing. Some will do more, some will do less.

Those who argue that different numbers of time-periods can be derived from the timed-SBH verses (e.g. 5, and thus argue for 5 daily salat) will have to accept that

even if this were true it will not change the fact that any number above two is only possible using the singular address verses, which may or may not be applicable to us. Thus, it doesn't seem to matter how one interprets the timed-SBH verses as long as one appreciates this point.

It is possible this finding may help explain how multiple times came about. Furthermore, it is likely that one's SBH/glorification may have been different in format/content to the timed-salat, and sometimes similar, thus in such a flexible environment a mixture of practices may have become formalised later. When it comes to people's practice of religion, it is quite common for fluidity to gradually turn into rigidity, resulting in orthodoxy.

### **Conclusion**

SBH/glorification of God can come in different forms, including expression through actions and verbally. If timed-SBH is taken as timed-salat then it is a minimum of twice daily (references: [one](#), [two](#), [three](#)), with an optional night vigil which the messenger likely undertook regularly [17:79, 73:20]. If the messenger opted to SBH/glorify more than others, then the individual is also free to do the same.

Tools/Resources/Books used:

[www.StudyQuran.org](http://www.StudyQuran.org)

[Project Root List](#) - Quran concordance, grammar and dictionary

[Quranic Arabic Corpus](#)

[Study Method](#)

This work would not have been possible without the many people who have contributed to this topic, and without the resources now available to anyone wishing to study The Quran in detail. For these stepping stones, I am indebted and truly thankful.

### **IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER:**

This work reflects my personal understanding, as of July 9th, 2014. Seeking knowledge is a continual process and I will try to improve my understanding of the signs within 'the reading' (*al quran*) and out with it, unless The God wills otherwise. All information is correct to the best of my knowledge only and thus should not be taken as a fact. One should always seek knowledge and verify for themselves when possible: [17:36](#), [20:114](#), [35:28](#), [49:6](#), [58:11](#).

**And do not follow what you have no knowledge of; surely the hearing, the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.** [17:36]