

سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1. BACKGROUND

This chapter is known as the 'Fatiha.' This is because the Quran begins with this Surah and a person begins his prayer with the recitation of this chapter. The Fatiha is the first to be memorised by young children and is the most recited chapter of the Quran.

The chapter has many other names such as 'Ummul Quran,' 'Surah al-hamd,' 'al-Sab' Al-Mathani,' 'Surah al-Qafiya,' and 'Surah al-Shafiya.' All these names indicate the greatness of this chapter.

Al-Fatiha was revealed both in Makkah and Madina. The scholars maintain that this chapter was revealed twice, once in Makkah and once in Madina.

The subject area of this chapter includes monotheism, worship, resurrection, and supplication.

Regarding the excellence of this chapter, it is narrated from a companion who stated,

'While I was praying in the Mosque, Allah's Messenger called me but I did not respond to him. Later I said, 'O Allah's Messenger! I was praying.' He said, 'Didn't Allah say - 'Give your response to Allah (by obeying Him) and to His Apostle when he calls you.' (8.24) He then said to me, 'I will teach you a Surah which is the greatest Surah in the Quran, before you leave the Mosque.' Then he got hold of my hand, and when he intended to leave (the Mosque), I said to him, 'Didn't you say to me, 'I will teach you a Surah which is the greatest Surah in the Quran?' He said, 'Al-Hamdu Lillahe Rabb al-Alamin which is Al-Sab'a Al-Mathani (i.e. seven repeatedly recited Verses) and the Grand Quran which has been given to me.'¹

¹ Imam Bukhari narrates this hadith from Abu Sa'id ibn al-Mu'alla.

2. Short Commentary

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

(Verse 1) All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.

This chapter starts with 'Alhumdullilah.' The reason for this is:

- I. These were the very first words uttered by Prophet Adam.
- II. This is a reminder that whenever we begin anything, we begin by praising our Lord.
- III. This reminds us of a basic etiquette. The best way to address our Lord is through praising him, then we put forward our petition.

This verse emphasises that all types of praise in all times and in all situations are for Allah. Even when we praise the creation of Allah, we are praising Him. If we were to praise the structure of a building, indirectly we are praising the architect, and if we compliment the handwriting of a person, we are in fact complimenting the writer. Similarly, when we praise our noble Prophet ﷺ, we are praising Allah as he was from the best of Allah's creation.

The verse also explains Allah is the Lord of the worlds. This serves as a reason as to why we should praise Allah. He demands praise because He is the nourisher of everything.

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

(Verse 2) The most merciful the most kind.

These are two names that are derivatives of the meaning for mercy and softness. The word 'Rahman' is an intense exaggeration of mercy. In other religions, God's qualities are often linked to the masculine. In our tradition, Allah's qualities are often manifested through the feminine. Qualities such

as love and mercy, are understood by examples of our mothers.² Regarding the quality of Rahman, Allah states, 'I am the most merciful (*Rahman*) who created mercy and I added it as a name to my names. Whoever tries to reach it, I will reach him and whoever cuts himself off from it I will cut myself off from him.'³

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

(Verse 3) Master of the Day of Judgement.

In the previous verse, Allah mentions his attributes of mercy. This softens the heart of a person as they begin to understand how merciful our lord is. In this verse, Allah announces that he is also to be feared. The Day of Judgment is a frightening ordeal. It is described as equivalent to 50,000 years.⁴ Allah is reminding us that he is also the Lord of this too, and that he is the ultimate authority and judge. This description indeed brings fear to the heart and for a Muslim, these are the two states he ought to be in between; fear and hope. Imam Ghazzali dedicated a whole book to this subject in his *Ihya*.⁵

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

(Verse 4) It is you alone we worship and it is you alone we seek help from.

² Regarding this point, Imam Bukhari narrates a hadith from Hazrat Umar bin Al-Khattab, who stated that some war prisoners, including children and woman were brought before the Prophet and behold, a woman amongst them was breastfeeding. Whenever she found a child amongst the captives, she took it over her chest and nursed it (she had lost her child but later she found him). The Prophet said to us, 'Do you think that this lady can throw her son in the fire?' We replied, 'No, if she has the power not to throw it (in the fire).' The Prophet then said, 'Allah is more merciful to His slaves than this lady to her son.'

³ Imam Tirmidhi narrates from Abdur Rahman Bin Awf.

⁴ Imam Abu Ya'la narrates on the authority of Abu Said al-Khudri.


⁵ He begins the book on Hope and fear by stating, 'Praise be to Allah whose loving kindness and reward are hoped for, whose stratagems and punishment are feared; who keeps alive the hearts of His saints with the breadth of hope in him, so that He may urge them on with the kindness of His benefits to alight in his courtyard and to swerve from His house of tribulation which is the abode of His enemies...Hope and fear are two wings by means of which those who are brought near fly to every commendable station, and two mounts on which every steep ascent of the paths of the next world is traversed.'

In the previous verses Allah describes himself as 'Rabb,' he is our provider. When we make mistakes he overlooks them for he is 'Rahman.' We then feel remorse over our sins so we repent and he accepts it, therefore he is 'Rahim.' Finally, one day we will return to him and we will be questioned for all what we did for he is the 'Malik.' After mentioning these **four** qualities we are then ordered to worship Him, and it makes sense, because the being who has these four supreme qualities is only worthy of worship.

'Iyyaka' appears at the start to generate emphasis, 'You Alone (oh Allah) we worship.' Another reason is because Allah is the 'First' and the everlasting. Therefore, it is only suitable that the real 'First' is mentioned and then 'we' the creation are mentioned next. This also indicates that when we do dua, we call out the name of our Lord first.

'We' is used instead of 'I'. The reason is because in worship a person's ego and self is annihilated. He realises that he is nothing. If a person was to say, 'It is you alone I worship,' he could possibly become the subject of arrogance and pride. However, when he says, 'it is you alone we worship,' it means that 'from your countless slaves, I am merely one being who worships you.'

Notice, there is a shift of address. The dialogue moves from the third person to the second person (You alone we worship). The secret behind this is that once a servant has mentioned the divine nature of Allah, His mercy, and acknowledgement as Master, only then he is allowed to address him directly.

 أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

(Verse 5) Guide us to the straight path.

In the previous verse, we declared that we worship Allah and seek assistance from Him. This verse gives details of what type of assistance we are asking. We are asking for guidance to the correct path. We are asking that we worship him constantly, and that we do not fall short in our worship when He showers us with the comforts of this world. We are also asking that we are kept on the straight path, safe from the path of extremism.

Guidance or showing the way is of two types. One is to simply show the way and the other is to guide someone to the destination. If the former was intended then after 'Ihdina' the preposition 'ilad' or 'li' would have come. However, neither are in the verse which means that in essence what we are

saying is, 'Oh our Lord, do not simply show us the correct path but put us on the straight path and give us perseverance to stay on this till we die.'

The subtle reason as to why we use the pronoun 'us' instead of 'me' is because the prayer which is done for everyone has more merit in it being accepted.

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

(Verse 6) *The path of those whom you have favoured.*

In this verse, we are highlighting the type of guidance we want. We want to be guided to the path that previous pious people have travelled on. This makes it easy for us to tread such a path. The reason we ask guidance on this path is because this journey is very difficult. There are many enemies who are waiting to attack us on this path.⁶ However this path can be achieved by loving the Prophets, keeping company of the people of truth, and becoming those who practise Ihsan.⁷

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

(Verse 7) *Not of those on who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray.*

We have asked for the path of the Prophets; the middle path and not the path of extremism; *Ifrat* (excess) and *Tafrit* (neglect). These are the two extremes which are being mentioned here. The first are those 'who earned your anger.' Imam Tabari reports with many chains⁸ that this refers to the Jews.

⁶ The Satan is a prime example, who openly said, 'Because You have sent me astray, surely I will sit in wait against them (human beings) on Your Straight Path.' (Quran, 7:16). Other enemies include bad companionship.

⁷ Those who are on this path have been explained in the following verse, 'the Prophets, the Siddiqin, the martyrs and the righteous. And excellent are they as companions.' (Quran, 4:69)

⁸ From Ibn Abbas, Addi Ibn Hatim, Ibn Masud and other companions. (Tabari, vol. 1, p. 61-2)

The other extreme which refers to 'those who went astray' refers to Christians.⁹

May the Fatiha heal our hearts and open our hearts to the divine presence, Ameen.

آمین

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⁹ This is supported by the narration of Ibn Masud and other companions. (ibid).