

Commentary on Surah Al-Fatihah (Proceeds from an Austin Qur'anic discussion group)

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*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.
The Beneficent, the Merciful.
The Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help.
Guide us to the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou has bestowed favors, not
of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray.
(English translation from Al Mizan)*

This is the opening chapter of the Qur'an that Muslims recite in every ritual prayer. No prayer is complete without it. It is the first chapter and consists of seven verses. It is called by these names:

- ❖ *Al Fatihah*, which means "the opening"
- ❖ *Fatihatul-Kitaab*, or inaugurator of the book
- ❖ *Ummul-Quran*, Mother of the Qur'an, or the essence of the Qur'an
- ❖ *Saba minal-mathani*, the seven oft-repeated verses (Al Qur'an)
- ❖ "Lord's prayer" of Muslims

Distinctions accorded to Surah Al Fatihah (from the Prophetic traditions and from the sayings of the Imams from his family)

- ❖ It teaches in Allah's own words how to address, how to worship and pray to Him.
- ❖ It is superior to all the divine revelations contained in all the previous scriptures.
- ❖ It is the most honored of all the heavenly treasures.
- ❖ The reward of its recitation is the reward of reciting two third of the Qur'an.

Importance of Al Fatihah according to Imam Ar-Rida A.S. (Al Mizan).

The Imam narrates through his ancestors, through Ali A.S. that Prophet PbuH&p said, "I heard from Allah, the Mighty and Great, He (Allah) said: I have divided the Opening of the Book between Myself and My servants. Therefore, its first half is for Me and the other half is for My servant. My servant shall get what he asks for."

When My servant says *In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*, Allah the Great in His glory says: 'My servant has started with My name, and it is incumbent upon Me that I should complete his works for him and bless him in his affairs.' In addition, when he says: *All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds*, Allah, great is His glory says: 'My servant has praised Me, and he knows that Bounties that are with him are from Me, and the misfortunes averted from him were by My Grace. (O'my Angels!) I appoint you My witnesses, that I shall add for him the favors of the next world, to those of this world, and will avert from him the calamities of the next world, as I have averted from him the calamities of this world.' In addition, when he says: *The Beneficent, the Merciful*, Allah great in His Glory says: 'My servant bore witness that I am the Beneficent, the Merciful. I make you (Angels) My witnesses that I will augment his share in my Mercy, I will most certainly increase his portion in My bounties.' And when he

says, *The Master of the Day of Judgment*, Allah the High says: ‘I make you My witness that as he has acknowledged that I am the Master of the Day of Judgment, I will most certainly make his reckoning easier on the Day of Reckoning, and I will most certainly accept his good deeds and overlook his sins.’ In addition, when he says, *Thee do We worship*, Allah the Mighty and Great says: ‘My servant is telling the truth. He worships only Me. Be My witness that most surely I will give him (for his worship) a reward that will be the (object of) envy to all who opposed him when he worshipped Me.’ And when he says, *and Thee do We beseech for help*, Allah the High says: ‘From Me has My servant sought help, and in Me he has taken refuge. Be My witness that I most certainly will help him in his affairs, and will aid him in his difficulties, and will take his hand in his calamities.’ And when he says, *guide us to the right path*...Allah, Mighty and great is He, says: ‘This (part) is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for, and I have answered the prayer of My servant, and given him what he hopes for, and have protected him from what he is afraid of. (Uyunul-Akh’baar)

The author of Al Mizan says that this chapter is especially for the purpose of worshipping Allah and no other chapter of Al Qur’an comes close to it in this respect. This divine revelation has been sent as though, on behalf of the servants of Allah, to teach them the manners of servitude, to show them how to praise their Lord, and how to declare their allegiance to Him in Allah’s own words.

In spite of its brevity, it contains all the Qur’anic wisdom, which may be summarized in four fundamental topics of truth: 1. The Oneness of God. 2. The Prophet-hood 3. The Resurrection. 4. The Divine Guidance (Leading to Bliss in the Hereafter).

Allamah Tabatabai says that the correct way of interpretation of the Qur’an is from the Qur’an itself, with additional help of the true teachings of the Prophet and the Imams from his household pbuh&p. Other methods are defective and not acceptable to him. He calls them “misinterpretations.”

Bismillahir Rah’maanir Raheem. The full import of this verse would be as follows: The guidance (total guidance) is begun with the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah, to whom the servants turn to. He is *Beneficent*, Who has opened the way of His all-encompassing Mercy that is necessary for their existence, for the believers and non-believers alike. He is *Merciful*, Who has reserved His special Mercy for the believers, which ensures their happiness in the Hereafter. Allah says: “*and (as to) My Mercy, it embraces everything. Therefore, soon I will ordain it (particularly) for those who safeguard themselves (against evil) with full awareness of divine laws (Yat’taqoona), and pay Zakaat, and those who believe in Our signs.*” 7: 156. Thus, this explanation places this first verse in the framework of the whole Qur’an, of which it is the first and opening sentence.

This beginning also implies that the servant of Allah says: “In Thy name do I pledge my servitude to Thee.”

Agha Puya says that beginning a work in the name of Allah (*Bismillah*) demonstrates the following:

- A) The reciter acknowledges Allah as his Lord and Master.
- B) He confesses his own helplessness.
- C) He believes in Allah as ever Living, ever-Present, all Knowing, all Hearing, and Almighty.
- D) He places reliance on Allah alone, seeking His Mercy and Pleasure.
- E) He demonstrates that when he calls upon the Beneficent and Merciful Lord, that Allah will not deny him of His Mercy.

Traditions (quoted in Al Mizan):

- ❖ Prophet Pbu&P always recited the first verse in the beginning of this Surah, as one of the seven verses of this Surah.
- ❖ Imam Rida A.S. said: *In the name of Allah* means “I mark (brand) my soul with one of the marks of Allah.”
- ❖ Imam As-Sadiq A.S. said: “*In the name of Allah* is nearer to the Greatest Name of Allah (*Isme Azam*), than is the iris of the eye from its white.”
- ❖ Imam Ali bin Husain A.S. says in his Dua of Friday: “*In the name of Allah*” is the word of those who hold fast to Him, the speech of those who seek His protection.” (Sahifa-e-sajjadia)

Alham-du-Lillaahi Rab-bil A‘alameen. (Hamd means praise.)

It implies praise of someone for good by his own intention and from his own power. For example, to praise a pearl, the word Hamd will not be used, because its luster was given to it by some one other than itself. Therefore, *AlhamduLillahi* will be translated, as “**All praise is due to Allah (alone)**”

Allah says in the Qur’an: “*Who made good everything that He created.*” 32:7
“in Thy Hand is the Good; surely, Thou hast power over all things.” 3:26

Every good and every beauty emanates from Allah. Thus a praise for any good (deed) is in reality addressed to (and credited to) Allah alone.

It is to be noted that only intelligent being are the ones that truly praise Allah. Regarding Angels and other creations, the Qur’an uses the term *Tasbih* or glorification followed by the term praise. “*And angels glorify their Lord with praise ...* 42:5. “*Thunder glorifies Him and repeateth His praise*” 13:13

Ali A.S. is quoted to have said as follows: “We cannot know all the bounties of Allah. They are beyond our count and estimation. So, we say *AlhamduLillah*, which means all Praise is for Allah.”

Ar-Rah’maanir Raheem. Discussed above.

Ar-Rabb. It is translated as '**the Lord, the Master, or the Owner.**'

Allamah Tabatabai gives the example of our limbs. We are the owner and master of our limbs. They do not have an independent existence apart from us. We use them as we wish. Similarly, Allah is our owner.

Al-A‘alameen. It means the whole creation, the universe. Therefore, Rabbil A‘alameen implies the owner of the universe and every created thing.

Maaliki Yaumid’deen. Master of the Day of the Judgment.

Day’yaan means judge. Deen means the day of judgment. It also means religion.

Al Maalik is derived from Al Malik, which means possessor or owner. It also means Sovereign Lord or King. Ad-Deen is the day of the Judgment.

Iy’yaa ka Na’budu wa Iy’yaa ka Nas’ta-een. “Thee do we worship, and Thee alone we beseech for help.”

Iy'yaaka means only You (emphasis). *Ibaada* means to worship. *Ista'aana* means to ask for help. *Nas'ta-
een* means 'we ask for help.'

The servant stands in front of the Master for worship. The body and the soul are attentive. The master and the servant, both are present. The Ownership is exclusive, and the servitude is exclusive. The plural 'we' is used, perhaps implying that "I" carries the connotations of egotism and self importance. The word "worship" by itself may imply that the worshipper may be independent, thus, the phrase 'Thee do we beseech for help' immediately follows, indicating dependence of the devotee upon the Master.

Imam As-Sadiq A.S. said this about the meaning of worship: "Worship is of three kinds; some people worship Allah out of fear of Him - so, it is the worship of slaves. A group worships Allah to seek reward - so, it is the worship of hirelings (Merchants, according to Hazrat Ali A.S. in Nahjul Balagha). A group worships Allah because of (His) love – and this is the worship of noble persons, and it is the excellent worship. (Al – Kafi)

***Ih'dinas-Siraatal Mus'taqeem.* "Guide us to the straight path."**

There are more than one path. Straight path is for those who believe, and are not arrogant to worship Allah, and worship Him alone. Allah says in the Qur'an: "*Did I not enjoin on you, O' children of Adam! That you should not worship the Satan. Surely, he is your open enemy. And you should worship Me, this is the straight path.*" 30:60-61. So, there is a straight path, and there is another path. According to Allamah Tabatabai, there are ways that are less than the straight path. He calls them "ways." He quotes this verse to support his viewpoint; "*Indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear book from Allah, with it Allah guides them who follow His pleasure, into the ways of safety, and brings them out of utter darkness into light, by His permission, and guides them to the Straight Path.*" 5:15-16. He concludes by saying that either the *ways* are same as straight path or the other *ways* eventually merge into the Straight Path.

There is a difference between *ways* and the Straight Path. Allah says: "And most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others (with Him). 12:106. Thus *Ways* may co-exist with some form of polytheism. However, the Straight Path is free of such things. It leads to Allah, the destination, unconditionally.

Allamah Tabatabai makes following points:

1. **There are various ways to Allah.** They differ in perfection, smoothness, depending upon factors like; way of submission and worship, degree of submission, purity of intention, humility, knowledge, etc. Allah says this: "*And for all are grades according to what they did, and so that He may pay them back fully their deeds, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.*" 46: 1
2. **The Straight Path controls all the ways.** The people of the Straight Path do enjoy authority to guide the other servants of Allah. Allah says: "Verily, your only Master is Allah and His apostle, and those who believe, those who keep up prayer, and pay Zakat while they are bowing down (in *Ruku*). 5:55 This verse was revealed for Ali A.S. The people of Straight Path are higher in rank than the others. Their path is superior to the others ways because of their knowledge of the Divine Attributes.
3. **Guidance (*Hidaya*).** It means showing the way to the destination. The act of Guidance is exclusively reserved for Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an: "*Therefore, to whomever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam.* 6:125. The guidance is of more

than one kind. (A) To someone who strives in the way of Allah. (B) To someone who **strives for Allah**. According to Allamah Tabatabai these are two different situations. Allah says: “*And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them unto Our ways; and Allah is most surely with the doers of good.*” 29:69

Hazrat Ali A.S. is quoted to have said: “The straight path in this world is that which stops short of excesses, and rises above shortcomings and remains straight; and in the next world, it is the path of the believers (leading them) to the Garden.” (Ma’anil Akhbaar).

Siraatal Ladeena An-am-ta Alai-him, Ghair-il Magh’doobi Alai-him Walad’Da’al-leen. “The path of those upon whom Thou have bestowed favors, not of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray.”

Every straying is polytheism, and vice versa. Allah says: “... *and whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith. He indeed has gone astray from the right way.*” 2:108

Who are “*Anam-ta Alai-him?*” (Those on whom favors are bestowed). Allah says: “*And all who obey Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad) are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors, of the Prophets, and the Truthful, and the witnesses, and the Righteous; and excellent are these as companions!*” 4:69

“*Magh’doobi*” means, on whom is “*Ghadab*” Wrath (of Allah). The ones on whom wrath of Allah descends are the ones persistent in disbelief or they are hypocrites. Allah says: “He, who disbelieves in Allah after he has believed, and opens his breast for disbelief, will suffer the wrath (*Ghada-bun*) of Allah.” 16:106. These are worse off than the Da’al-leen.

“*Da’al-leen*” are those who have gone astray. It is the plural form derived from the root word “*Dalla*” which means to err, to wander away, or to go astray.

[The End]

References:- 1.) *Al - Mizan (English)* by Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabatabai. 2.) *The Holy Qur’an, translation and commentary* by Aqa Mirza Mahdi Puya. 3.) *Tafseer-e-Namoonah. (Urdu)* by Ayatullah Nasir Makaram Shirazee.

Food for thought. The Qur’an is the word of the *infinite*, revealed for the benefit of the finite, the humankind. The higher level of understanding is beyond the reach of most us, except those blessed with divine knowledge, the Prophet and his purified progeny (pbuh&p). A knowledgeable and well-respected friend stated to me that *Siraatal Mus’taqeem* is not a mere “highway” or a set of rules or a set of beliefs leading to Allah; it may also signify a higher spiritual path to connect with Allah swt.

Before studying the Qur’an, let us pray; “O’ Allah, grant us knowledge and understanding of Your Book. We acknowledge our ignorance and shortcomings.”
