

Tafseer Surah al-Fatihah (الفاتحة)

Notes on Nouman Ali Khan's Concise Commentary of the Quran

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Introduction

- There is a difference of opinion among the scholars whether Basmalah before the beginning of each chapter is part of the surahs of the Quran or not
 - Basmalah is referring to: *In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful*
 - Meaning did it come down with the surahs?
 - Nouman Ali Khan's view: Basmalah is not part of the surahs
- All of the following is taken from the book *al-Tafseer al-Muyassar*:
 - Al-Fatihah literally means 'The Opening' because the Quran opens with it. It is the first chapter (surah) of the Quran and is considered its 'greatest surah'
 - It is seen to be a precise table of contents of the Quranic message because some scholars of exegesis have stated that this chapter is a summary of the whole Quran
 - It has other names as well, such as, the Mother of the Book, The Cure, The Commendation (Hamd), and others
 - Another name is The Seven Oft-Repeated Verses because it is recited daily in the salah

Tafseer of the Verses

1. [All] praise and thanks is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds

- a. The Arabic word *hamd* (praise)
 - i. It is a combination of two meanings: praise and gratitude
 1. Why did Allah use one word (*hamd*) to refer to both and not separate between the two?
 - a. Because the best type of speech is that which is little and gets the point across. This is part of eloquence
 - b. Separating the two would make it seem as if Allah sometimes deserves thanks and at other times praise, rather, He always deserves both together
 - ii. *Hamd* is something that is done only for the living and necessitates sincerity
 1. Another word in Arabic used for praise is *madh* (مدح), which can be done towards someone without sincerity
 - a. Ex: a poet praising an unjust king
 - iii. The word is used as a noun in the sentence to indicate that *hamd* of Him is timeless and permanent. Meaning that Allah always deserves praise

1. Everything that He does deserves to be praised
- b. The Arabic word *shukr* (gratitude)
- i. In the context of this verse, it means to show gratitude/appreciation for whatever He does for us in our lives
 - ii. The main problem with atheists is that they do not appreciate God. They lack *shukr*
 1. They cannot get themselves to be grateful to Him
 2. They always complain about Him
 - a. Why does God allow evil? Why is it not like that? Why did He do that?
- c. In the first verse, He uses His name Allah and not one of His attributes
- i. This is in order to ascertain that there is no confusion as to who is being referred to. Allah is saying that it is Him alone and not other false deities that deserve *hamd*
 1. Also mentioning an attribute alone could give the impression that we are only thanking Him due to that one specific attribute
- d. Sentences can be for information purposes or for emotion. The latter type is not categorized into true or false
- i. The word *alhamdulillah* is meant for both types
- e. The Arabic phrase *Lillahi Al-Hamd* means *hamd* only belongs to Allah alone and nobody else
- i. Because He is the cause of everything
- f. The Arabic word *Rabb*
- i. It can mean the giver of gifts, caretaker, maintainer (make sure something does not die), owner, etc.
 1. This is the secondary meaning in this verse
 - ii. It can also mean Master
 1. This is the primary meaning in this verse
 2. This is our main relationship with Him. The summary of the whole Quran is that: He is our Master and we are His slaves
 3. It should not be confused with the way we think about master/slave relationship in the West during the slave trade
 - a. We belong to Allah and He has complete power and control over us. We do not and cannot set limits on Him but He sets limits on us. He will judge us on the Day of Judgement and we will not judge Him
 4. Usually masters in this world punish their slaves immediately for not following rules but Allah allows us to keep indulging in them without immediate consequences
- g. The Arabic word *'alameen* (worlds)
- i. It can have multiple meanings:
 1. Nations of people
 2. Ethnicities of people

3. Societies of people
 4. Different species (angels, jinn, animals, etc.)
 5. People of different worlds
 6. Generations of people
- ii. Since this surah is only discussing the conditions of people, as we read in the later verses, it may be that Allah is using this word to only refer to humans and their worlds
1. All of us are living in our own little worlds

2. The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful

- a. The origin of both words, al-Rahman and al-Raheem, is mercy (*rahmah*)
 - i. They are put together here in one sentence to highlight the difference
 1. Ar-Rahman [3 benefits meant here]
 - a. Someone extremely merciful
 - b. Something happening right now
 - c. It is temporary (transient)
 - i. This means it may be taken away if you do something wrong
 2. Ar-Raheem [2 benefits meant here]
 - a. It is permanent – always there and never going to go away
 - b. It is not necessarily happening right now
 - ii. Both words used here to show that Allah is being Merciful to His creation right now as well as in the future
 - iii. Some also said that the word al-Rahman means a more general type of mercy that covers all of His creation, whereas, the word al-Raheem means that there is a special type of mercy which He gives only to the believers
- b. To the Arabs, mercy (*rahmah*) meant when someone is completely taken care of and covered
 - i. Ex: a baby in the womb of its mother
 1. This is why the word for womb (*rahim*) in Arabic is derived from the same root as mercy
 - c. Allah's mercy is so vast that we cannot comprehend it

3. Master of the Day of Judgement

- a. On that day, we will all answer precisely
- b. The word *maalik* means here that He is the owner of that day and its king
 - i. An owner pays attention to details, whereas, a king concerns himself with big things. Allah does both
 - ii. Allah is saying that great day when judgement will take place is owned by Him
- c. There are only two kinds of people on that great day
 - i. Those who will receive His mercy
 - ii. Those who will receive His Justice (punishment)

4. It is You we give ourselves to completely and You we ask for help

- a. Meaning it is You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help
 - i. When the previous three verses are understood properly, it will naturally lead to this

- b. Another meaning is that we give ourselves to Allah in totality
 - i. We can only truly be free when we enslave ourselves to our creator
- c. The words “master” and “guidance” are very frequently mentioned together in the Quran
 - i. Guidance is a set of instructions
 - 1. A master can only be a master if he is giving instructions else he is not a master. Hence Allah is our master, thus, He gives instructions to His slaves (guidance)
- d. The meaning of the second part of the verse (‘and You we ask for help’)
 - i. It means help in matters we are currently struggling with
 - 1. You’re telling Allah, “O Allah I am already trying to do this but struggling, so please help me because I cannot do it by myself”
 - a. We do not rely on supplication alone, rather, we make attempts on our own with it as well. We cannot just sit in our house without making any effort and just rely on supplication. We have to do both
- e. The first part of this verse is related to worship, which means our primary task is to be His slave and submit to Him. The second part relates to seeking His aid
 - i. It is mentioned in this order because worship and submission is for Him, whereas, seeking His aid is for us. The first qualifies us for the second part, which means if we are not submitting ourselves to Him, then we do not qualify for His aid
- f. Some also suggest that the second part of the verse (seeking His aid) is requesting Allah to help us with the first part of the verse (worshipping and submitting to Him)

5. Guide us to the straight path

- a. This is the number one thing we should be asking for
- b. Why is the plural ‘we’ being used?
 - i. Because Allah is telling us that we all should ask together as a community
 - 1. We will not survive by ourselves, rather, we must do things together as a community
- c. This is so important that we ask for it in every unit of prayer when we recite the Fatiha
- d. We are asking Allah in this surah for things we need and not what we have
- e. Increase in knowledge does not mean increase in guidance
 - i. You have to ask for guidance and beg for it
 - ii. A person can have knowledge but no guidance
 - iii. We should also not let knowledge become a fashion
- f. The Arabic word *siraat* (path)
 - i. Comes from a word meaning a long straight sword
 - ii. Here it means one straight path which cannot have multiples
 - 1. There is only one path to God
 - a. The word *siraat* does not have a plural because it is alone and can only be one
 - iii. This *siraat* is wide, straight, long, and dangerous due to attacks from the devils
- g. The Arabic word *mustaqeem* (straight)
 - i. It means to stand up straight

- ii. It is to imply that the *siraat* leads straight upwards to the heavens

6. The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor

- a. It is in reference to those righteous people that have already died upon truth and righteousness. It is not referring to those who are currently alive because they can still go astray
 - i. This is why the past tense verb is used in this verse
- b. The words “You have bestowed favor”
 - i. Meaning Allah made it easy for them
 - ii. The Arabic word ‘*anama* (favor)
 - 1. Comes from a word meaning something soft and easy
 - 2. It is also used to refer to cattle because these animals are real relaxed

7. Not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray

- a. The Arabic phrase *maghdhoobi ‘alayhim* (those who evoked [Your] anger)
 - i. It refers to someone whom everybody else is mad at, thus, he is receiving lots of anger
 - 1. The everybody in the context of the verse implies Allah, angels, believers, etc.
 - ii. It is interesting to note that Allah does not refer to Himself in this verse, as in the previous verse, because He does not even want to be mentioned with them. He is distancing Himself away from them
 - iii. This is also in reference to people who were given knowledge, thus, they knew the truth but still chose to go the wrong way
 - 1. Ex: the Jews who denied the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) despite him clearly being mentioned in their books
- b. The Arabic word *dhaalleen* (those who are astray)
 - i. It means those who got lost
 - 1. This is the opposite of guidance
 - ii. It is in reference to those who do not know any better and are ignorant, however, their ignorance in this case is not an excuse
 - 1. Ex: the Christians who say Allah is one of three
- c. Allah used nouns to refer to the two groups mentioned in this verse because such people always exist

Conclusion

- All of humanity can be categorized into three categories:
 - Those whom He favored
 - Those with whom He is angry
 - Those who got lost
- One of the lessons this surah teaches us is that we should not consistently do things that we know are forbidden by Allah
 - Because it can cause Allah to be angry with us or being lost as a punishment to the point that we can never get guidance again

- This chapter talks about both: individual and collective *eemaan* (faith)
- *Iyyaka na'budu* is the conclusion of first part of the chapter and *wa iyyaka nasta'een* is the conclusion of the second part of it