

Surah al-Fatihah

Introduction

- The word *surah* literally stands for height or elevation. Perhaps the chapters of the Qur'an have been called by this term because they raise the reader from one stage of knowledge and spiritual advancement to another (i.e. higher). Another meaning of the word *surah* is wall or fortification of a city, so perhaps the chapters of the Qur'an are called by this because each chapter encompasses many verses within itself and guards them from spilling into other parts of the Qur'an [Zaheer]
- The word *ayah*, usually translated as verse, literally means a sign or miracle. It is as if every verse of the Qur'an is a sign of Allah and a miracle in itself [Zaheer]
- There is a difference of opinion among the scholars whether *Basmalah* before the beginning of each *surah* is part of the of the Qur'an or not
 - *Basmalah* is referring to the phrase in the beginning of each *surah*: *In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful*
 - The statement means, "I begin with the name of Allah," or "I began with the name of Allah" [Ibn Jawzi]
 - The name 'Allah'
 - There is a debate on the word 'Allah' whether it is derived from Arabic root letters or not [Ibn Jawzi]
 - Some said it is a proper name for the Deity as is and has no root
 - Some said it is derived from Arabic root letters
 - Some said it is inclusive of all of Allah's beautiful Names [Sa'di]
- 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 Qur'an and is considered its greatest *surah*
 - It is seen to be a precise table of contents of the Qur'anic message because some scholars of exegesis have stated that this chapter is a summary of the whole Qur'an
 - 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* because it is recited repeatedly in the five daily prayers

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* (to Allah belongs all praise) means [true] praise only belongs to Allah alone and nobody else because He is the cause of everything
 - i. He sustains His creation in two ways, general and specific [Sa'di]:
 - 1. In general terms, this refers to His creation of all creatures, His granting of provision to them and His guiding them to that which is in their best interests, which enables them to survive in this world
 - 2. In specific terms, it refers to His cherishing of His close friends, by means of instilling faith in their hearts, guiding them to it, perfecting it for them and warding off from them distractions and obstacles that come between them and faith. In real terms, this means guiding them to everything that is good and protecting them from everything that is bad. Perhaps it is for this reason that most of the supplications of the Prophets used the word Lord

(*Rabb*), since all their requests and needs came under His special cherishing

- 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
 - 2. It refers to a beings who creates a thing and then develops it gradually, in steps, until it has achieved its optimum development [Zaheer]
 - 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 Judgment and we will not judge Him
 - 4. It comprises the ideas of having a just claim to the possession of anything and, consequently, authority over it [Zaheer]
 - 5. Usually masters in this world punish their slaves immediately for not following rules but Allah allows us to keep indulging in acts of disobedience 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. All of us are living in our own little worlds
 - iii. Some opine that '*alameen* is in reference to everything other than Allah [Sa'di]

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 [three 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 [two 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 [Zaheer]
- 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 Judgment

- a. On that day, we will all answer precisely for our deeds
 - i. It is a day in which we will be brought back to life and repaid for what we have done, all of His creation will be held accountable for their actions and recompensed for them [*al-Mukhtasar fee al-Tafseer*]
 - ii. On that day, kings and subjects, slaves and free, will all be equal and will submit fully to His might, awaiting the reckoning, hoping for His reward and fearing His punishment [Sa'di]
- b. The word *maalik*, translated here as 'Master', means 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 judgment will take place is owned by Him
- c. The Day of Judgement has been specifically mentioned because His absolute lordship will be apparent to everyone that day when no one else will possess lordship besides Him to any degree [Zaheer]
- d. 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 (i.e. punishment)
- e. In the recitation of this verse, Muslims are reminded in every unit of their prayers of the Day of Judgment. It serves as an encouragement for them to prepare themselves through righteous actions and to abstain from disobedience and evil deeds [*al-Tafseer al-Muyassar*]
- f. To mention the Day of Judgment after the Attributes of His Mercy is perhaps to remind man that although Allah is Kind and Merciful, He has also to be Just with all of His creation. Accordingly, He has appointed a day when everyone will have to recompense for the wrongs he committed to others and draw retribution for the wrongs he suffered at the hands of others [Zaheer]

4. You 'alone' we worship and You 'alone' we ask for help

- a. Meaning we intend and make You exclusive in worship, which is obedience with [complete] submission [Al-Wahidi]
 - i. When the previous three verses are understood properly, it will naturally lead to this conclusion
 - ii. Meaning of worship
 1. Many of the *tafseer* books define it as obedience with humility and submission [Al-Baghawi]
 2. Some opine worship refers to everything that Allah loves and is pleased with of actions and words, both outward and inward [Sa'di]
 - iii. Allah alone deserves to be worshiped because He alone is the bestower of all blessings, the greatest of which is the gift of life [Raazi]
- 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 Qur'an
 - 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 (i.e. guidance)
- d. The meaning of the second part of the verse: *You 'alone' 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
 - ii. Seeking help refers to relying upon Allah when seeking to attain what is beneficial and ward off what is harmful, whilst trusting that one will attain that [Sa'di]
- 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
 1. Others said worship is mentioned before seeking help by way of mentioning what is general before what is specific, and also to give precedence to Allah's dues over those of His slaves [Sa'di]
- 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)

- g. In this verse, there is healing for the hearts from the disease of attachment to other than Allah, as well as from the ailments of showing off, vanity, and pride [*al-Mukhtasar fee al-Tafseer*]
- h. The whole of Islam revolves around two principles: worship of Allah and trust in Allah. The former negates any association with Allah while the latter signifies trust and dependence on none other than Him [Zaheer]

5. Guide us to the straight path

- a. This is the number one thing we should be asking for
 - i. Meaning show and facilitate for us the right way, the path of submission to You which has no crookedness, and make us firm upon it [*al-Mukhtasar fee al-Tafseer*]
 - 1. A Muslim is, at all times and in all situations, in need of Allah's help in remaining steadfast on the Path of Allah, in firmly establishing himself on it and in continuing with determination [Zaheer]
- 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* is not written as a plural because it is alone and can only be one straight path. There is only one path to Allah, which is Islam, not multiple
 - iii. This path is wide, straight, long, and dangerous due to attacks from the devils
 - iv. It is the Prophet ﷺ who showed us this straight path so there is no way for the servant to attain happiness except by staying firm upon this upright path [*al-Tafseer al-Muyassar*]
- g. The Arabic word *mustaqeem* (straight)
 - i. It means to stand up straight
 - ii. It is to imply that the path leads straight upwards to the heavens
- h. The next verse tells us what this straight path is [Sa'di]

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

- a. Meaning the same path as those of Your creation whom You have blessed with guidance, such as the prophets, the truthful, martyrs, and the righteous ones [al-Mukhtasar fee al-Tafseer]
 - i. Because they are people [who received] guidance and remained firm on it [al-Tafseer al-Muyassar]
- b. 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. This is why the past tense verb is used in this verse
- c. 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
- d. There is clear evidence in this verse that the obedience that the faithful demonstrate, is not their own achievement. Rather, it is by Allah's leave and the *tawfeeq* (ability) granted to them by Him [Zaheer]
- e. The verse also is hinting that the 'path' is not a hypothetical, imaginary or an ideal one. Rather, it is a real and tangible one: one on which people have walked before and have met with success [Zaheer]
- f. We also learn from this verse that it is essential to seek the company of those who have been favored by Allah. Mere study of books might not be enough [Zaheer]

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. The Arabic phrase 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, it is as if He does not even want to be mentioned with them in the same sentence. He is distancing Himself away from them
 - iii. This is in reference to people who were given knowledge, thus, they knew the truth but chose not to follow it
 - 1. Ex: the Jews who denied the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ despite him clearly being mentioned in their books
- b. The Arabic word *dhaalleen* (those who are astray)
 - i. The Arabic word refers to 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. They were neglectful in seeking the Truth and being guided by it [al-Mukhtasar fee al-Tafseer]
 - 2. 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 will always exist

Conclusion

- Knowledge is when we follow it with action
 - Whoever knows the truth and followed it is more deserving of the straight path [al-Tafseer al-Muyassar]
 - The straight path is knowing the truth and acting upon it [Sa'di]
- 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