

Al-Fatihah

A Surah We Recite Often But Seldom Reflect On
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© Aljumuah Magazine for Editing & Pub
King Fahd National Library cataloging-in-
Publication Data

AL qasim. Abdul hakim
Alfatihah./ AL qasim. Abdul hakim.- Riyadh
78P; ..cm

ISBN: 978-603-90133-2-7

1-Quran- Commentaries- English	I-Title
221.42 dc	1433/61

L.D. no. 1433/61

ISBN: 978-603-90133-2-7

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T H I S B O O K

- This is an exercise in reflection on the meanings of an important surah of the Qur'an. An exercise performed in response to Allah's call to us, His slaves, to meditate over His Book: "*(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its meanings, and that men of understanding may receive admonition.*" [Saad: 29] And by reflection I mean looking into the denotations, connotations and implied associations of the verses of the Qur'an.
- The divine command to reflect on the Qur'an applies even more to surah Al-Fatihah, the reason being that it is a grand surah that boasts magnificent epithets such as: the Mother of the Book, the Pillar of the *Salah*-prayer, The Oft-repeated Seven Verses, etc.
- The *duaa*-prayers featured in surah Al-Fatihah are indeed significant. And we, the slaves of Allah, are ever needful of the divine guidance to the Straight Path. For attainment of bliss and salvation from perdition in the hereafter hinges on this divine intervention. Moreover, any one who is deprived of divine guidance ends up in one of two doomed camps: either the camp of those who have incurred Allah's wrath or that of those who have gone astray.
- Ignorance of the meaning of any *duaa*-prayer is capable of rendering it unworthy of a divine answer; for such ignorance is tantamount to heedlessness. The Prophet advises, "Supplicate Allah believing firmly that He will grant your requests, and know that Allah will disregard *duaa*-prayers that issue from a distracted, heedless heart." Therefore, internalizing the meanings of the splendid *duaa*-prayers featured in surah Al-Fatihah makes these *duaa*-prayers worthy of

divine answers.

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, all praises belong to Allah. We praise Him and we seek His assistance and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of our souls and from the evil of our actions. Whoever Allah guides, there is no one to misguide him, and whoever is misguided, there is no one to lead him to the Straight Path. I bear witness that nothing has the right to be worshipped except for Allah; and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

“O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not save as those who have surrendered (unto Him).” [Al-Imran: 102]

“O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, and created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence Allah, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.” [Nisaa: 01]

“O you who believe! Fear Allah, and (always) be truthful, candid and straight to the point. That He may make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins. He that obeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed attained the highest achievement.” [Al-Ahzab: 71-72]

Dear reader...

The following is a brief treatise featuring some reflections on the splendid verses of the grand Qur’anic chapter (surah) of Al-Fatihah. I was motivated, in putting together this treatise, by Allah’s command to us to ponder over the meanings of the Noble Qur’an: *“(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its meanings, and that men of understanding may receive admonition.” [Saad: 29]*

The Arabic term *tadabbur* (meditation) used in the Arabic original of the verse quoted above means: *thinking deeply about something for the purpose of really grasping its true meaning.* In

fact, Allah states in the Qur'an that, with regard to meditation on the meanings of the Noble Qur'an, people fall into two categories: those who reflect on those meanings and, those who do not: "*Will they then not meditate on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts.*" [Muhammad: 24]

Imam Qurtubi, the noted Qur'an commentator, cited this verse to prove that a Muslim is obligated to ponder over the Qur'an with a view to understanding its message . Furthermore, Allah reprimands those who do not reflect on the Qur'an by saying: "*Is it then that they do not ponder over what is said (in the Qur'an).*" [Al-Mu'minun: 68]

It is, therefore, incumbent upon every legally responsible Muslim (*mukallaf*) to ponder over the verses of the Noble Qur'an in order to understand their meanings.

Also, people fall into two categories with respect to the function of the Qur'an as a Divine Argument. The Companion Abu Malik al-Ash'ri quoted the Prophet as saying: "The Qur'an is either an argument for you or an argument against you." (Reported by Muslim)

Therefore, Muslims are advised to open up their hearts and minds to the Qur'an such that they bask in the Spirit and Light of Allah: "*And thus have We, by Our Command, sent inspiration to you: You knew not (before) what Revelation was, nor what Faith was; but We have made the (Qur'an) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will.*" [Ash-Shura: 52]

The noted Muslim scholar and ascetic, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, said, "The early generations of

¹See Qurtubi's comments on verse 82 of surah An-Nisa in his Tafseer al-Qurtubi. See also An-Nahhas comments on the same in his I'raabul-Qur'an 1/474.

Muslims viewed the verses of the Noble Qur'an as messages from Allah; hence, they took to the study of the Qur'an, pondering over its meanings and acting on its teachings." Ihyaa Ulum Addeen, 1/275.

Furthermore, Allah promises in verses 17, 22, 32, and 40 of surah Al-Qamar to make the Qur'an easy to comprehend: *"And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand; but is there anyone that is willing to understand?"* [Al-Qamar: 17, 22, 32, 40]

Moreover, meditating the Qur'an spurs the Muslim to act upon Allah's commands. The noted Muslim scholar and ascetic Malik ibn Dinaar used to say, *"O the people of the Qur'an (i.e., its reciters and memorizers), what effect does the Qur'an have on your hearts? O you who have committed to memory a surah or two of the Book of Allah, have you acted upon the teachings of these surahs?"—Hilyat al-Awliyaa, 2/358-359.*

So let each and everyone of us look into his or her heart to see to what extent does the Qur'an influence it; for when the light of the Qur'an permeates the heart of the believer, he or she possesses a god-given insight, thus loving that which Allah loves, abhorring that which Allah abhors, and relegating people and things to the statuses to which Allah consigns them.

As for those who are indifferent about the Qur'an and do not reflect on its meanings, they are bound to suffer onslaughts of distress, depression, isolation and worry. Speaking about those unfortunate people, Allah says: *"But whosoever turns away from My Message, i.e., the Qur'an, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. He will say: "O my Lord! why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)? (Allah) will say: "Thus did you, when Our Signs came unto you, disregard them: so will you, this day, be disregarded. And thus do We recompense him who transgresses beyond bounds and believes not in the Signs of his Lord: and the Penalty of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more enduring."* [Taha: 124-127]

The Qur'an is, therefore, a message from Allah to every Muslim who is legally responsible (*mukallaf*)—a message that urges Muslims, males and females, young and old, to

reflect on the Qur'an and act upon it: “*Verily this is no less than a Message to (all) the Worlds; nay, this surely is an admonition. Let any who will, keep it in remembrance!*” [Al-Muddaththir: 45-55] Allah also says: “*For it is indeed a Message of instruction; so let whosoever will, pay heed to it.*” [Abasa: 11-12]

Therefore, a little amount of proper recitation of the Qur'an coupled with *tadabbur* (pondering over the meanings of the Qur'an) is preferable to a recitation that is large in amount but bereft of reflection. A man once said to the Prophet's Companion, Ibn Abbas, “I'm so fast a reader, I can finish reading the Qur'an once or twice a night!” Ibn Abbas replied, “I would rather recite a single surah of the Qur'an than follow your way of reading; but if you insist [on your speedy method of recitation], recite the Qur'an with concentration and in-depth reflection.” (Reported by Baihaqi)

Of the things that facilitate meditation on, and understanding of, the Qur'an is consultation of expositional commentaries on the Qur'an (*kutub tafseer-ul-Qur'an*). Moreover, it is recommendable to consult verified (*muhafqqaq*) Qur'an commentaries, beginning with abridged ones, then moving on to elaborative and advanced ones. One should also make sure to stick to the interpretations of the first generations of Muslims—the Prophet's Companions and their Successors—whose excellence and piety were attested by Allah and His Messenger. Furthermore, a Muslim ought to know that reflection on the Qur'an is but a means to a grand end; that is, submission to the will of Allah and perseverance in the Straight Path in order to attain bliss in this world and the one to come.

No wonder then that the obligation to ponder over the Qur'an applies to surah Al-Fatihah, for it is the mainstay of salah-prayer, as well as the Mother or the Essence of the Qur'an (*Ummul-Qur'an*). Nothing stresses the preeminence of surah Al-Fatihah like the following qudsi hadith. The Companion Abu Hurirah quoted the Prophet as saying in a qudsi hadith: “Allah says, ‘I have divided salah, i.e., surah Al-Fatihah, between Myself and My servant into two halves, and My servant shall have what he has asked for.’ When Allah's servant says: *الحمد لله رب العالمين*, Allah says: My servant has praised Me. And when he says: *الرحمن الرحيم*, Allah says: My servant has extolled Me. And when he says: *مالك يوم الدين*, Allah says: My servant has glori-

fied Me. And when he says: **إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ**, Allah says: This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for. And when he says: **إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ، صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ، غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ**, Allah says: This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for.” (Reported by Muslim)

The word “salah” in the foregoing qudsi hadith refers to surah Al-Fatihah, for the verses mentioned in the hadith are from surah Al-Fatihah. Moreover, Al-Fatihah was called salah on account of its being a constituent component (*ruk'n*) in each and every *rak'ah* of salah-prayers.

Indeed, the supplications which surah Al-Fatihah comprises are sublime, because one is ever needful of Allah’s guidance of oneself to the Right Path; for this guidance is an essential prerequisite for attainment of bliss and salvation from this-worldly and otherworldly wretchedness. And whosoever is deprived of this divine guidance is either of those who incurred Allah’s wrath or of those who has gone astray. One of our righteous predecessors said concerning the *duaa*-prayer for guidance mentioned in surah Al-Fatihah: *“It is, indeed, the greatest request and the grandest sought-after prize which one should hold dearer than anything else in life. For this salah-prayer encompasses all the good things of this worldly life and the one to come. And because of the supreme status of this duaa- prayer, Allah has obligated Muslims to recite surah Al-Fatihah in every rak'ah of their salah-prayers.”* --*Badaai' at-Tafseer*, 1/223, compiled by Yusri as-Sayyed Mohamed.

Sadly, though Muslims recite surah Al-Fatihah in each and every *rak'ah* of their salah-prayers, a great number of them are unaware of its meanings, so much so that if you ask them about the meanings of the *duaa*-prayers this surah contains, they will be reduced to silence! Those Muslims, unfortunately, are in big trouble, because ignorance of the meaning of a *duaa*-prayer is tantamount to heedlessness which, in its turn, renders a supplication unworthy of Allah’s answer. Abu Hurairah quoted Allah’s Messenger as saying, “Supplicate Allah knowing for certain that your *duaa*-prayer will be answered; and make no mistake, Allah will not regard *duaa*-prayers that come from a heedless heart.” (Reported by Tirmithi) And before wrapping up this

introductory note, I would like to encourage my fellow Muslims to apply themselves to the study of this great surah and to reflect on the great meanings it embodies. I would also like to remind them that they are required to realize with their body limbs, i.e., their acts, the things they supplicate for (with their tongues) in surah Al-Fatihah; that is, to worship their Lord and seek His help.

Finally, goaded by a genuine interest in partaking of the tremendous blessings of surah Al-Fati-

hah, I put together some expositional notes on this magnificent surah, hoping that these notes will be of some aid to Muslims as they endeavor to receive the best divine answers for their duaa-prayers.

P R E L U D E

Before reviewing the meanings of this noble surah Al-Fatihah I thought it befitting to write a prelude to the surah that will attempt to answer two questions. First, when was surah Al-Fatihah revealed to Prophet Muhammad? Second, what are some of the merits of surah Al-Fatihah? Because having a notion about the worth of surah Al-Fatihah helps one grasp its meanings and appreciate its rank.

When was surah Al-Fatihah revealed?

Muslim scholars differ as to when surah Al-Fatihah was revealed. Some say it is a Makkan surah, i.e., was revealed in Makkah, prior to Prophet Muhammad's flight (*hijrah*) to Madinah. Others hold that it is a Madinan surah, i.e., was revealed after the Prophet's *hijrah* to Madinah. A third view, however, avers that the surah was revealed in both Makkah (*before hijrah*) and Madinah (*after hijrah*).

The correct view—and Allah knows best—is that surah Al-Fatihah was revealed in Makkah, before the Prophet's hijrah to Madinah. My preference of this view is based on the following verse in which Allah says to Prophet Muhammad: “*And We have bestowed upon you the Seven Oft-repeated (verses) and the Grand Qur'an.*” [Al-Hijr: 87]

Now, three things in this verse substantiate the view that surah Al-Fatihah was revealed in Makkah, before *hijrah*: 1) the quoted verse is from surah Al-Hijr which is a Makkan surah 2)

² Surah Al-Fatihah is the only seven-verse surah in the Qur'an. As for surah Al-Maa'un, the scholars differ as to the number of its verses. Some put them at seven, while others say they are six. For more information on the matter see Imam Alusi's Qur'an commentary *Ruhul-Ma'aani* 1/68, and Imam Abu Amr Ad-Daani's *Al-Bayaan Fee Addi Aail-Qur'an* 1/291

the fact that the verse refers to Al-Fatihah by one of its epithets, i.e., The Seven Oft-repeated (verses)² ; and 3) the fact that the Arabic verb used in the verse— *aatainaaka*—(we have bestowed upon you)—is in the past tense form.

Some of the merits of surah Al-Fatihah

The superior qualities of surah Al-Fatihah are legion. The following are some of the key merits of the surah:

1. The recitation of surah Al-Fatihah is a constituent component (*ruk'n*) in every salah-prayer—any salah-prayer in which the recitation of Al-Fatihah is omitted is null and void.

1. Al-Fatihah is the greatest surah of the Qur'an. The Companion Abu Sa'id ibnul Mua'llaa reported, "I was once making salah-prayer in the Prophet's Mosque, when the Prophet called my name; but since I was in the middle of a salah-prayer, I didn't answer his call. When I finished my salah-prayer I went to the Prophet and said, "I'm sorry didn't answer your call; I was offering salah-prayer." The Prophet replied, "Now, has Allah not said: "*O you who believe! give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you. [Al-Anfaal: 24]*?" The Prophet then held my hand and said, "If you meet me after the salah-prayer, I will teach you the greatest surah of the Qur'an." So when the salah-prayer was over, I went to him and said, "Didn't you say you would teach me the greatest surah in the Qur'an?" He said, "**الحمد لله رب العالمين**" [Al-Fatihah: 2]; it is the Seven Oft-repeated Verses and the Noble Qur'an which Allah gave me." (Reported by Bukhari)

2. Surah Al-Fatihah is great for *ruqyah* (remedy by recitation of invocations and or Qur'anic verses over a sick person). The Companion Abu Sa'id al-Khudri reported: "A number of the Prophet's Companions were once on a journey. One night, they camped near the dwellings of a Bedouin tribe who refused to host them and give them food. Later that night, the chief of that tribe was stung (by a snake or scorpion). His people tried everything possible

to treat him, but nothing worked. A man suggested seeking help from the camping strangers. When they came to the Companions' camp, one of the Companions said, "Well, I can perform *ruqyah*; but since you have refused to host us, I would not perform the *ruqyah* until you pledge to give us an offering." The tribe agreed to give the Companions a flock of sheep. So one of the Companions went up to the chief's house and started blowing (with light spit) on his wound while reciting surah Al-Fatihah and, lo and behold, the man was immediately cured. But when the tribe gave the Companions their pledged offering, some of the Companions said, "Let us not divide the flock until we consult the Prophet." When they arrived in Madinah and reported the incident to the Prophet, he laughed and said (approvingly): "How did you know that it (surah Al-Fatihah) is a *ruqyah*? You have done well! Go ahead, divide the flock among yourselves, and allot a share for me." (Reported by Bukhari and Muslim) The Prophet's statement: "How did you know that it (surah Al-Fatihah) is a *ruqyah*?" indicates his approval of the Companion's usage of surah Al-Fatihah for *ruqyah*.

3. That surah Al-Fatihah is a light and a divine gift conferred upon Prophet Muhammad, to the exclusion of all other prophets of Allah. It is reported that Allah sent an angel to Prophet Muhammad with the good news that Allah would grant him the blessings contained in surah Al-Fatihah. The Companion Abdullah ibn Abbas said, "While (the archangel) Jibril (Gabriel) and the Prophet were once meeting, a noise was heard. Jibril lifted his head and said, "I heard today the sound of a door open that was never opened before in Heavens." Then an angel came who never came before. The angel greeted the Prophet and said, "I'm here to give you the good news of two lights you were given that have never been given to any Prophet before you: surah Al-Fatihah and the concluding verses of surah Al-Baqarah; and no dua-prayer in these verses you make, except that it is granted." (Reported by Muslim)

4. The multiplicity of the names of surah Al-Fatihah tells of its greatness. The following are some of these names: The Opening of the Book (the Qur'an)—The Mother of the Book—The Seven Oft-repeated Verses—The Glorious Qur'an—The Prayer, Etc. Surah Al-Fatihah is also described as being a Light, a *Ruqya*, etc.

³ For more descriptions of surah Al-Fatihah, see Imam Syuti's *Al-Itqaan Fee Uloom Al-Qur'an* 1/167-171

Surah Al-Fatihah:

A General Overview

“In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

The Most Beneficent; the Most Merciful.

Owner of the Day of Judgment.

You alone we worship; You alone we ask for help.

Show us the straight path.

The path of those whom You have favored. Not the path of those who earn Your wrath nor
of those who go astray.”

[Al-Fatihah: 1-7]

The Basmalah: ”بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ“

(In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful)

Basmalah is a noun form derived from the Arabic quadrilateral verb: *b•s•m•l* بِسْمِ (to say *bismi-llah*).

The phrase “*bismi-llah*”⁴ (in the name of Allah) means: I begin my work in the name of Allah Whose aid and succor I seek; Allah says: “*Pray for help from Allah, and (wait) in patience and constancy.*” [Al-A’raaf: 128]⁴

Ismu-llah (The name of Allah) denotes *Uluhah* (deification), i.e., intense devotion combined with utmost veneration, adoration and total submission. Allah says: “*And He is Allah in the heavens and on earth;*” [Al-An’aaam: 3] meaning, Allah is the only rightful entity of worship in heavens and earth.

Ismu-llah (the name of God) comprises *Tawhid al-uluhiyyah* (oneness of Allah) which signifies the solid understanding and firm belief that none has the right to be deified and worshipped except Allah. In other word, *Tawhid al-uluhiyyah* denotes the realization of the concept of *tawhid* through the slave’s acts—be they esoteric (*batinah*), such as fear, love, humble submission to Allah’s Will, trust, etc; or exoteric (*thahirah*), such as salah-prayers, sacrificial offerings, alms-giving, etc. It is over this type of *tawhid* the conflict between Allah’s Messengers and their people occurred. According to the Qur’an, Quraish, the tribe of Prophet Muhammad, for instance, reacted to the latter’s call to *tawhid* thus: “*Has he made the gods (all) into one Allah? Truly that is an astounding thing!*” [Saad: 5]

⁴ It is legally incumbent (*wajib*) upon a Muslim to say *bismi-llah* before eating, drinking, slaughtering animals, and at the moment of firing or setting a hunting dog or bird at games. It is also legally recommendable (*mustahab*) to say *bismi-llah* before starting *wudhu* (ritual ablutions), cohabitation, sleep, etc.

The term “Allah” is an exclusive and proper name of God; it denotes and encompasses all of *Al-Asmaa Al-Husna* (The Most Beautiful Names of Allah) as well as God’s supreme attributes (*As-Sifaat Al-Uliyyaa*), as indicated in the Qur’an: “*The most beautiful names belong to Allah.*” [Al-A’raaf: 180] The term “Allah”, therefore, encompasses, in a general manner, all the meanings of His *Al-Asmaa Al-Husna*; whereas the *Al-Asmaa Al-Husna* explain in detail the divine attributes from which the name “Allah” is derived.

Allah’s Name الرحمن (The Beneficent)

Allah’s Name “*Ar-rahman*” is unique, exclusive, unprecedented, and has no parallel. No one is permitted to use the name *Ar-rahman* as a name for oneself or for someone else, Allah says: “*And Allah’s are the best names, therefore call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names; they shall be recompensed for what they did.*” [Al-A’raaf: 180]

The name *Ar-rahman* denotes that mercy is an essential attribute of Allah (*wasf thati*), the evidence being the fact that this divine name is always mentioned in revelatory proof-texts (*nusus*) unassociated with the object or locus of mercy. Allah, for instance, says: “*The Beneficent One (Ar-rahman), Who is established on the Throne.*” [Taha: 05]

Moreover, unlike the divine name “*Ar-rahim*”, the revelatory proof-texts do not associate the divine name “*Ar-rahman*” with the believers. Furthermore, the divine name *Ar-rahman* occurs almost exclusively in the Makkan surahs of the Qur’an. It is mentioned sixteen times in surah Mariam; seven times in surah Az-Zukhruf; five times in surah Al-Furqan; four times in surahs: Taha, Al-Anbiyaa, Yaa Seen, Al-Mulk; and two times in surah An-Naba’. Surah Al-Baqarah is the only Madinan surah in which the divine name “*Ar-rahman*” is mentioned.

Allah’s Name الرحيم (The Merciful)

Allah’s name *Ar-rahim* signifies the act of Allah’s bestowal of His Mercy on His slaves, when and as He pleases. Moreover, Allah’s Mercy on His creation takes two forms:

1. A general mercy that covers His entire creation, be they believers or non-

believers, humans or nonhumans; for Allah’s Mercy covers everything, as attested by His act of creation, His bestowal of sustenance, His decreeing of the affairs of His creation, and His writing of the destinies of each and every single creature. The following are some of the Qur’anic references to this comprehensive mercy of Allah: *“Our Lord! Your Reach is over all things, in Mercy and Knowledge;”* [Ghafir:07] *“Look then at the signs of Allah’s mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death, most surely He will raise the dead to life; and He has power over all things;”* [Ar-Rum: 50] *“But your Lord is Most forgiving, full of Mercy. If He were to call them (at once) to account for what they have earned, then surely He would have hastened their punishment.”* [Al-Kahf: 58]

2. A mercy that is reserved exclusively for the believers. Allah says: *“He it is Who blesses you, as do His angels, that He may bring you forth from darkness unto light; and He is ever Merciful to the believers.”* [Al-Ahzaab: 43] ⁵

Also, it is narrated that upon seeing a woman who was breastfeeding her baby, Prophet Muhammad asked his Companions, “Do you think this woman would ever abandon her baby?” They said “She would never abandon it!” Thereupon Allah’s Messenger said, “Allah is more kind to His servants than this woman to her child.” (Reported by Bukhari)

Mercifulness, however, could be attributed to entities other than Allah, as Allah says in the Qur’an: *“Now has come unto you a Messenger from amongst yourselves. It grieves him that you should perish; full of concern for you; for the believers full of pity, merciful.”* [At-Tawbah: 128]

One, however, should consider the disparity between the mercies of the created—which is

⁵ See Ibn Kathir Commentary on the Qur’an (*Tafseerul Qur’an Al-athim*), 1 / 20. The *angels’ blessings* mean their dua-prayers (on behalf of the believers). *Allah’s blessings* refer to His mentioning a believer’s name in His Exalted Assembly (*Al-Mala’ Al-’Alaa*).

proportionate to their weakness and mortality—and the mercy of the Creator, Allah, the Most-Powerful, the Ever-living: “*Naught is as His likeness; and He is the Hearer, the Seer (of all things).*” [Ash-Shurah: 11]

It is reported in an authentic hadith that the Prophet said, “Allah created mercy in one hundred parts, ninety-nine parts of which He retained with Him; and He has sent down upon the earth the remaining one part, and it is thanks to this one part that there is mutual love among the creation so much so that the beasts treat its young ones with affection.” (Reported by Muslim)

Is *basmalah* a verse of surah Al-Fatihah?

The matter of whether *basmalah* is a verse of surah Al-Fatihah had been a bone of contention among the Prophet’s Companions, the Qur’an Readers (*Al-Qurraa*) who came after them, and the specialists in the sciences of the Qur’an.

The Qur’an scholars in Makkah and the garrison town of Kufah count *basmallah* as part of surah Al-Fatihah; the reading-style of Hafis from Aasim follows this view.

The Qur’an scholars of Madinah, Basrah and Ash-Shaam (the Levant), however, are of the opinion that *basmallah* is not part of surah Al-Fatihah.

As for the authoritative copies of the Qur’an (*Mushafs*) which the caliph Othman ibn Affan forwarded to the different Muslim regions, they neither had diacritical points, vocalization marks

⁶ See Imam Abu Amr Ad-Daani’s *Al-Muhkam* p.2-3.

nor had they included identification and counting of verses.

The weightier view, in my opinion, is that *basmallah* is not part of surah Al-Fatihah. The following evidences support this choice:

1. The fact that the scholars differed as to whether *basmallah* is part of surah Al-Fatihah. Muslim theologians said, “The strong doubt about *basmallah* precludes mutual charge of unbelief (*takafir*) between the parties to the controversy, which indicates that the disagreement over *basmallah* does not belong in the category of the matters that are incontrovertibly known or are reliable beyond all doubt (*qat’ee*).⁷
2. Allah’s saying in the well-known qudsi hadith: “I have divided salah between Myself and My servant into two halves, and My servant shall have what he has asked for. When the servant says:” الحمد لله رب العالمين”, Allah says: My servant has praised Me. And when the servant says:” الرحمن الرحيم”, Allah says: My servant has extolled Me. And when the servant says: “مالك يوم الدين”, Allah says: My servant has glorified Me.

And when the servant says: “إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين”, Allah says: This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for. And when the servant says: “إهدنا الصراط المستقيم، صراط الذين أنعمت عليهم، غير المغضوب عليهم، ولا الضالين”, Allah says: This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for.” (Reported by Muslim)

In this hadith Allah divides surah Al-Fatihah into two parts:

The first part: from “الحمد لله رب العالمين” to “إياك نعبد”

The second part: from “وإياك نستعين” to the end of the surah

⁷ See Bahuti’s *Kashfi Al-Qinaa’*, 1/336. Some scholars, such as Zamakhshari (*Kashshaaf*, 1/2), Bydaawi (*Tafseer Al-Bydaawi* 1/12), Ibn Aashur (*At-Tahrir Wat-Tanwir* 1/145-146), consider the controversy over *basmalah* as part of the controversy over the widely-narrated Qur’an Readings (*Al-Qiraat Al-Mutawatirah*).

Now, had the *basmalah* been part of surah Al-Fatihah, Allah would have mentioned it in the foregoing qudsi hadith. Besides, the two divisions mentioned in the qudsi hadith are equal. However, if we were to count *basmalah* as part of Al-Fatihah, the count of the verses up to “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” would be four verses and half, while the remaining verses after “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” would number two verses and half, which renders the two halves of the surah unequal, hence at variance with the division mentioned in the hadith. Also, counting *basmalah* as part of surah Al-Fatihah makes the last verse of the surah so long that it appears incongruous with the remaining short verses of the surah.

3. Had *basmalah* been part of surah Al-Fatihah, some of its phrases and meanings would have been repeated later in the surah, in a way that doesn't add any new information. For instance, the phrase “*bismillah*”, which is essentially an *isti'ana* (seeking of Allah's aid), would have been repeated in the fourth verse: “إِيَّاكَ

نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” Additionally, the adjectives:

“الرحمن، الرحيم” in the *basmalah* would have been repeated in the second verse: “الرحمن، الرحيم” Now, the elevated status of surah Al-Fatihah and the fact that it is the Mother and Essence of the Qur'an renders the occurrence of pointless repetitions in it highly unlikely.

However, although I lean strongly to the opinion that *basmalah* is not part of surah Al-Fatihah, I still believe it to be a verse of the Qur'an. According to the opinion of the majority of the scholars, *basmalah* is an independent verse that was revealed to separate between the surahs of the Qur'an. Allah knows best.

The First Verse:
“الحمد لله رب العالمين”
(Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds)

⁸ See Ibn Taimyah’s *Majmu’ Al-Fatawi* 22/351. Also, the dispute over the *basmalah* impacts the positions of the parties to the controversy as to the legal status (*hukm shar’ee*) of the recitation of *basmalah* in salah-prayer. Those who view *basmalah* as part of surah Al-Fatihah judge its recitation in salah-prayers as obligatory (*wajib*). While those who believe otherwise say that recitation of *basmalah* in salah-prayer is not an obligation (*wajib*), but rather a supererogatory act (*sunnah*). See Ibn Qudamah’s *Al-Mughni*, 2/151. As for audible recitation of *basmalah* in audible salah-prayers (*as-salah al-jahriyyah*), it is not *sunnah*. In his *Sharh Ma’aani-l-Aathaar*, Imam Tahawi, cited *mutawatir* reports (wide-scale narrations from the Prophet) to prove that the Prophet and his Companions did not use to recite the *basmalah* audibly in audible salah-prayers. Also, Imam Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali quoted Imams Uqayli and Ad-Daaraqutni as saying that there is no authentic hadith to support the claim that *basmalah* recitation in salah-prayer is *sunnah*.

The Meaning of *hamd* (praise)

Linguistically, the Arabic term *hamd* denotes harboring love for the object of *hamd* (*al-mahmud*) and attributing qualities of elective perfection (*kamal Ikhtiyaari*) to it. The opposite of *hamd* is *themm* (Arabic for disparagement), which signifies taking dislike to someone or something and speaking of him, her or it slightly.

The Difference between *Hamd* and *Shukr* (gratitude)

Hamd differs from *shukr* in that the latter is a praise that can be expressed either verbally or by actions, whereas the former is a praise that can only be expressed verbally or by acts of the heart. Allah says: “Work you, sons of David, out of gratitude (*shukr*)! but few of My servants are grateful!” [Saba’: 13] Moreover, *hamd* is more general in that it is an unconditional praise of someone that is independent of his or her favors. *Shukr*, on the other hand, is specific to praising someone for certain favors bestowed by him or her.

The Difference Between *Hamd* and *Madh* (Lauding)

Hamd differs from *madh* in that *hamd* combines praise of the qualities of the object of *hamd* with love and admiration to his or her person. Hence *hamd* is more specific than *madh*. *Madh*, however, doesn’t necessarily entail love. Moreover, *hamd* is confined exclusively to the elective acts and traits of its object, whereas *madh* pertains to both automatic and elective acts and traits of its object; for instance, one could be an object of *madh* for one’s comeliness or for one’s remarkable stature although these are in-born, God-given qualities that one has no say in his or her possession of them; on the other hand, one could be an object of *hamd* because of his gracious manners which is a quality one acquires at his or her own discretion. So *madh* is more general than *hamd*

“*Al-Hamdulillah*” is the most rightful word ever uttered by Allah’s slaves

The Arabic letter “*Laam* ﴿

He is the One who decrees, facilitates and makes possible any hamd received by any of His Creation, as Allah says: “*And to Allah belongs hamd (praise); and He has power over all things.*” [At-Taghabun: 01]

Also, several authentic reports from the Prophet highlight the excellence of the hymn phrase الحمد لله “*Al-Hamdulillah*”. The following are some of these Prophetic reports.

“O Allah, all *hamd* is to You.” (Reported by Ahmed) “*Al-Hamdulillah* is the best supplication.” (Reported by Tirmithi) “*Subhanallah and Al-Hamdulillah* tip the Scale (in favor of the believer on the Day of Judgment).” (Reported by Muslim)

The Prophet also used to recite the following dua-prayer every time he lifted his head from ruku’ (bowing in salah-prayer): “Our Lord, Yours is all *hamd*—a *hamd* that is capable of filling heavens and earth and anything You will beyond that. All glorifications and praises are Yours, the most rightful utterance Your slaves make. All of us here are Your humble servants. None can give a thing You withhold, or hold back something you give. No one’s fortune or wealth is ever going to elevate him or her in Your Eye [only one’s righteous deeds will raise one in the sight of Allah].” (Reported by Muslim)

Moreover, singing the *hamd* (praises) of Allah involves realization of the concept of *tawhid*, because the sincere, heartfelt saying of *Al-Hamdulillah* is, in essence, an admission that Allah is the sole object of all of *hamd*, hence the sole object of worship. Also singing the *hamd* of Allah entails recognising His perfect wisdom as reflected in His acts of creation; it also entails appreciation of Allah’s perfect mercy as instanced by His sending Messengers and Scriptures to

⁹ See Ar-Raghib Al-Asfahaani’s commentary notes on surah Al-Fatihah in his Jaami’ *At-Tafaasir*, p. 218

mankind. Thus, the sincere utterance of the hymn phrase *Al-Hamdulillah* entails profession of the testimony of faith, i.e., *Laa ilaaha illallaah* “There is no deity worth of worship except Allah.”

Giving hamd to Allah in all circumstances

As mentioned above, a true believer must give *hamd* to Allah in good times and bad times. It is reported in a qudsi hadith that Allah once said to the angel of death: “O angel of death, did you take the life of the son of My slave? Did you deprive My slave of the delight of his eye and joy of his heart?” When the angel of death answered in the affirmative, Allah asked: “And how did my slave react?” The angel answered, “He sang your hamd and repeated your saying “*To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return* [Baqarah: 156].” Whereupon Allah instructed the angels saying: “Build for My (afflicted) slave a house in Paradise and name it: the House of *Hamd*.” (Reported by Ahmed & Tirmithi)

After the phrase “*Al-hamdulillah*”, which establishes Allah’s entitlement to all types of *hamd*, Allah mentions some of His attributes to justify this entitlement. These are:

1. The fact that Allah is the “Lord of the worlds (Rabbil Aalamin)”. The Arabic term *rabb* means cherisher, nurturer or lord. It is a derivative form of the Arabic root *r•a•bb•a* which means to cherish or nurture something, step by step, until it comes to full fruition. Some scholars maintain that Allah’s Lordship (*rububiyyah*) refers to Allah’s unceasing bestowal of His innumerable favors on his creation. Others hold that *rububiyyah* signifies Allah’s act of creation, His dominion over the worlds, and His power over His creation.

Allah’s *rububiyyah* of His creation takes two forms:

First: a universal *rububiyyah* that covers Allah’s entire creation. This signifies Allah’s acts of creation as well as His bestowal of sustenance and material favors, both overt and covert, on his creation.

Second: a *rububiyyah* reserved exclusively for the believers (*al-Mu’minun*). This refers to nurturing and guidance (to that which is good) and protection from evil. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the duaa-prayers of Allah’s Messengers and

their followers, as shown in the Qur'an, begins by recognizing the *rububiyyah* of Allah. For instance, Allah says about Adam and Eve: “*They said: Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost!*” [Al-A'raaf: 23] Allah also says about Prophet Muhammad: “*And (O Muhammad) say: My Lord! Forgive and have mercy, for You are Best of all who show mercy.*” [Al-Mu'minun: 118]

Exposition of the term *Al-aalmin* (the worlds)

The Arabic term *Al-aalmin*, plural of *aalm* (world), designates a class or a genus of beings. *Al-aalmin* are numerous and subsumes many kinds such as: the world of angels, the world of jinn, the world of humans, the world of plants, the world of sea creatures, etc. Thus, the term *Al-aalmin* encompasses the entire creation of Allah. The Qur'an indicates this universal scope of the term *Al-aalmin*. Speaking about a debate between prophet Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh, Allah says: “*Pharaoh said, 'And what is the 'Lord and Cherisher of the worlds'?' (Moses) said: 'The Lord and Cherisher of the heavens and the earth, and all between, - if you want to be quite sure.'*”

[Ash-Shu'araa: 23-24]

Some scholars said that Allah calls heavens and earth and all between *aalamin* (worlds), as in this verse and its likes, because these entities serve as *alamat* (Arabic for signs) of their creator: Allah.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Ibn Attiyyah's *Al-Muharrar Al-Wajiz*, 1/66

¹¹ The term *Al-aalamin* is sometimes used in the Qur'an to refer to certain classes of the worlds. Allah, for instance, employed the term *Al-aalamin* in two places of surah Saad and surah At-Takwir: “*Verily this, i.e., the Qur'an, is no less than a Message to Al-aalamin (all the Worlds);*” [At-Takwir: 27; Saad: 87] to refer to mankind and jinn exclusively, for they are the only beings who are obligated to act on the teachings of the Qur'an (*mukallafin*). Also Allah said about the Children of Israel (*Bani Israael*): “*O Children of Israel! Remember My favor where with I favored you and how I preferred you to Al-aalamin (all the worlds);*”

The term “*Al-aalamin*” is, then, said to encompass all the creation because all the creation, without exception, are cherished and sustained by Allah. ¹¹

2. The second and third divine attributes which Allah cites to affirm His deservedness of all kind of hamd, namely, *Ar-rahman* and *Ar-rahim*, are treated below (in the comments on verse two of surah Al-Fatihah).

The second verse:

“الرحمن، الرحيم”

(The Merciful, the Beneficent)

[Baqarah:47;122]and,“ *We did aforetime grant to the Children of Israel the Book, the Power of Command, and Prophethood; We gave them, for Sustenance, things good and pure; and We favored them above Al-Aalamin (all the worlds);*” [Al-Jaathiyah:16] meaning, Allah preferred them to the nations existing at the time, or the world nations prior to the appearance of the Community of Prophet Muhammad (*ummat Muhammad*). Furthermore, the term *Al-aalamin* is sometimes used in the Qur’an to indicate mankind, as shown in Prophet Lot’s censorious statement to his people: “*What! Of Al-aalamin (all mankind) do you come unto the males?*” [Ash-Shu’raa: 165]

In this verse, Allah mentions the second and third reasons why He deserves all *hamd* and stresses that compassion, leniency, ease (*yusr*) and mercy are at the core of His *Rububiyyah* over His creation, and that this *Rububiyyah*, including Allah's legal prescriptions (*ahkaam shar'iyah*) to His creation, is far removed from hardship, harm and oppression (*haraj*).

And as we stated in the foregoing, the term *Ar-rahman* is an Essential Attribute of Allah (*wasf thaati*); whereas the term *Ar-rahim* signifies the material manifestations of Allah's Mercy.

We also referred earlier to the fact that the reach of Allah's Mercy blankets all His creation. Allah said about the angels who carry His Throne (*hamalatul-arsh*): "*Our Lord! Your Reach is over all things, in Mercy and Knowledge.*" [Ghafir: 07]

Now let us conclude this section by listing below the Divine Attributes (*as-sifaat al-I'laahiyyah*) mentioned in the portion of surah Al-Fatihah we covered so far:

- *Rububiyyah* (Cherishing and Nurturing): *Rabbil-aalamin*
- Allah's Essential mercy: *Ar-rahman*
- Allah's practical mercy: *Ar-rahim* which, together with *Ar-rahman*, signify an offer of reward (*targhib*)

-Then Allah presents (in the third verse of surah Al-Fatihah, "مالك يوم الدين" the fourth reason why He deserves all *hamd* and gives a warning (*tarhib*) against rebellion against Him or trespassing His limits. The next chapter of the book features an explication of this third verse of surah Al-Fatihah.

The Third Verse:
“مالك يوم الدين”
(Master of the Day of Judgment)

In this verse Allah mentions the fourth reason why He deserves all of *hamd*; i.e., the fact that He is: “مالك يوم الدين” Literally, the term *mulk* (a derivative noun form of the Arabic triconsonantal root m-l-k from which the term “*malik*” is also derived) denotes control and management. Thus, “مالك يوم الدين” means the One to Whom belongs the uncontested control and mastery of the Day of Judgment.

The term “*din*”, as indicated by its use in this third verse of surah Al-Fatihah, means: just reckoning; i.e., the dispensing of rewards and punishments on the Day of Judgment to the people who are legally responsible “*mukallafin*”, as the Qur’an says: “*On that Day Allah will pay them back (all) their just din (dues);*” [An-Noor: 25] Allah also says: “*When we die and become dust and bones, shall we indeed receive our din (rewards and punishments)?*” [As-Saaffaat: 54] and says: “*That Day, every soul shall be requited for what it earned; no injustice will there be that*

¹² The first word of the third verse varies as between variant reading-styles (Qiraat) of the Qur’an. Two of the well-known Seven Authentic Readers of the Qur’an (*Al-qurraa’ As-sabaa’*), namely, Aasim and Al-Kisaa’ee, read the first word in this verse thus: “*Melik*” with a short “a,” which means “king”; whereas the rest of the Qurraa’ pronounced it thus: “*Malik*” with a long “a,” meaning “master” or “owner”—see Ibn Mujahid’s *Kitaab As-Sab’aa*, p. 104. This variation in pronunciation versions of the verse notwithstanding, the terms “*melik*” and “*malik*” are not that distinct in meaning, and could, therefore be reconciled by holding the term “*melik*” to refer to an Essential Attribute of Allah, and the term “*malik*” to describe Allah’s control over Yawmid-din. See Shawkaani’s *Fathul-Qadir*, 1/22.

Day.” [Ghafir: 17]

In fact, even animals and birds, no matter how insignificant they may be, will be resurrected by Allah on the Day of Judgment to be justly requited for what they earned, Allah says: “*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, or a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end.*” [Al-Anaam: 38] The Prophet said, “Allah will definitely enforce settlement of disputes between adversaries on the Day of Judgment; even the wrong done to a hornless goat by a horned one will be redressed.” (Reported by Muslim)

The wisdom of future reckoning

Had there been no resurrection, reckoning or requital in a future life, the creation of life would be a frivolous, pointless act. Distancing Himself and His Acts from purposelessness and futility, Allah says: “*Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)? Therefore exalted be Allah, the King, the Truth; there is no god but He, the Lord of the Throne of Honor!*” [Al-Mu’minun: 115-116] Allah also said: “*Or do those who commit ill-deeds suppose that We shall make them as those who believe and do good works, the same in life and death? Bad is their judgment!*” [Al-Jaathiyah: 21]

So *hamd* be to Allah for His decreeing resurrection and requital in a life to come: “*to Him be Praise in the Hereafter;*” [Saba: 01] and, “*All praise is due to Him in this (life) and the hereafter.*” [Al-Qasas: 71] Allah also relates in the Qur’an what all of his creation would say at the conclusion of Divine Judgment in the hereafter: “*And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne (Divine) on all sides, singing Glory and Praise to their Lord. The Decision between them (at*

¹³In his commentary on *Sahih Muslim*, the late Ustaz Mohamed Fuad Abdul-Baqi opined that the retribution referred to in this hadith is not a *taklif*-based one, but rather an act which Allah’s Justice dictates. Other scholars, however, hold that it is a *taklif* (legal obligation) of some sort. Allah knows best.

Judgment) will be in (perfect) justice, and the cry (on all sides) will be, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!" [Az-Zumar: 75]

Moreover, Allah has explained Yawmi-d-din (The Day of Judgment) by relating some of its events. Allah says: "And what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? Again, what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? (It will be) the Day when no soul shall have power (to do) aught for another; for the command that Day, will be (wholly) with Allah." [Al-Infitaar: 17-19] No one, no matter how close or how favorable he or she to Allah, would have a say on the matters of the Day of Judgment, for the command in it would rest completely in Allah's Hands. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have once addressed his daughter, Fatimah, thus: "O Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, ask of my wealth to your heart's content, but I can avail you naught with Allah." (Reported by Bukhari) Indeed, this disclaimer by the Prophet should motivate each and every one of us to serve Allah with pure intention, and to give up on counting on the support of anyone other than Allah, be he a prophet, an angel or a saint; for none of those entities shall have the power of intercession; Allah says: "Say: 'To Allah belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession,'" [Az-Zumar: 44] He also says: "None shall have the power of intercession, but such a one as has received permission (or promise) from (Allah) Most Gracious;" [Maryam: 87] and says: "And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails naught save after Allah gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts." [An-Najm: 26] When the Companion Abu Hurairah asked the Prophet: "Who is entitled to your intercession on the Day of Judgment?" The Prophet replied, "My intercession on the Day of Judgment is for whosoever professes the *shahadah* (*Laa Ilaaha Illallaah*) from his heart." (Reported by Bukhari)

Allah's reference to the Day of Judgment in surah Al-Fatihah is meant as a warning (*tarhib*) to His slaves in order that they be in a median state between hope (*rejaa*) and fear (*khawf*), as well as be ever mindful of that grievous Day and prepare for it.

Now, some might ask about the wisdom behind Allah's singling out of the Day of Judgment to be a locus wherein His Power and Control is shown, when it is known that He owns both this life and the one to come, as Allah says: "Or shall man have what he covets? But unto Allah be-

long the after (life), and the former;” [An-Najm: 24-25] and: “And verily unto Us (belong) the End and the Beginning.” [Al-Lyl: 13]?

The answer to this question is multifaceted:

1. We made mention in the foregoing of Allah’s absolute and universal *Rububiyah* which applies comprehensively to both this life and the one to come, as emphasized by Allah’s saying in the first verse of Al-Fatihah: “رب العالمين” (The Cherisher of the worlds). Allah, therefore, is the absolute owner of the two abodes and in all times.
2. Humans in this worldly life (*dunya*) do not congregate in the same place at the same time; rather, human communities succeed one another.
3. Even when humans get together in this life, their gathering is normally short-lived; whereas their gathering in the hereafter is never-ending.
4. Allah’s exclusive dominion becomes demonstrably clear On the Day of Judgment—by way of the gathering and consensus of His entire creation. On that Day Allah will address His creation thus: “*Whose is the Sovereignty this day?*” but because no one will dare answer the question, Allah will provide the answer saying: “*It is Allah’s, the One, the Almighty.*” [Ghafir: 16]

In conclusion of my comments on the third verse of surah Al-Fatihah, I would like to highlight the following points:

- The previous three verses of surah Al-Fatihah comprise the constituent components (*arkan*) of worship (*Ibadah*). These are: love (*mahabbah*)—in the first verse “الحمد لله رب العالمين”; hope (*raja*)—in the second verse “الرحمن، الرحيم”; and fear (*khawf*)—in the third verse “مالك يوم الدين”.
- Also, in these verses Allah shows us how to give *hamd* to Him; how to praise

Him; and how to glorify Him. Hence, *hamd* is to ascribe qualities of perfection to the object of *hamd* (*al-mahmud*) combined with love of, and pleasure with, him or her. When *hamd* is given repeatedly, it becomes exaltation (*thanaa*). And when *hamd* is combined with attribution of qualities of greatness and majesty (*jalal*) to the object of love, it becomes glorification (*tamjid*).

-We mentioned in the foregoing the qudsi hadith: “When Allah’s servant says:”الحمد لله رب العالمين”, Allah says: My servant has praised Me. When he says:”الرحمن، الرحيم”, Allah says: My servant has extolled Me. And when he says:”مالك يوم الدين”, Allah says: My servant has glorified Me.” Now, some important questions are in order here: do we really feel our *hamd*, our extolling and our glorification of Allah when we recite the Qur’an in our salah-prayers? Do we feel Allah’s response to us?

The Fourth Verse:
“إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ، وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ”
(You alone we worship; You (alone) we ask for help)

After praising Allah and seeking nearness to Him (*tawassul*) through His Most Beautiful Names and Supreme Attributes, the slave declares his or her sincere devotion to Allah, and petitions for Allah’s aid in this devotion. In other word, the slave is making another kind of *tawassul*, i.e., *tawassul* through servitude (*ubudiyah*) and *tawhid*. And with these two types of *tawassul*, the *duaa*-prayer is almost guaranteed a divine answer.

This fourth verse of Al-Fatihah is made of two parts:

The first part: Allah’s right, which is indicated by “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ”

The second part: The slaves’ right, which is indicated by “وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ”

This division of the verse is indicated by the foregoing *qudsi hadith* in which Allah says “This is between Me and My slave, and My slave shall receive what he asks for.” Hence, the phrase “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” is a praise of Allah, whereas “وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” is a *duaa*-prayer.

The First part: “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ”

Linguistic and Legal meanings of *ibadah*

Literally, *ibadah* (a noun form of the Arabic triconsonantal root *a-b-d*) denotes obedience, submission and humility. When an Arab says this road is *mu’bbad* (a passive form of the Arabic root *a-b-d*), he means a road that is prepared for people to walk on. This linguistic meaning of *ibadah* occurs in the Qur’an. Allah says about the reaction of Pharaoh and his generals to prophet’s Moses call for belief in Allah: “They said: ‘Shall we believe in two men like ourselves and whose

people are in bondage (*aabidun*) to us?” [Al-Mu’minun:47] The word *aabidun* used in the original Arabic text of the verse implies bondage, submission, and obedience.

Legally, *ibadah* is a comprehensive concept that encompasses everything Allah loves and accepts, be they utterances or physical acts, and whether they are internal (*batinah*) or external (*thahirah*). And for an act to be loved by Allah, it must satisfy two conditions: purity of intention (*ikhlas*), and following what Allah has legislated and what His Messenger has taught (*ittibaa’*).

The above legal definition of *ibadah* is a comprehensive one that includes acts by heart as well as acts by limbs (*jawarih*)

First, acts by heart. These include: A) Acts that Allah commands, such as: loving what Allah loves, hating what He hates, trust in Allah (*tawakkul*), fear of Allah, and hope (for His reward). B) Acts that Allah proscribes, such as: arrogance, showing-off (*riyaa*), vain pride (*kibr*), envy, heedlessness, hypocrisy, despairing of Allah’s mercy, feeling secure about Allah’s Wrath, taking delight in the misfortunes of Muslims, and loving to see disgrace spread among Muslims.

Second, acts by limbs (external acts). These include: Utterances: whether prescribed, such as: pronouncing the two *shahadas*, seeking Allah’s forgiveness (*istighfar*), reciting Qur’an, performing post salah-prayer *athkaar* (the practice of remembering or invoking Allah), commanding good, forbidding evil, truthfulness; or prohibited, such as: ridiculing Islam, talking about matters that one has no knowledge of, perjuring oneself, slandering, cussing, name-calling, lying, etc.

Eating: whether permissible, such as: eating food on which man’s life depends; taking life-saving medicine; or impermissible, such as: imbibing intoxicants or lethal poisons, eating things whose legal status is not clear, overeating, etc.

Listening: whether prescribed, such as: listening to Allah’s injunctions (His prescriptions and proscriptions); listening to the Imam’s audible recitation of the Qur’an in salah-prayer; listen-

ing to sermons (*khutbah*) on Friday salah-prayer, etc; or proscribed, such as: listening to talk of disbelief or speech that ridicules Allah’s religion, eavesdropping, listening to unlawful songs and music, etc.

Looking: whether lawful, such as: looking at Allah’s signs in His creation, looking into the *mu-shaf* and other beneficial religious literature, etc; or unlawful, such as: invading other people’s privacy, ogling *ajnabiyyat* women (women who do not belong in the category of female relatives to whom marriage is permanently prohibited), etc.

Smelling: whether permissible, such as: smelling a thing to determine whether it is lawful or unlawful, etc; or impermissible, such as: smelling or wearing perfume while in state of ihram, smelling stolen or usurped items, and smelling perfumes worn by *ajnabiyyat* women, etc.

Touching: whether prescribed, such as: shaking hands with fellow Muslims and touching one’s spouse; or proscribed, such as: touching *ajnabiyyat* women.

Acts of hands and legs: whether lawful, such as: working to earn a living for oneself and dependents; performing the acts of hajj; frequenting mosques and participating in religious congregations; attending religious study circles; visiting one’s kith and kin, etc; or proscribed, such as: committing murder, pillaging other people’s properties, causing bodily harm to others; writing falsehoods, injustice and slander, etc.

In short, *ibadah* in its entirety should be directed to Allah alone. And *isti’annah*—with regard to matters that only Allah can do—is a form of *ibadah*; hence it should be offered exclusively to Allah alone. *Isti’annah* is also recognition on the part of the slave of his or her helplessness and limitations, compared to the absolute power and might of Allah. Therefore, true believers credit Allah with their success in carrying out the obligation of *ibadah*. Allah says about the believers when they enter Paradise on the Day of Judgment: “*And they shall say: ‘Praise be to Allah, Who has guided us to this (felicity); never could we have found guidance, had it not been for the guidance of Allah.’*” [Al-A’raaf: 43] Allah also said about a certain people who reckoned their

conversion to Islam as a favor to Prophet Muhammad: “*They impress on you as a favor that they have embraced Islam. Say, ‘Count not your Islam as a favor upon me. Nay, Allah has conferred a favor upon you that He has guided you to the faith, if you be true and sincere.’*” [Al-Hujuraat: 17]

Ibadah: A sign of sincere love

Observing *ibadah* is indicative of the slave’s sincere love of Allah. And no form of *ibadah* will pass muster with Allah unless it is done according to the guidance of Prophet Muhammad. Allah says: “*Say: ‘If you do love Allah, Follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins.’*” [Al-Imraan: 31]

Ibadah is two types: Ibadah of choice and Ibadah of necessity

The *ibadah* that the slave offers in praise of Allah is an *ibadah* of choice (*ikhtiyar*), is associated with the concept of *uluhiyyah* and is rewarded by Allah. Allah says: “*The (faithful) slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth modestly, and when the foolish ones address them answer: Peace.*” [Al-Furqaan: 63] *And: ‘Is not Allah enough for his Servant?’* [Az-Zumar: 36] Also Allah, addressing Satan, says: “*For over My servants no authority shall you have.*” [Al-Hijr 42; Al-Israa’ 65]

On the other hand, there is an *ibadah* of necessity (*idh-tirar*), which applies to the entire creation of Allah—even disbelievers come under its sway. This form of *ibadah* relates to the concept of *rububiyyah* and it signifies Allah’s absolute dominion over his creation. Referring to this form of compulsory submission, Allah says: “*Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant.*” [Maryam: 93] Allah also says in this regard: “*They say: ‘Allah has begotten a son’: Glory be to Him. -Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him.*” [Baqarah: 116]

Function of ibadah

Ibadah is the noblest function of the loci of obligation (*mukallafin*), from humans and jinn. To show the lofty status of *ibadah*, Allah calls the best of His creation—Prophet Muhammad—an *abd* (slave) of Allah; Allah says: “*Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion, i.e., the Qur’an, to*

His servant, that it may be an admonition to all creatures.” [Al-Furqaan: 1] Allah also says: “And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, i.e., Muhammad, then produce a surah like thereunto.” [Baqarah: 23] And, speaking about His angels, Allah says: “And they say: ‘(Allah) Most Gracious has begotten offspring.’ Glory to Him! they are, i.e., the angels, (but) servants raised to honor. They speak not before He speaks, and they act (in all things) by His Command.” [Al-Anbyaa: 26-27]

The reasons why *ibadah* is the noblest function of *mukallafin*

Allah states in the Qur’an that He created jinn and humans for the sole purpose of tendering *ibadah* unto Him. Allah says: “*I have only created Jinn and men that they may serve Me;*” [Ath-Thaariaat: 56] meaning, I created jinn and humans in order that I command them to worship Me and not because I need them. In fact, by observing *ibadah*, humans’ and jinn’s are doing themselves a big favor, as Allah says: “*If you do well, you do well for your own selves.*” [Al-Israa’: 07] Allah also says: “*And those who do righteous deeds are providing for themselves (in heaven).*” [Ar-Rum: 44]

The opposite of *ibadah* is arrogance and taking (for worship) others besides Allah (*shirk*). And

whoever commits these two grave sins subjects himself to divine punishment and wrath, and forfeits, on account of their disregard for the reason of their existence (*ibadah*), the opportunity to attain honor and perfection, in this life and in the one to come.

The second part of verse two: “وإياك نستعين”

The meaning of *isti’annah* (seeking help)—among Allah’s creation, and between Allah and His creation

Isti’annah (Arabic verbal noun form of the verb *nast’in*) among Allah’s creation refers to the act of seeking the help and support of others to perform a task that will, otherwise, be beyond the seeker(s) power. *Isti’annah* in the context of surah Al-Fatihah, however, refers to *isti’annah* between the Creator (Allah) and His creation. For it is not in the power of Allah’s slave to attain what he wants without Allah’s aid. In fact, the will of Allah’s slave is subordinate to that of Allah. Moreover, the will of the slave is ineffective unless it is seconded by the Will of Allah. The Will of Allah is, therefore, the overarching, dominant one, as Allah says: “*Whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord. Yet you will not, unless Allah wills. Lo! Allah is Knower, Wise.*” [Al-Insan: 29-30] Allah also says: “*This is naught else than a reminder; (With profit) unto whomsoever of you wills to go straight; and yet you will not (go straight), unless (it be) that Allah, the Lord of the worlds, wills.*” [At-Takwir: 29] Nevertheless, the agreement between the Will of Allah and that of His slave doesn’t necessarily mean that Allah is pleased with the slave’s

¹⁴A Muslim must concede that the Will of Allah (*mashia’tullah*), which overarches the actions of His slaves, belongs in the province of the Unseen (*al-ghayb*). Moreover, one is not able to know the Will of Allah concerning a certain act until after the occurrence of the act. Hence, the Will of Allah couldn’t be adduced to justify disobedience and sins, because all the acts of the slave are of his or her own choosing. A Muslim should also know that the Will of Allah is of two types: 1) an overarching creative Will (*iraadah kawniyyah*) that governs and reigns supreme over each and every occurrence in the universe, whether good or evil; and 2) a prescriptive, legislative Will (*iraadah shar’iyyah*) which is communicated by Allah’s Messengers and comprises Allah’s do’s and don’ts to the legally responsible ones among His slaves (*mukallafin*).

doing, for Allah is pleased with lawful acts only, as indicated by His saying: “If you are ungrateful, then surely Allah is Self-sufficient above all need of you; and He does not like ungratefulness in His servants; and if you are grateful, He likes it in you.” [Az-Zumar: 07] ¹⁴

Now, legitimate *isti’ناه* comprises all legitimate pursuits of the slave, be they spiritual or material; for, as we mentioned in the foregoing, the concept of *ibadah* in Islam is wide-ranging. The Prophet said in a well known hadith to his cousin Ibn-Abbas, “... And if you seek help, seek help from Allah.” (Reported by Ahmed) The Prophet also said to the Companion Mu’aath ibn Jabal, “O Mu’aath, by Allah I do love you! And I would like to advise you not to forget to say at the end of every salah-prayer: ‘Oh Allah, help me remember You, thank You, and worship You the way You should be worshipped.’” (Reported by Ahmed & Ibn Hibban)

The benefits inherent in the verse: “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ، وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ”

-The expression: “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” signifies *tawhid* and renunciation of *shirk* and *ryaa*; for the reciter of this verse declares that his *ibadah* and devotion is reserved exclusively for Allah. Whereas the clause:

“وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” is an acknowledgment on the part of the slave that he is ever in need of Allah’s aid; it is also an expression of the slave’s admission of his weakness, and his recognition of the Power of his Creator, for no one is able to properly serve Allah without the latter’s aid and succor. So, “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” is an antidote for showing-off (*ryaa*), whereas “وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ” is a remedy for arrogance (*kibr*). Moreover, “إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ” is associated with *tawhid al-uluhiyyah* (Oneness and uniqueness of divinity), whereas “وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ”, pertains to *tawhid*

□ *Al-Jabriyyah* (proponents of Divine Pre-determination or *qadar*) is an epithet given to the followers of a Muslim sect who claim that believing or disbelieving is absolutely beyond the power of *mukallafin*, for Allah is the One who gives us faith and who makes us perform acts of worship. Every action, according to them, is done under Allah’s compulsion. Man is doomed to his *qadar*, hence no one is responsible for the sins he or she commits. — *Translator*.

ar-rububiyah (Allah’s Lordship over the worlds) which signifies Allah’s absolute Dominion and Power over the worlds, as well as indicates the incapacity of His creation to do what they want absence their Creator’s decree, Allah says: “*You will not (go straight), unless (it be) that Allah, the Lord of the worlds, wills.*” [At-Takwir: 29]

- The verse contains a rebuttal of the claims of the Muslim sects of *Al-Jabriyyah* and *Al-Qadariyyah*. The phrase: “**نَعْبُدُ**” refutes the claim of the *Jabriyyah* that Allah’s slaves have neither will nor ability to act. The verse affirms that the slave is the agent of *ibadah*, for he does it by his own will. On the other hand, the phrase “**نَسْتَعِينُ**” is a refutation of the claim of the Muslim sect of *Qadariyyah* that the slave is the creator of his own acts, and that the Will of Allah has nothing to do with the slaves’ doings. As the verse shows, *isti’annah* is indicative of the fact that the will of the slave is contingent upon that of Allah, for the slave is only able to achieve *ibadah* thanks to Allah’s infinite mercy and grace.
- With regard to *ibadah* and *isti’annah*, people fall into four categories.
 - First:** the true slaves of Allah, i.e., those who combine *ibadah* and *isti’annah* in a balanced way—they do not over-focus on one at the expense of the other.
 - Second:** those who focus on *ibadah* but are deficient in *isti’annah* and *tawakkul* (trust in Allah). The ones in this category tend to be impatient and fretful when afflictions befall them; are quick to despair over opportunities that pass them; are ignorant of much of Allah’s Wisdom and Decrees; and are predisposed to count too much on Allah’s creation.
 - Third:** those who focus on *isti’annah* and *tawakkul* at the expense of *ibadah*; they focus more on Allah’s *qadaa’* and *qadar* (Divine Judgment and Predestination) and less on His sacred law (*Shari’ah*).
 - Fourth:** those who are deficient in both *ibadah* and *isti’annah*; i.e., they worship and seek the help of entities other than Allah; and, with regard to matters of worldly life, they count wholly on natural causes and disregard Allah’s hand in these causes

(Allah).

Why has *ibadah* been mentioned before *isti'anah* in surah Al-Fatihah

Scholars differ as to the reason why Allah mentions *ibadah* before *isti'anah* in surah Al-Fatihah. Some say that because Al-Fatihah is divided into two parts featuring the rights of Allah and those of His slaves, *ibadah* is mentioned first to go with Allah's part of the surah (His Attributes) which is referred to in the first verses of the surah; whereas *isti'anah* was mentioned later in the surah to suit the part of the slave (his or her duaa-prayers) which is referred to in the latter verses of the surah. Other scholars hold that *ibadah* has a better claim to advancement because it is an end while *isti'anah* is a means. Yet a third scholarly viewpoint holds that *ibadah* was mentioned first because it is more relevant to the Day of Judgment and Divine requital which are mentioned in the first verses of Al-Fatihah; whereas *isti'anah* is more pertinent to the slave's

□□ *Al-Qadariyyah* (proponents of unconditional self-determination) is a name given to the followers of the Muslim sect who disbelieve in *qadar*. They maintain that Allah does not interfere in our good or evil acts.—Translator.

duaa-prayer for Allah’s guidance (*hidayah*) which is stated later in the surah.

The Fifth Verse:

“إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ”

(Show us the straight path)

This verse features a clear duaa-prayer for a thing the slave of Allah needs most; that is: Divine guidance (*hidayah*). Moreover, the slave makes this petition for *hidayah* with humility, and with an admission of his helplessness, as Allah commands: “*Call on your Lord with humility and in private; for Allah loves not those who trespass Allah’s limits.*” [Al-A’raaf: 55]

***Hidayah*: What does it Mean?**

Linguistically, *hidayah* is the opposite of *dhalal* (deviation or straying from the right course). In other word, *hidayah* denotes the act of showing the proper way, gently and benevolently, by leading, directing or advising.

Legally, the term *hidayah* signifies two main types of guidance:

1. Communicating Allah’s Message and pointing out the right path to Him, regardless of whether the targeted audience heeds or ignores this guidance (*hidayah* of *dalalah*) i.e. guidance through instructions.

This *hidayah* is bestowed by Allah on His creation. Allah says: “*As to the Thamud, We gave them Guidance, but they preferred blindness (of heart) to Guidance.*” [Fussilat: 17] It is also given by Allah’s Messengers; Allah says about Prophet Muhammad: “*And verily you do guide (men) to the Straight Way.*” [Ash-Shuraa’: 52] Righteous People (*as-saalihin*) also provide *hidayah* of *dalalah*. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said to the Companion Ali ibn Abi Talib: “If Allah guides even one person through you, that is

better for you than possessing a whole lot of the best breed of camels.” (Reported by Bukhari) The Qur’an is also a source of *hidayah* of *dalalah*; Allah says: “*And We have sent down to you the Book, i.e., the Qur’an, explaining all things, a Guide, a Mercy, and Glad Tidings to Muslims.*” [An-Nahl-89]

Moreover, observing and contemplating the signs of Allah in the material universe, as well as looking into one’s own soul, is another font of *hidayah* of *dalalah*; Allah says: “*Soon will We show them our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth.*” [Fussilat: 53] In fact, even inanimate objects such as books, movies or tape recordings can serve as sources of this kind of *hidayah*.

2. Accepting the Truth through Allah’s aid (*hidayah* of *tawfiq*). This type of *hidayah* refers to Allah’s opening of the heart of the slave such that it warms up to, and accepts, the Truth; Allah says: “*For Allah leaves to stray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills;*” [Faatir:08] and says: “*Those whom Allah (in His plan) wills to guide, - He opens their breast to Islam; those whom He wills to leave straying, - He makes their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies; thus does Allah heap the penalty on those who refuse to believe.*” [Al-An’aam: 125]

This *hidayah* belongs exclusively to Allah; Allah says: “*It is not required of you (O Muhammad) to set them on the right path, but Allah sets on the right path whom He pleases;*” [Al-Baqarah: 272] and: “*Lo! you (O Muhammad) sets not whom you love on the right path, but Allah sets whom He wills in the right path.*” [Al-Qasas: 56]

Furthermore, it is on this *hidayah* of *tawfiq* the slave’s entitlement to Allah’s reward depends. Also, Allah’s creation has no say in *hidayah* of *tawfiq*; rather, Like Allah’s Messengers, they are only required to do their best in communicating, as clearly as possible, the Word of Allah, as Allah says: “*Are the Messengers of Allah charged with aught*

save plain conveyance (of the message)?” [An-Nahl: 35]

Spurning the Truth after one is fully acquainted with it is one of the causes of deprivation of the *hidayah* of *tawfiq*; Allah says: “*We (too) shall turn to (confusion) their hearts and their eyes, even as they refused to believe in this in the first instance; We shall leave them in their trespasses, to wander in distraction;*” [Al-An’eam: 110] and says: “*Then when they went wrong, Allah let their hearts go wrong; for Allah guides not those who are rebellious transgressors;*” [As-Saf: 05] and says: “*Truly, Allah leaves, to stray, whom He will; but He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence.*” [Ar-Ra’d: 27]

It is safe to say that *hidayah* of *tawfiq* is the exclusive reserve of Allah—with regard to both religio-legal matters (*Shari’ah*) and worldly affairs. For instance, one could call on certain people to pay *zakah* (poor dues), explaining that doing so will gain them both spiritual and material blessings. The reaction of the audience to this call, however, might vary—with some accepting and others rejecting. On the other hand, one might advise a car driver to shun speeding, explaining the harms such reckless behavior is capable of heaping on him and on others, and enumerating the rewards of wise, cautious driving; however, the driver might still turn a deaf ear to the advice and insist on speeding. Those two examples, then, show that it is Allah alone who switches hearts as He pleases—out of divine mercy or according to Divine Plan and Justice, as Allah says: “*Say: ‘With Allah is the argument that reaches home; if it had been His will, He could indeed have guided you all.’*” [Al-An’eam:

149]

This sway that Allah holds over His slave’s heart was firmly held by our Prophet Muhammad; it is reported that the *duaa*-prayer the Prophet made the most was: “O Controller of the hearts! Make my heart steadfast upon Your religion.” (Reported

by Ahmed & Tirmithi) In another hadith, caliph Omar ibnul Khattabb narrated that the oath formula the Prophet used the most was: “By the Controller, or by the Director, of the hearts.” (Reported by Bukhari & Nasaa’i)

Finally, the *hidayah* of *dalalah* is a prerequisite for, but does not necessitate the occurrence of, the *hidayah* of *tawfiq*; meaning, if one gets the *hidayah* of *dalalah* but has not attained the *hidayah* of *tawfiq*, one cannot be said to have attained the *hidayah* that renders him or her eligible Allah’s reward and pleasure. In other word,

winning Allah’s reward and good pleasure is contingent upon achieving both *hidayah* of *dalalah* and *hidayah* of *tawfiq*.

The Meaning of *Hidayah* in the Context of Surah Al-Fatihah

As I said in the foregoing, the reciter of surah Al-Fatihah supplicates Allah for both types of *hidayah*:

- 1- A *hidayah* that signifies acquaintance with, and reception of, Allah’s Message (*hidayah* of *dalaalah*). This type of *hydaayah* signifies beneficial knowledge that conforms with, and leads to, the Truth (*Al-haqq*). One delicate example of this *hidayah* is to arrive at the Truth in controversial legal matters. For it is established through an authentic hadith that when an authority in religio-legal matters (*faqih mujtahid*) practices independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), he or she gets a reward for his or her *ijtihad*, regardless whether he or she arrives at the correct conclusion. However, if one’s *ijtihad* yields correct conclusions, one will get double rewards. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad used to recite the following dua-prayer after making *takbir* and before starting recitation of surah Al-Fatihah (*duaaul-istiftaah*) in his voluntary night salah-prayers (*salatullyl*): “O Allah, the Lord of Jibreel, Mikaa’il and Israa’fil (notable angels); Creator of heavens and earth; Knower of all things, seen and unseen; Decider of differences among your slaves, guide me to the Truth in

contentious matters, for You guide whomsoever You please to a straight path.”
(Reported by Muslim)

2- *Hidayah* of *tawfiq*. This denotes heartfelt opening and submission to, and acceptance of, the Truth. The slave petitions his Lord for this type of *hidayah*. Allah says: “*But Allah has endeared the Faith to you, and has made it beautiful in your hearts, and He has made hateful to you unbelief, wickedness, and rebellion; such indeed are those who walk in righteousness; a Grace and Favor from Allah; and Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom.*”

[Al-Hujuraat: 07-08] *Allah Also quotes the believers’ saying on the Day of Judgment: “And they (the believers) shall say: “Praise be to Allah, who has guided us to this (felicity); never could we have found guidance, had it not been for the guidance of Allah.”* [Al-A’raaf: 43]

A proof that the *hidayah* referred to in surah Al-Fatihah is of a general nature is the fact that Allah says: “إهدنا الصراط المستقيم” (*show us the straight path*), instead of saying: إهدنا إلى الصراط المستقيم (*lead us to the straight path*).

The Meaning of الصراط المستقيم (the Straight Path)

Linguistically, the term *siraat* means a clear, broad path; whereas the word *mustaqim* means leading straightforwardly to the intended point. So, literally, *as-siraat al-mustaqim* means the shortest course between two points.

In the context of surah Al-Fatihah, الصراط المستقيم “*as-siraat al-mustaqim*” involves knowing the Truth and acting upon it, for this is the only sure way to achieving Allah’s good Pleasure and Reward.

Scholarly Opinions as to the Meaning of الصراط المستقيم

Some scholars hold that as-siraat al-mustaqim stands for Islam. They cite in support of this interpretation the verse: “*Those whom Allah (in His plan) wills to guide, - He opens their breast to Islam... This is the way of your Lord, leading straight.*” [Al-An’aaam: 125-126] They also adduce the Prophet’s saying: “Allah gives the similitude of a straight path (*siraat mustaqim*) that is surrounded by two walls that are fitted with gates. A sentry at the gate of the straight path addresses the people saying: “*O people enter all of you into the siraat and don’t deviate from it.*” Another guard, lodged above the *siraat*, urges those who approach the other gates not to open them, warning if they do they will get sucked in.” Then the Prophet added, “The *siraat* symbolizes Islam; the two walls stand for Allah’s limits; the gates (other than the one on the *siraat*) represent Allah’s prohibitions; the sentry at the gate of the *siraat* signifies the Book of Allah; and the sentry above the *siraat* stands for God-given sense of right and wrong planted in the heart of every Muslim.” (Reported by Ahmed & Tirmithi)

Other scholars opine that as-siraat al-mustaqim stands for acting on the teachings of the Qur’an. To back their opinion, those scholars cited the verse: “*O people of the Book! There has come to you our Messenger, revealing to you much that you used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary). There has come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book, - Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light, - guides them to a path that is straight.*” [Al-Maedah: 15-16]

Yet some say that as-siraat al-mustaqim denotes singling out Allah for ibadah, as Allah says: “*And that you should serve Me; this is the Straight Way?*” [Yaasin: 61]

Also, *as-siraat almustaqim* is held by some to mean emulating the example of Prophet Muhammad, as Allah says: “*And verily you do guide (men) to the Straight Way. The Way of Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allah.*” [Ash-Shuraa: 52-53]

Now, all the above-listed variant interpretations of the term: *as-siraat al-mustaqim* come down to one comprehensive meaning that accommodates them all; that is, the realization of the meaning of the two testimonies of faith (*ash-shahaadatyn*); i.e., to worship none but Allah, and to limit obedience to Prophet Muhammad. For all Divine Scriptures command their followers to maintain *tawhid* and to follow the example of Allah’s Messengers; in other word, to stick to *as-siraat al-mustaqim*, and to be mindful of the fact that Satan is bent on hindering them from it, as Allah says: “*He (the Satan) said: ‘Now, because You have sent me astray, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them (Your slaves) on Your Right Path;’*” [Al-A’raaf: 16] and says: “*Did I not enjoin on you, O you Children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an enemy avowed? And that you should worship Me, (for that) this was the Straight Way?*” [Yaasin: 60-61]

The Differences between الصراط المستقيم and Crooked Paths

There are several intrinsic differences between the two paths. The crooked way is long, perilous and fraught with hardships, whereas the straight one is short, clear and safe. Moreover, some crooked ways do not take to Allah at all. For, as numerous proofs from the Qur’an and the Sunnah show, hypocrites, idolaters, disbelievers and People of the Book, who reject Islam after they become acquainted with it, are destined to end up in Hellfire. Also, rebellious transgressors from among the Muslims (*al-fasiqin*), though they maintain *tawhid*, are travelling a crooked way, and their fate on the Day of Judgment rests with Allah—He will punish them if He so wills, or, if He wills, pardon them.

Now, some might ask: why should a believing, practicing Muslim plead for divine guidance to

the Straight Path?

The answer to this question is multisided:

First: complete guidance to the Straight Path is not achieved by carrying out a single or a one-time righteous act. Rather, the slave attains guidance to, and perseverance in, *as-siraat al-mustaqim* by “*executing Allah’s commands in their appointed times; and by desisting from Allah’s prohibitions; and by harboring a firm resolve to act upon Allah’s commands and abstain from His proscriptions. Now, these detailed knowledge and will do not lend themselves to the slave in one time, rather, the slave is ever needful of Allah’s endowing of his heart with a kind of knowledge and will that will carry him through the Straight Path.*”—Majmu’ Fataawi ibn Taimiyyah, 14/37-38.

Some Muslims, for instance, perform a hundred righteous deeds per day; some beat that number or fall short of it. So, when practicing Muslims supplicate for *hidayah* they are, in fact, seeking to refine and fortify the *hidayah* they already have—to attain the uppermost level of it. Moreover, the worth of a righteous act may vary significantly from one person to another. For instance, two persons may stand next to each other behind the same Imam in salah-prayer, however, the gap between their performances and rewards could be as yawning as the one between heavens and earth. This disparity in performance of salah-prayer also applies to people’s performances with regard to *tawakkul*, charity (*sadaqah*), fasting, Hajj, call to the way of Allah (*da’wah*), enjoining good and forbidding evil, excellence of character and manners, etc.

Second: *hidayah* is not one-leveled; rather, it is multi-leveled, and only those who achieve perfection in taqwa (bewareing Allah) are entitled to the uppermost level of *hidayah*; Allah says: “*Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you,*” [Al-Hujuraat: 13] and says: “*And Allah does advance in guidance those who seek guidance,*” [Maryam: 76] and says: “*But to those who receive Guidance, He increases the (light of) Guidance, and bestows on them their Piety and Restraint (from evil).*” [Muhammad: 17] Allah also addresses Prophet Muhammad thus:

“That Allah may forgive you your faults of the past and those to follow; fulfill His favor to you; and guide you on the Straight Way;” [Al-Fath: 02] meaning, increase you in hidayah.

Moreover, religion of Islam itself has three levels; these are: Islam (first level), *Emaan* or belief (second level), and *Ihsaan* or excellence (third and last level).

There is also the foremost rank of Prophethood (*nubuwwah*), followed by the rank of *siddiqiyyah* (being a person of truth), followed by the rank of martyrdom (*shahaadah*), followed by the rank of righteousness (*selaah*). And each one of these ranks has different levels.

Third: Supplicating Allah for steadfastness and perseverance in *hidayah* is a life-long practice; Allah says: “Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave, to stray, those who do wrong. Allah does what He wills.” [Ibrahim: 27] Allah also shows us in the Qur’an how the ones who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*ar-raasikhun fi-l’ilm*) supplicate: “Our Lord!” (they say), “Let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us.” [Al-Imraan: 08]

Prophet Muhammad, the best of *ar-raasikhun fi-l’ilm*, used to supplicate for steadfastness in religion saying: “O Controller of the hearts! Make my heart steadfast upon Your religion.” (Reported by Ahmed & Tirmithi) It is instructive that Prophet Muhammad—the Messenger of Allah, the best of the children of Adam, and the one to whom Allah promised Paradise—is asking, in this hadith, for *hidayah* and steadfastness in religion, and admitting that he does not possess *hidayah* and that *hidayah* belongs to Allah alone.

Types of *hidayah*, detailed

- 1- Matters which one, unknowingly, goes about in a manner that is contrary to *hidayah*. One has to seek *hidayah* to the truth concerning these matters.
- 2- Matters which one intentionally handles in a way that contradicts *hidayah*. One must repent from such attitude.
- 3- Matters which one doesn’t know how to approach, both theoretically and practically, in a manner consistent with *hidayah*.
- 4- Matters which one takes on in a manner that blends *hidayah* and *dhalal* (misguidance). One needs to achieve full *hidayah* in dealing with these matters.

- 5- Matters about whose general aspects one attains *hidayah*, but misses *hidayah* as regards their details. One needs to achieve *hidayah* with regard to these details.
- 6- One may be granted *hidayah* to a certain path but still needs additional *hidayah* along this path; for *hidayah* to a certain path is one thing, and *hidayah* during one's travel along this same path is another. To grasp this point, consider the example of a person who knows the way that leads to a certain place but ignores the requirements of travelling along it. He or she needs *hidayah* as to how to proceed along this way: what is the ideal time to take it, how much food and water does one need to take with him or her, where to rest along the road, etc.
- 7- Future matters that one needs *hidayah* to deal with.
- 8- Matters toward which one possesses neither right nor wrong attitude. One needs *hidayah* to the right approach to them.
- 9- Matters that one believes he is handling in a way consistent with *hidayah*, but, in truth, he is handling them in a manner rooted in *dhalaal*. One needs to change this erroneous belief by way of *hidayah* from Allah.
- 10- Matters which one has approached in a way consistent with *hidayah* and he needs to provide others with this *hidayah* he has attained. For bestowing *hidayah* on others increases one's own store of *hidayah* and opens the doors before him to attain yet more of it. The Prophet is reported to have said, "O Allah, adorn us with Emaan; make us rightly guided and guiding (to good), neither misguided nor misguiding; make us friends of Your devoted servants, and [make us] adversaries of Your enemies, such that we love those who loves You and abhors whomsoever stands against You." (Reported by Tirmithi)

Supplicating Allah for *hidayah* requires two key things:

- Attainment of beneficial knowledge; applying oneself to the study of this knowledge; and acquiring more of it. Allah says: "Say, 'O my Lord! advance me in knowledge.'" [Taaha: 114]

- Translation of knowledge into acts and ways of behaving.

Why the dua-prayers featured in surah Al-Fatihah came in the first person plural form: نَعْبُدُ (we worship), نَسْتَعِينُ (we seek), and اِهْدِنَا (show us), though the surah may at times be recited by individuals?

The answer to this question comprises several points:

1. The reciter of the dua-prayers occurring in surah Al-Fatihah views himself as a member of a community of righteous slaves of Allah—a feeling that helps remove sentiments of vain pride and egotism.
2. The usage of the first personal plural form reflects the numerousness of Allah's slaves who supplicate their Lord for help and *hidayah*, which indicates Allah's

greatness and power. Moreover, most of the duaa-prayers featured in the Qur'an use the first person plural form, such as the duaa-prayer mentioned at the beginning and end of surah Al-Imraan, and the duaa-prayer mentioned at the conclusion of surah Al-Baqrah, etc.

3. In using the first person plural form, the slave includes his fellow believers in his duaa-prayers; thus emulating the example of Allah's Apostles such as prophet Noah whom Allah quotes in the Qur'an as supplicating: *"O my Lord! Forgive me, my parents, all who enter my house in Faith, and (all) believing men and believing women."* [Nooh: 28] Allah also quotes prophet Ibrahim duaa-prayer: *"O our Lord! cover (us) with You Forgiveness - me, my parents, and (all) Believers, on the Day*

that

the Reckoning will be established!" [Ibrahim: 41] Allah also addresses Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an thus: *"Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your fault and for {the faults of} believing men and women."* [Muhammad: 19]

4. The usage of the plural form in the duaa-prayers of surah Al-Fatihah shows the Muslim as a loving, loyal, caring member of a wider group whose interest he holds dear, and whom he includes in his or her duaa-prayers. Allah knows best.

The Sixth Verse:

“صراط الذين أنعمت عليهم”

(The path of those whom You have favored)

The duaa-prayers featured in surah Al-Fatihah do not end at the verse: *“إهدنا الصراط”* *المستقيم* rather, the rest of the surah is an elaboration on this supplication for *hi-dayah*. The subsequent verses of the surah expound the sough-after *as-siraat al-mustaqim* and describe the slave's aversion to, and fear of, the perilous crooked paths.

After describing the desired path “الصراط المستقيم” as broad, clear and straight, the slaves illustrate it yet further—describing the people who walk steadily and unswervingly along it. For this path is not untrodden; rather, it is a trodden one; and what is more, it is travelled by the best of Allah’s creation.

Yes! A vigilant supplicator who cares about his or her duaa-prayers sees to it that the objects of his or her duaa-prayers are clearly delineated and distinguished from other undesired objects; for, often, paths tend to get befuddled and mixed such that they bewilder travelers. Therefore the makers of the duaa-prayer for *hidayah* in surah Al-Fatihah define their demand strictly. They describe the path they covet as one travelled by people on whom Allah has bestowed His unique favor that entails wholesome life and perpetual success, not the general favor that doesn’t necessarily entail these prizes.

***Ni’mah* (favor): What does it mean?**

¹⁵ Abu Sa’id al-Khudri reported Allah’s Messenger as saying: “Ad-Dajjal would come forth and a man from amongst the believers would go to him. The armed men of Ad-Dajjal would ask him: “Where to?” He would say: “I intend to go to this one who is coming forth.” They would say to him: “Don’t you believe in our Lord?” He would say: “There is nothing hidden about our Lord.” Thereupon, they would say to one another: “Kill him! Kill him! Then some of them would say: “Has your master (Ad-Dajjal) not forbidden you to kill anyone without (his consent)?” And so they would take him to Ad-Dajjal. When the believer sees Ad-Dajjal, he would say: “O people, he is Ad-Dajjal about whom Allah’s Messenger has informed (us).” Ad-Dajjal would then order his men to smash the believer’s head saying: “Catch hold of him and smash his head.” So the believer would be struck on his back and on his stomach. Then Ad-Dajjal would ask him: “Don’t you believe in me?” The believer would answer: “You are the False Messiah (Masih).” He would then order him to be sawed from head to toe. After that Ad-Dajjal would walk between the two

Linguistically, *ni'mah* signifies wholesome, appropriate living conditions. And the guidance to *as-siraat al-mustaqim* is the greatest *ni'mah* that Allah ever endowed His slave with; for it combines wholesome life in this world and eternal bliss in the world to come.

Moreover, Allah grants the favor of *hidayah* to *as-siraat al-mustaqim* according to His Knowledge and Wisdom; thus the slave who supplicates for *hidayah* should neither be disheartened by the paucity of travelers along *as-siraat al-mustaqim*, nor awed by the abundance of those who stray from it; Allah says to Prophet Muhammad: “*Were you to follow the common run of those on earth, they will deflect you from Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture, and they do nothing but lie.*” [al-An’aaam: 116]

Who are the divinely favored ones?

Allah Has clarified in the Qur’an the categories of those whom He Has favored. Allah says: “*All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the company of those whom Allah Has favored, - of the prophets (who teach), the sincere (lovers of Truth), the witnesses (who testify), and the*

halves of the believer’s body. He would then address the mutilated body of the believer thus: “Get up!” and he would stand erect. Ad-Dajjal would then say to him: “Don’t you believe in me?” And the believer would reply: “It has only added to my insight concerning you (that you are really Ad-Dajjal).” The believer would then say: “O people, he would not behave with anyone of you (in such manner) after me.” Again Ad-Dajjal would try to slash the believer’s throat, but the believer’s neck would turn into copper and Ad-Dajjal would not be able to kill him. So Ad-Dajjal would catch the believer by his hands and feet and fling him away with the people thinking as if the believer had been thrown in Hellfire whereas he would land in Paradise. Thereupon Allah’s Messenger said: “He would be the most eminent martyr in the eye of the Lord of the worlds.” (Reported by Muslim)

Righteous (who do good). What a beautiful fellowship! Such is the favor from Allah. And sufficient is it that Allah knows all.” [An-Nisaa’: 69-70] According to this verse, the favored ones, i.e., the partisans of *as-siraat al-mustaqim* are those who obey Allah and Prophet Muhammad; in other word, all the legally responsible Muslims (*mukallafin*), from the beginning of man’s creation to the Day of Judgment, who profess the doctrine of *tawhid*.

The ranks of the rightly-guided ones (*al-muhtadun*)

The following is a list of those upon whom Allah has bestowed His special favor, organized in a descending order:

- 1- The Prophets of Allah, with Prophet Muhammad at the top
- 2- The lovers of Truth (*as-siddiqin*), with the Companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq in the lead
- 3- The martyrs (*ash-shuhadaa*): those are headed—according to an authentic hadith reported by Al-Hakim and At-Tabarani—by three figures: the Companion Hamzah ibn Abd al-Muttablib; a man who stands up against the excesses of an oppressive tyrant and pays with his life for that; and the man killed by the False Prophet (*Ad-Dajjaal*)¹⁵
- 4- The righteous people (*as-saalihin*): those are headed by the ones who would enter Paradise without going through the process of Divine Reckoning (*hisaab*). *As-saalihin* are the ones who embrace Islam and act upon its teachings. One’s righteousness, however, wanes proportionate to one’s failure to perform religious duties or one’s share of grave sins (*kebaa’ir*).

The connection between the allegorical *as-siraat al-mustaqim* in worldly life and the

eschatological *Siraat*-bridge laid over Hellfire

Adherence to the figurative *as-siraat al-mustaqim* in this worldly life will influence significantly one's passing over the literal *Siraat*-bridge that Allah would lay over Hellfire on the Day of Judgment and make each and every one pass over it. That *Siraat*-bridge is described by the Prophet as a bridge running across a "bottomless pit (in Hellfire) fitted with snares and hooks that look like the thorns of *As-Sa'daan* (a thorny plant that grows in the region of Najd)." (Reported by Bukhari) Also, the Companion Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri said, "I was told that the *Siraat*-bridge (over Hellfire) would be razor-sharp and thinner than a hair." (Reported by Muslim)

Imam ibn Rajab said, "*People's crossing over the Siraat-bridge is conditioned by the nature of their deeds in this worldly life. So whoever sticks, inside-out, to as-siraat al-mustaqim in this worldly life, his or her passing over the Siraat-bridge will be steady and secure. But whoever wavers and falters in his or her adherence to as-siraat al-mustaqim in this worldly life, his or her passing over the Siraat-bridge will be unsteady and insecure, as the Prophet stated in a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah, "... Those hooks will snatch people away according to their deeds.* (Reported by Muslim)" —*at-Takhwif min an-Naar*, p. 244

So, if you truly hope to enjoy a secure passing over the *Siraat*-bridge on the Day of Judgment, adhere to *as-siraat al-mustaqim* which Allah has outlined and commanded us to take in this worldly life; translate your profession of the Two Testimonies of Faith (*ash-shahaadatyn*) into sincere devotion to Allah and staunch emulation of the example of Prophet Muhammad; and conceive a genuine love for Allah's Prophets, *as-Siddiqin*, *ash-Shuhadaa'*, and *as-saalihin*. The Prophet is reported to have said, "You will be (i.e., on the Day of Judgment) with the ones you love." (Reported by Muslim)

The Seventh Verse:

“غير المغضوب عليهم، ولا الضالين”

(Not the path of those who earn Your wrath nor of those who go astray)

In this verse, the slave of Allah clarifies his duaa-prayer further by asking Allah to help him stay away from the path of those who were once guided to the Straight Path but betrayed it and failed to stick to it, thus ended up going astray and earning Allah’s wrath.

This duaa-prayer obliges the slave to be ever watchful of what he is doing, in order to be spared the sorry fate of the two parties mentioned in verse seven of surah Al-Fatihah: those who earn Allah’s wrath and those who go astray. Abu Said al-Khudri reported Allah’s Messenger as saying: “You will follow the ways of those nations who were before you so staunchly, that if they entered a burrow of a mastigure, you would follow suit.” The Companions enquired, “O Allah’s Messenger! Do you mean Jews and Christians?” He said, “Whom else (than those two religious groups)?” (Reported by Bukhari)

Examples of **المغضوب عليهم** (those who earn Allah’s wrath)

According to the Qur’an, some sections of the Jewish people in the time before and after the Messengership of prophet Eisaa (Jesus) incurred Allah’s wrath on account of their rejection of prophet Eisaa’s mission. Allah says: “Say: *‘Shall I point out to you something much worse than this, (as judged) by the treatment it received from Allah? those who incurred the curse of Allah and His wrath, those of whom some He transformed into apes and swine, those who worshipped evil;- these are (many times) worse in rank, and far more astray from the even path!’*” [Al-Maedah: 60] Allah also says about them: “*Miserable is the price for which they have sold their souls, in that they deny (the revelation) which Allah has sent down, in insolent envy that Allah of His Grace should send it to any of His servants He pleases. Thus have they drawn on themselves Wrath upon Wrath. And humiliating is the punishment of those who reject Faith.*” [Al-Baqarah: 90]

Commenting on the verse: “**غير المغضوب عليهم، ولا الضالين**”, the Prophet is reported to have said, “The Jews are *magdhubi aleyhim* (have incurred Allah’s wrath); the

Christians are dhallin (have gone astray).” (Reported by Ahmed and Tirmithi) Major Qur’an commentators were in a unanimous agreement on this Prophetic interpretation of the verse.

The phrase: “**ولا الضالين**” (Nor of those who go astray), it means: O Allah help us shun the ways of the dhallin who, mistakenly, miss the Straight Path and take wrong ways instead. The Christians of the period between the time of the true disciples of Eisaa (*hawari’in*) and the mission of Prophet Muhammad exemplify the people who stray from the Path of Allah. Speaking about the Christian doctrine of the trinity and the Christian belief in the divinity of Prophet Eisaa, Allah says: “*Say: ‘O people of the Book! exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, - who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even way.’*” [Al-Maedah: 77]

Types of attitudes that incur Allah’s wrath

One incurs divine wrath when one becomes thoroughly acquainted with the Truth but still rejects and denies it, out of vain pride, envy, or for fear that accepting the Truth might compromise ones social, financial or political standing. According to the Qur’an, the Jews at the time of Prophet Muhammad rejected the latter’s divine mission although they were wholly privy to his truthfulness. Allah says: “*And when there comes to them a Book from Allah, confirming what is with them, - although from of old they had prayed for victory against those without Faith, - when there comes to them that which they (should) have recognized, they refuse to believe in it but the curse of Allah is on those without Faith.*” [Al-Baqarah: 89]

Thus the Jews to whom this verse refers had perfect knowledge of Allah’s will but failed to turn this knowledge into obedience to Him and submission to His will.

Why has the Qur’an labeled the Christians before the time of Prophet Muhammad as dhallin (misguided)?

Some might get confused as regards the Qur'an's depiction of the followers of prophet Eisaa (Jesus) as *dhallin*, when in fact the same Qur'an tells that Jews have incurred Allah's wrath for refusing to follow prophet Eisaa!

To answer this question, and to clarify the *dhalal* (misguidedness) of the Christians to whom the verse refers, one could say that prophet Eisaa did attest the Torah (Prophet Moses' Law), as well as receive a heavenly book called *Al-Injeel* (the Gospel) which contained some relief from certain former legal restrictions as well as some new legislations, but still there remained significant amount of legal issues that Eisaa's followers were required to refer to the Torah. Quoting prophet Eisaa, Allah says: "*(I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (Before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me.*" [Al-Imraan: 50] Allah Also says: "*And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel; therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him; a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein.*" [Al-Maedah: 46-47]

* *Li'aan* (oath of condemnation/imprecation) refers to a situation where a person accuses his spouse of adultery (*zinaa*). If a person accuses his spouse of adultery, while there are no witnesses to the incident except the accuser, then the accuser would declare four times under oath that he is truthful in his accusation, followed by an invocation of Allah's wrath upon himself, if he were to lie. In response, the accused shall be considered as guilty unless she declares under oath that the accusation is false, followed by an invocation of Allah's wrath upon herself if he were to lie. If both the accuser and the accused were to make the stated declarations under oath, neither of them will be penalized nor be considered guilty of making false allegation. Though *Li'aan* does not result in any penal measures against any of the parties to it, it does, however, dissolve for good the marital bond between husband and wife.-Translator

Those Christians were misguided because of the following circumstances. When Allah sent Prophet Eisa to the Children of Israel, some of them accepted his call, whereas others did not; Allah says: *“Then a portion of the Children of Israel believed, and a portion disbelieved.”* [As-Saff: 14] The Christians retaliated by rejecting prophet Musa and his Law, as Allah tells us: *“The Jews say: ‘The Christians have naught (to stand) upon;’ and the Christians say: ‘The Jews have naught (To stand) upon.’ Yet they both (Profess to) study the (same) Book.”* [Al-Baqarah: 113]

However, when the Christians rejected the Torah in response to the Jews’ attitude towards prophet Eisa, they were left without a sacred law, for, as we said earlier, most of the divine laws that were meant to regulate Christians’ life were included in the torah. Consequently, motivated by a desire to fill this legal vacuum, the Christians started making up laws and inventing religious practices. Therefore, the Christians to whom this concluding verse of surah Al-Fatihah refers were deficient in revelatory knowledge (Ilm) though they were energetic and staunch in their adherence to, and observance of, the religious practices and rituals they invented, as Allah says: *“Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our messengers; We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy. But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them.”* [Al-Hadid: 27]

Are the labels: الضالين and المغضوب عليهم reserved exclusively for Jews and Christians?

The simple answer to this question is: no. For these two labels do apply to every person who emulates the examples of their original bearers; because Allah depicts rejecters of the Truth, irrespective of their religious backgrounds, as dhallin and magdhubi alayhim, as He says: *“Any one who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters Unbelief, - except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith - but such as open their breast to Unbelief, on them is Wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty.”* [An-Nahl: 106] In another verse, Allah says: *“Those*

*who reject Faith and keep off (men) from the way of Allah, have verily strayed far, far away from the Path.” [An-Nisaa’: 167] In fact, Allah reserves His wrath and severe punishment for any Muslim who deliberately murders a fellow Muslim: “If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hellfire, to abide therein (For ever); and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.” [An-Nisaa’: 93] Also, Allah’s wrath is promised for wives or husbands who lie in li’aan * (oath of condemnation/imprecation): “And the fifth (time) that the curse of Allah be on him if he is of those who lie;” [An-Nur: 07] and says: “And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of Allah on herself if (her husband) is telling the truth.” [An-Nur: 09]*

Sufyaan ibn Uyaynah, the renown Muslim scholar and sage, said, “[*Our righteous predecessors*] used to say: “Morally corrupt men of learning bear resemblance to Jews; while depraved men of prolific ibadah bear resemblance to Christians.” He then added: “Beware the seduction (*fitnah*) of depraved men of learning and ignorant men of prolific ibadah, for it is indeed a severe *fitnah*.”—*Al-fataawi al-Kubraa*, 2/142

The sought-after *hidayah*

We now know from the foregoing that the coveted *hidayah* mentioned in Allah’s saying: “*Ihdinaa*” (guide us) takes two forms:

First: acquisition of beneficial knowledge.

Second: acting upon one’s stock of beneficial knowledge.

Indeed, combining the above-mentioned two branches of *hidayah* is the attitude of Allah’s prophets, the *siddiqin*, the *shuhadaa’* and the *saalihin*, who turn beneficial knowledge they gain into righteous deeds. The Jews and Christians to whom the seventh verse of surah Al-Fatihah refers, however, dealt differently with these two branches, with the former focusing on knowledge and neglecting action, and the latter tilting towards action and forsaking knowledge.

Muslims are, therefore, required to seek beneficial knowledge strenuously and to act upon this knowledge, privately and publicly, any time, any place.

Some examples of Muslims' acts that resemble those of Jews and Christians

A significant number of Muslims know the incumbency of offering salah-prayers, yet they abandon them or take them lightly. Many know that changing words from their context is prohibited, yet they practice distortion and conceal the truth and employ artifices to avoid submission to the will of Allah. A great number of Muslims know that paying *zakah* is one of the five pillars of Islam, yet they deny the poor their due. A lot of Muslims know that severing bonds with blood relatives is impermissible, yet they do just that. Many allow that lying is *haram*, yet they lie with a clear conscience; and know that *riba* (usury), backbiting (*ghybah*), deceit, oppression are unlawful acts, yet they seek after these immoral ways without the least compunction. A great number of Muslims ask Allah repeatedly to protect them from the ways of Jews and Christians whom they describe in every *rak'ah* as *dhallin* and *magdhubi alayhim*, yet they take these same people for role models whom they venerate and whose appearances, behavior, and lifestyles they strive to emulate!

Many Muslims frequent graveyards, yet they are ignorant of the religious rulings regulating this practice. Many exceed, in their attitude towards Prophet Muhammad and towards Muslim saints, the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth and raising these modest slaves of Allah to the level of divinity.

Sadly, we are significantly heedless of, and oblivious to, the meanings and connotations of the great dua-prayers included in surah Al-Fatihah which we recite every time we stand in salah-

prayer, and whose repeated recitations resonate and echo and reecho in our mosques and salah-prayers halls. In every salah-prayer we offer, we call upon Allah to help us attain beneficial knowledge, yet we may not care to listen to the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet, or we might evince little interest in understanding the meanings of the speech of Allah or the words of Prophet Muhammad. We might not ponder over our own souls, the universe or the regions of our planet earth.

Indeed, supplicating Allah for guidance to the Straight Path is a thing the slave of Allah needs most; and it is fortunate that Allah, out of His mercy, has made the recitation of surah Al-Fatihah in each and every salah-prayer incumbent upon His slaves. In fact, Allah has made the recitation of Al-Fatihah a constituent component (rukn) of salah-prayers.

**Half of surah Al-Fatihah contains the Islamic doctrine of *walaa' and baraa'*
(Allegiance and Disavowal)**

If one is to ponder over the dua-prayers featured in the last half of surah Al-Fatihah, one will see that, on the one hand, these dua-prayers highlight love and loyalty to the believers, i.e., the people whom Allah has endowed with His special favor such as the prophets, the *siddiqin*, the *shuhadaa* and the *saalihin*. And on the other hand, these dua-prayers stress aversion to, and disownment of, disbelievers of all stripes. The dua-prayers of surah Al-Fatihah also affirm the believers' rejection of the enemies of the True Religion—a rejection that entails recognizing