

Allah's blessings are so abundant that it is difficult to show gratitude for them in any meaningful way. Life itself, good health, a roof over our heads, sufficient food in our possession to last a few days, the lists go on endlessly. But the greatest of all of these blessings by far, above and beyond any blessing you can enumerate or imagine, is the Book of Allah. It is for this reason Allah declares at the outset of Surah al-Kahf: *"Praise is due to Allah, for revealing unto His servant the Book, not placing therein any crookedness."*²

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا ﴾

Part of showing gratitude for this esteemed noble blessing is to read this Noble Book and attempt to understand and implement it to the best of our ability. The Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramadan, and specifically on the glorious Night of Power.

The Isti'adhah

When we open this Book, we find that it commands us to begin its reading in a particular way.

﴿ فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴾

*When you recite the Qur'an, seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Shaytan.*³

This supplication is called the isti'adhah and its formula is as follows:

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

Now what is the wisdom and significance of the isti'adhah?

The greatness and virtue of studying the Qur'an is unimaginable, as we saw in the beautiful Hadith Qudsi from yesterday's lesson. The Prophet also declared without reservation that the best people among the entire ummah are those who study and teach the Qur'an. Unfortunately, your enemy, Shaytān knows this fact all too well and will be doing his job to divert you. Hence the need for the isti'adhah.

Secondly, it is quite clear that in order to study and derive benefit from the Qur'an, one must rely on certain well-known means and tools, such as the Arabic language, proper works of tafsīr, knowledge of the life-history of the Holy Prophet, etc. The isti'adhah is an affirmation that the greatest tool and means of deriving benefit from the Noble Qur'an is supplicating the One who revealed it. This is an expression of our utter dependence on and complete need for Allah's mercy and support. Hence we should constantly supplicate Allah to help us in all our affairs, especially if it involves His Noble Book.

There is one such supplication related to the Qur'an, a beautiful Prophetic du'āh that shows us what our orientation should be towards the Qur'an:

² The Noble Qur'an. al-Kahf 18:1

³ The Noble Qur'an. al-Nahl 16:98

*'O Allaah, I am Your servant, son of Your servant, son of Your maidservant, my forelock is in Your hand, Your command over me is forever executed and Your decree over me is just. I ask You by every name belonging to You which You name Yourself with, or revealed in Your Book, or You taught to any of Your creation, or You have preserved in the knowledge of the unseen with You, that You make the Qur'aan the life of my heart and the light of my breast, and a departure for my sorrow and a release for my anxiety.*⁴

The Noble Qur'an should really be the springs of our hearts, the light of our chests and the eraser of our worries and concerns.

Today we live in an age of learning and study. Academic education is now considered a universal human right. While there is nothing wrong with that, the real crux of the matter is:

﴿ أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴾

*Read in the name of your Lord who created.*⁵

Real knowledge and learning is that which is connected to Allah. All other study is ignorance (jahālah). All other paths to learning lead to confusion. The Noble Qur'an is the only way out, the only way to a "Good Life" (Hayāt al-Tayyibah).

﴿ مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

*As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life, and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did.*⁶

The Basmalah

It appears from a study of the Qur'an, Sunnah and Islamic works that it has been a divinely ordained methodology to begin all matters with Allah's name. The Prophet Nuh rode his ark with Allah's name, "And he said: Embark therein! In the name of Allah be its course and its mooring. Lo! my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful."⁷ The Prophet Sulayman began his letter to the Queen of Sheba with Allah's name.⁸

Likewise, all chapters of the Qur'an begin with the basmalah, the debate over whether it is a part of the surahs or external to them aside. The only exception is Surah al-Tawbah, which does not begin with it due to two possible reasons: its stern content relating to themes of jihad and dealing with hypocrites, etc., or its continuity with the previous chapter al-Anfāl. This fact is proof of the meticulous preservation and transmission of the Qur'an by the Companions and successive generations, for had it been a careless matter or related to our logic, the chapter may have begun with it to preserve the "coherence" and continuity of the Qur'an.

⁴ Musnad Ahmad #3528, authenticated by al-Albānī.

⁵ The Noble Qur'an. al-'Alaq 96:1

⁶ The Noble Qur'an. al-Nahl 16:97

⁷ The Noble Qur'an. Hud 11:41

⁸ The Noble Qur'an. al-Naml 27:30

The scholars of the Shafi'i legal school and others recite the basmalah aloud before each surah, considering it a portion of the surah. Our Hanafi legal school considers the basmalah to be a continual verse of the Qur'an that should be recited at the beginning of recitation but is not necessarily the first verse of each surah.

Remember four key points relating to the basmalah:

1. We have been commanded to recite with the basmalah (Surah al-'Alaq 96:1), so we should do so before every recitation.
2. It is an Islamic custom and tradition to begin all tasks with Allah's name. This is supported by a Prophetic hadith that deems any deed not beginning with Allah's name as susceptible to failure.
3. The basmalah contains three of Allah's noble names and two of His key attributes (al-Rahmān and al-Rahīm), and so any deed beginning with it is truly blessed and worthy of Divine help. *Al-Rahmān* is the root of all Divine attributes, and the logical culmination of this attribute relating to the mercy of Allah, is the Noble Qur'an. As He says, *The Most Gracious is He who has taught the Qur'an.*⁹

﴿ الرَّحْمَنُ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ ۝ ﴾

4. If you make a habit of reciting the basmalah before each task, your sins will begin to diminish, for no person, however wretched, would dare to do evil deeds such as stealing with the recitation of Allah's name.

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⁹ The Noble Qur'an. al-Rahmān 55:1-2