

Day 3: The Foundation of the Qur'an

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We begin today an examination of al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Noble Qur'an. I wish to highlight for our purposes two statements from a well-known hadith relayed by Imam Tirmidhi and Imam al-Darimi among others.¹⁰

لَا يَخْلُقُ عَلَى كَثْرَةِ الرَّدِّ
Its repetition never tires

The Qur'an's living miracle is that you never tire of reading it, unlike any other book or work in the history of mankind. Just imagine that we have been reading al-Fatihah in every rak'ah of prayer for every day of our lives, but our minds never waiver, nor raise a red flag, nor suggest to us that we read something else in its place.

وَلَا تَنْفَضِي عَجَائِبُهُ
And its wonders never cease.

The wonders and meanings of the Qur'an truly never end. In every era, new aspects of the Quran will be revealed. Every time we go through it, we will learn new things.

Amidst the darkness and gloom of the aftermath of the death of Prophet, 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb became emotional and threatened violence. On this occasion, Abu Bakr ascended the mimbar and delivered an historic address that was a masterpiece of oratory. He proclaimed to the devastated masses, "Whoever worshipped Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad has died, but whoever worships Allah, know that Allah lives and never dies."

الْأَمَانِ كَانَ يَعْبُدُ مُحَمَّدًا فَإِنَّ مُحَمَّدًا قَدْ مَاتَ ، وَمَنْ كَانَ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ حَيٌّ لَا يَمُوتُ

Abu Bakr then proceeded to recite the verse, "Muhammad is no more than a messenger, and many messengers passed away before him. If he were to die or be killed, would you then turn your backs?"¹¹

﴿ وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ ﴾

Upon hearing this verse, 'Umar remarked that it was as if he was hearing this verse for the first time, as if it was being freshly revealed to him.

I personally can testify that I have been studying and teaching the Qur'an for a lifetime, but I continually come across new gems and realizations that never previously occurred to me.

¹⁰ Sunan al-Tirmidhi #2831 in the Chapter on Virtues of the Qur'ān, also found with variant wordings in Musnad Ahmad #666, al-Dārimī #3197, al-Baghawī in *Sharh al-Sunnah*. According to al-Albānī and Zubair 'Ali Za'i, the hadith is weak (see *Dhaeef al-Jāmi' al-Tirmidhi* and *Jami' at-Tirmidhi* Darussalam edition), and even al-Tirmidhi admits that in his text in a comment following the hadith. However, many scholars allow the use of such hadith in the realm of virtue and not in establishing rulings, particularly if there are supporting evidences in other narrations. This particular hadith is found with more than one chain and has been narrated by hadith scholars of the likes of Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyyah.

¹¹ The Noble Qur'an. Āl Imrān 3:144.

About al-Fatihah, the Holy Prophet said, “By the one in whose hand is my life, there is nothing like this surah in the previous scriptures nor in the Qur’an itself.”¹²

Once the Companion Abu Saeed ibn Mu‘alāh was praying in a corner of the masjid when the prophet called him. He delayed responding due to his prayer. When the Prophet asked the reason for his delay, he responded that he was praying. The Prophet reminded him, “Didn’t you read the verse, “O believers, respond to Allah and His messenger when they call you.”? He then took that Companion’s hand- and how fortunate was he- and said to him, “O Abu Sa‘eed, shall I tell you of the greatest surah of the Qur’an?” Abu Sa‘eed responded in the affirmative. But then they began talking about other matters on their way out of the masjid. Abu Sa‘eed then reminded him of his promise, upon which the Prophet replied, “That greatest surah is al-Fatiha, the Seven Oft-Repeated verses, and the Magnificent Qur’an which I have been given.”¹³

From this narration two other names for al-Fātihah are revealed: *Sab’un min al-Mathāni* (The Seven Oft-Repeated Verses) and *al-Qur’ān al-‘Adheem* (The Magnificent Qur’an). Other names for surah al-Fātihah include Umm al-Qur’ān, al-Wāfiyah, al-Qāfiyah and al-Shifā. The name al-Shifā derives from its power to heal human beings from their illnesses and ailments. Once, while returning from a battle, a group of Companions came across some commotion in a town. They discovered a man on the verge of death due to a scorpion bite. One of the Companions proceeded to recite al-Fātihah over him and cured him of his ailment.

One other description given by the Prophet in a Qudsi narration is *al-Kanzu min Kunuzi ‘arshī* (“a treasure from the treasures of my Throne”).¹⁴ May Allah give us the tawfeeq to recite it with understanding.

Surah al-Fātihah begins with the word *al-hamd* and ends with the word *dhālīn*. According to scholars of the Hanafi school, the basmalah is not a part of the surah, as it is not a part of any surah but a separate continual verse of the Qur’an. Incidentally, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi used to recite the basmalah before Surah al-Iklās alone among the surahs, in his khatm (complete recitation of the Qur’an in Taraweeh prayer), and I follow him in that practice.

Those scholars who hold the basmalah to be a part of the surah, and hence the first verse, consider the final and seventh verse to be the following:

﴿ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴾

Those who do not consider the basmalah as part of al-Fātiha break up the last verse into two verses, giving a total of seven verses.

The makeup of al-Fātihah is as follows: the first three verses mention Allah’s noble attributes, and the last three verses are a supplication for the straight path, to which the entire Qur’an is the response. The solitary middle verse between these- *You alone do we worship and You alone we seek assistance*- forms the backbone of the surah. In a Hadīth Qudsi, Allah says, “This verse is between me and my servant, and for him is whatever he asks.”¹⁵

¹² Tirmidhi #2800, Ahmad #8977, authenticated by Ibn Khuzaymah, Ibn Hibbān, al-Hākim and al-Dhahabi, and Zubayr Ali Za’i.

¹³ Saheeh Bukhari #4114, Nasā’i #904, Abu Daūd #1246, Ibn Majah #3775, Musnad Ahmad #15171, 17177, Al-Dārimī #1454, 3237. This hadīth is also narrated through a different chain from the Companion Ubayy b.Ka’b in Tirmidhi #2800, Ahmad #8977.

¹⁴ Narrated by Ali b. Hisām al-Dīn al-Muttaqi al-Hindi [died 975H] in *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*.

¹⁵ Muslim #597, Tirmidhi #2877, Ahmad #6990, al-Muwatta’ Malik #174.

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

All praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of All the Worlds

﴿

Al-hamd refers to praise that is coupled with gratitude. If we truly reflected on Allah's countless blessings, our hearts would submit in perpetual gratitude to Him.

﴿ قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَّعِينٍ ﴾

Say: If of a sudden all your water were to vanish underground, who could provide you with water again from unsullied springs. ¹⁶

Al-Fatiha is an expression of extreme gratitude and a supplication that concords with the fitrah or innate disposition of the human being, which naturally exhibits hamd, or gratitude. A human being in his natural unadulterated state exhibits gratitude to his Creator and Sustainer. For Allah's bounties and treasures are endless and never exhausted.

﴿ وَلَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَمٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةَ آخِرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴾

And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea ink, with seven more seas yet added to it, the words of Allah would not be exhausted. ¹⁷

Allah mentions that He is the Lord of the *worlds*, using the plural. How many worlds exist only Allah knows. We know of the worlds of humans, the jinn, the animals, the angels and many more. But there may very well be worlds we are not aware of. Narrations mention various numbers including 40,000 and 80,000. But many scholars maintain that is an unquantifiably large number. Allah himself says, "And He has created that of which you have no knowledge." ¹⁸

﴿ وَخَلَقُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

So all praise and gratitude is truly for Allah alone, as all bounties and beauties and blessings. The phrase *al-hamdu lillah* expresses the reality of tawheed.

Allah is the proper name of the Divine Being. Even the idol-worshippers from the Quraysh accepted this name, but worshipped other beings as intercessors and intermediaries.

﴿ قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَمَّنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَمَنْ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَمَنْ يُدْبِرُ الْأَمْرَ فَسَيَقُولُونَ اللَّهُ فَقُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ فَذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَاذَا بَعَدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ فَأَنَّى تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿١١﴾ ﴾

﴿ تَصْرَفُونَ ﴾

¹⁶ The Noble Qur'an. al-Mulk 67:30

¹⁷ The Noble Qur'an. Luqman 31:27

¹⁸ The Noble Qur'an. al-Nahl 16:8

Say: "Who is it that provides you with sustenance out of heaven and earth, or who is it that has full power over [your] hearing and sight? And who is it that brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive? And who is it that governs all that exists?" And they will [surely] answer: "[It is] God. Say, then: "Will you not, then, become [fully] conscious of Him- seeing that He is God, your Sustainer, the Ultimate Truth? For, after the truth [has been forsaken], what is there [left] but error? How, then, can you lose sight of the truth?"¹⁹

﴿وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لِيَقُولَنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفِكُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾﴾

If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, and made the sun and the moon subservient, they shall surely say, 'Allah.' How are they then deluded? Allah grants abundant sustenance or gives it in scant measure, to whichever He wills of His creation, for behold, Allah has full knowledge over everything.²⁰

One profound proof for Allah's existence and oneness is the existence of the poor and rich. Every one wants to be rich. But some struggle very hard and barely survive, while others are relatively comfortable despite their meager effort. No one can point to a guaranteed formula for success and wealth. This is proof that sustenance comes from and is determined by a higher source. As believers, we believe and affirm that sustenance is the exclusive domain of Allah, and only He determines its distribution.

Then Allah asks many more questions, to which the answer resoundly comes, 'Allah.' Allah is the name of that same being who has always been recognized by all human beings from the beginning of time, including the mushrikeen of the Quraysh.

¹⁹ The Noble Qur'an. Yunus 10: 31-32

²⁰ The Noble Qur'an. al-Ankabut 29: 61-62