

Day 5: The Backbone of al-Fatihah

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﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾

You alone do we worship, and from you alone do we seek assistance.

﴿

We saw that the first three verses of al-Fātihah dealt with the topics of Tawheed and Ākhirah, and now we turn to this verse, which forms the backbone of the sūrah. Half of this verse belongs to man and half to God. It is a covenant with Allah, which each of us must renew multiple times a day- for many of us, as many as forty or fifty times. If we truly understood its realities, our lives would be radically different.

Allah doesn't say "We worship you and seek your assistance" (*na'buduk wa nasta'eenuk*). Rather, by adding the word *iyāka*, the phrase is strengthened to mean: "We do not worship anyone save you and we do not ask of anyone save you." This verse cuts the very root of shirk.

Ibādah or worship linguistically is to humble oneself, consider oneself insignificant, fall at Allah's door in utter humility. The forehead is perhaps the noblest portion of the human body, yet we place it on the floor in the ultimate demonstration of servitude and humility to Allah.

But the one who prostrates to Allah in the masjid and follows yet others outside of the masjid is not a true believer. Because worship is not possible without obedience (*itā'ah*). So if Allah commands us to make two prostrations in one unit of prayer, we cannot make three. If He commands us to recite al-Fātiha in every unit, we cannot choose other verses in its place.

The world deals us difficult and easy days, days of coolness and heat. Prostrating in the masjid is very easy, but real obedience and worship in the real-world arena of life is a difficult thing indeed.

Another secret of this verse is that "we worship you alone but can never do so without your assistance." If you help us, O Allah, only then can we be true worshippers and remain firm in the trials of life.

Help and assistance does not preclude relying on worldly means and assisting one another. But it must be recognized that real help is from Allah in every case, for without His will, absolutely nothing can happen and no one can help one another. Without the tawfeeq of Allah you cannot step one foot into the masjid.

A famous scholar from our region, Maulana I'zāz Ali remarked once in a speech, "If Allah doesn't give you tawfeeq, you cannot do anything, not even two rakahs of prayer." He then mentioned the example of a man who sold miswaks (toothbrushes) at the Deccan (southern) door of the Delhi mosque for 40 years, but didn't have the tawfeeq to step foot into the masjid even once! So we should always remember to supplicate for Allah's help.

What necessitates this worship? The first three verses reveal that His blessings, bounties, Lordship, and attributes of mercy make his worship a right upon us.

His right upon us is that we worship Him, and then our claim upon Him is that He help us and grant us our needs. However, we don't demand His help but request it. It is not for the creation to demand anything of the

Creator. Rather, it is His mercy that benefits His creation. It is Allah's mercy that He acknowledges our meager efforts, though it doesn't deserve it.

Our minds comprehend the realities of the universe- Allah's Lordship and control over the universe, but stop short after that as to how we show gratitude and worship him. So we turn to Him to ask:

﴿ أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴾

Show us the straight path.

﴿

Allah took on the responsibility of showing us the guidance, through revelation and prophets and messengers. And the answer to this supplication comes in the immediate verses following this surah:

﴿ ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ ﴾

This is it. This is the Book.

The Noble Qur'an is the answer to this supplication. Our guidance and path to success lies in this Book alone.

﴿ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾

The path of those whom You favored.

﴿

We then ask to be guided to the path of those whom you have favored (with your deen, which is indeed the greatest favor of all). The Qur'an can never be understood without the guidance of human messengers and prophets. Which is why Allah sent them to every nation on earth. But we also know that these human messengers pass away after a fixed period of time, even the final Messenger of them all ﷺ.

﴿ وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ ﴾

And Muhammad is no more than a messenger, and many are the messengers that passed away before him.²⁸

The question is, what happens to this need for human guides after the deaths of these messengers? So long as we don't have human models before us, we can never fully comprehend the Qur'an. This is the reason we ask to be shown the straight path, and then describe it with its followers- those who incurred Allah's favors. Who are these people who incurred Allah's favors? Allah answers this in another verse:

²⁸ The Noble Qur'an, Āl-'Imrān 3:144.

﴿ وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴾

Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they are with those whom incurred Allah's favors from the prophets and the truthful ones and the martyrs and the righteous. And what a beautiful company that is.²⁹

Allah mentions the following four noble categories of people: the prophets of Allah, the truthful and sincere individuals (Siddiqin), the martyrs who bore witness to the truth (Shuhada') and the righteous individuals (Salihin). The amazing this is that Allah didn't tell us to follow the truth, but to be with those who follow the truth.

﴿ يَتَّيِبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴾

O you who believe, fear Allah and be with those who are truthful.³⁰

It is our pressing need to live in a collective way, under leadership, with those who follow the guidance. The last three verses of al-Fatihah consists of groups of people, and Allah further clarifies that this righteous company consists of four groups. In other word, there is no Islam, no guidance, no straight path, without these four noble groups.

Realize that one-half of al-Fatihah is about Tawheed and one-half about who to associate with!

﴿ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴾

Not the path of those who incurred Your wrath nor went astray.

﴿

Then we ask Allah to not show us the path of the opposite of the righteous people- those who incurred Allah's wrath and deviated from His way. The signs of the people who incurred Allah's wrath is as follows:

- They annoyed their prophets
- They focused on minor details while committing major sins
- They claimed exclusivity and special status

Today we Muslims are following these very characteristics that became the destruction of those who came before us.

Imagine a naked man standing before us with silk shoes, and we begin to argue about the permissibility of silk for him! It is the height of stupidity that roughly 15% of the ummah is coming to the mosques, according to some estimates, and this small percentage then wastes its time arguing with one another over trivial details while no one worries about bringing the other 85% to the masjid.

This alternate example is mentioned so we don't follow them. Every day we supplicate that Allah not make us like them.

²⁹ The Noble Qur'an, al-Nisa' 4:69.

³⁰ The Noble Qur'an, al-Tawbah 9:119.

Their other characteristic is that they went to extremes in their deviation, and subsequently deluded the masses of humanity.

﴿ وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا ۗ ﴾

*And many have they misled.*³¹

Some of them made prophets into God, and others ended up setting three gods altogether. This resulted from their love of the prophets coupled with exaggerations and going beyond the limits. Again, Muslims follow in their footsteps. In India, it is still sung today in milād gatherings: “Allah has nothing save oneness, and everything we want we will get from Muhammad!”

The stories of Muslim saints and sufi personalities are filled with exaggerations and deviations today. There is one such story of a follower of a guide who was told by his guide to make sure to continue feeding the people at their monastery in his absence. The guide returned after some years to find that follower emaciated, skin and bones. When asked what happened, the follower told his master, You told me to feed people, but you didn't tell me to eat. And so he refused to eat. That man became a legend and his story lives on.

The question is, where do these stories stand in relation to the lives of the greatest of men? In the Battle of the Trench, the Companions complained to the Prophet ﷺ of hunger and having to tie stones to their stomachs. The Prophet ﷺ lifted his shirt to reveal two stones! They were hungry due to real needs and due to their dedication to Allah's real work.

You can never leave the Qur'an and example of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions to follow anything or anyone else. All of the stories of sufi saints, if they clash with the Qur'an or the Sunnah, are worth nothing.

So we are saying this when we recite al-Fātiha: These are milestones of the path. We will stick to them and we will avoid the two evil groups.

Why do we need the company of the pious? Because the path is difficult, and we need mutual support, help and assistance. The believers should be like bricks, supporting one another, as the Prophet ﷺ instructed.

We should help one another and be united. We are all on the same ship, on the same journey. Make a team and embark on the road of worshipping Allah.

We ask Allah to make us recite this surah with this proper awareness. Imagine what kind of revolution and change would come about if that were so. We should also say *Ameen* at the end of the surah as an affirmation of the great supplication contained within it.

³¹ The Noble Qur'an, Nūh 71:24.