

Reflections on Surah al-Fatiha (part 1 of 3)

Description: An interpretation of the most oft-recited verses of the Holy Qur'an. Part 1: Translation of *Surah al-Fatiha* and the significance of the names given to it.

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Objectives

- To appreciate the significance of *Surah al-Fatiha* in comparison to other *surahs* in the Quran.
- To understand the translation of *Surah al-Fatiha*.
- To know the names of *Surah al-Fatiha* and their significance.

Arabic Terms

- *Rakah* - unit of prayer.
- *Surah* - chapter of the Quran.
- *Hadith* - (plural – *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

The Quran consists of 114 chapters or *surahs* of unequal length. *Surah al-Fatiha* is the first *surah* in the Quran and is recited in each *rakah* of every prayer as the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, declared:



“There is no prayer (valid) without the opening chapter of the Book.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari. Saheeh Muslim*)

It was revealed to the Prophet in Mecca. From all the verses of the Quran Allah chose this *surah* for us to read in every prayer for some divine wisdom. Almost every Muslim in the world has committed it to memory. When a person accepts Islam, the first thing that he or she memorizes is this opening chapter - the *Fatiha*. This is so they can perform the prescribed prayers. Its meaning should be learnt and contemplated on every time we offer

salah (ritual prayer). When a person recites *Surah al-Fatiha* in his *salah* (ritual prayer), the Lord of heavens and earth responds to every verse he says!

Text of *Surah al-Fatiha*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

1. In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, The Especially Merciful.

الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِیْنَ

2. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of All the Worlds;

الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

3. The Most Merciful, The Especially Merciful.

مَالِكِ یَوْمِ الدِّیْنِ

4. Master of the Day of Judgment.

اِیَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَاِیَّاكَ نَسْتَعِیْنُ

5. You alone we worship and from You alone we seek help.

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِیْمَ

6. Guide us to the straight way,

صِرَاطَ الَّذِیْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَیْهِمْ غَیْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَیْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّیْنَ

7. The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not the way of those who earn Your anger, nor of those who go astray.

Names of *Surah al-Fatiha* & their Significance

This *surah* has other names like The Opening[1], the Essence of the Quran[2], the Seven Oft-Repeated Verses[3], and the Glorious Recital[4].

Indeed this *surah* holds the essence of the Quran and contains its principles and major themes. It incorporates, in a condensed form, all the fundamental principles laid down in the Quran: the principle of God's oneness and uniqueness, of His being the originator of the universe, the fountain of all life-giving grace, the One to whom man is ultimately responsible, the only power that can guide and help; the principle of life after death and of

the consequences of man's behavior; the principle of guidance through God's message-bearers and, flowing from it, the principle of the continuity of all true religions (implied in the allusion to people who have lived - and erred - in the past); and, finally, the need for self-surrender to the will of the Supreme Being and, thus, for worshipping Him alone. It is for this reason that this *surah* has been formulated as a prayer, to be constantly repeated and reflected upon by the believer.

It is also called the Prayer, as in the Prophetic *hadith*[\[5\]](#):

"I have split *The Prayer* (meaning *Surah al-Fatiha*) into two parts; one for Me and one for My slave, and My slave will have what he asks for. When the slave says: *Praise be to Allah, the Lord of All the Worlds*, I say: 'My slave has praised Me.' When he says: *The Most Gracious, The dispenser of grace*, I say: 'My slave has extolled Me.' When he says *Master of the Day of Judgment*, I say: 'My slave has glorified Me' or 'My slave has deferred to Me.' When he says: *You alone we worship and from You alone we seek help*, I say: 'This is between Me and My slave, and my slave will have what he asks for.' When he says: *Guide us to the straight way, The way of those on whom you have bestowed Your grace, not the way of those who earn Your anger, nor of those who go astray*, I say: 'This is for My slave, and My slave will have what he asks for.'" (Saheeh Muslim)

One reason it is called Prayer is because the *surah* is part remembrance and part supplication. '*Guide us to the straight way*' is supplication for the greatest gift one can ask from Allah: divine guidance.

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

[\[2\]](#) Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

[\[3\]](#) Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

[\[4\]](#) Saheeh Al-Bukhari

[\[5\]](#) Hadīth Qudsī is a hadīth where the Prophet relates the words of his Lord.

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