

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

**Description:** An interpretation of the most oft-recited verses of the Holy Qur'an. Part 3: Explanation of the last three verses which pertain to a pledge made to Allah and a supplication on the part of man in the words which Allah Himself, in His great mercy has taught man what to pray for.

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## Objective

- To learn the verse by verse explanation of the last three verses of *Surah al-Fatiha*.

## Arabic Terms

- *Surah* - chapter of the Quran.
- *Tawheed* - The Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah with respect to His Lordship, His Names and Attributes and in His right to be worshipped.
- *Shirk* - a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.

## 5. You Alone we worship and from You Alone we seek help

This verse carries the gist of Islam: *Tawheed*. All the prophets from Adam to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) were sent to convey the central message: worship Allah alone Who has no son or partner. This is the meaning of the first testimony of faith: *La ilaha illa Allah*. It is the singular purpose of creation. *Tawheed* is salvation and we must convey the message of *tawheed* to our friends and family. No human being comes so close so as to become His associate and change His decisions. Deviation in this matter is fatal to one's spiritual well-being.



**What is the 'worship' that we are pledging to God alone?**

It is a comprehensive word including one's dealings with Allah in the form of ritual devotional acts like the five daily prayers or fasting as well as dealings with other human beings like family and friends. Simple physical acts performed by one's limbs like smiling and intense emotions like love, hope, and fear fall within its realm. God is worshipped by obeying His commands and refraining from what He has forbidden. Worship is every utterance and deed, apparent or hidden that Allah loves. Simply stated, every act pleasing to God is an act of worship in Islam. Allah is entitled to worship by the body, soul, and heart and remains incomplete unless it is done out of reverence and fear of Allah, divine love and adoration, hope in divine reward, and extreme humility. Giving anyone else - prophets, angels, Jesus, Mary, idols, or nature - a portion of worship due to Allah is called *Shirk* and is the gravest sin in Islam.

Humility is an essential ingredient of worship and there is no better way to approach the Lord of the worlds than through humility. A person conceited by his personal devotion blocks his own path to the Lord of Power. Worship should make us more humble. The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, has taught to admit self-deficiency, frailty, and iniquity in front of the Magnificent Lord by saying:

"O Allah, I have greatly wronged my own soul, and no one forgives sins except for You, so grant me Your forgiveness and have mercy upon me. Verily you are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

In another prayer he used to say:

"O Allah, you are my Lord. There is no God but You. You created me and I am your servant, and I abide by Your covenant and promise as much as I am able. I seek refuge with You from the evil that I do. I come back to You from Your grace upon me, and I come back to you with my sins. So forgive me, because none forgives sins except for You."

We are in need of Allah's help even to worship Him. So, we ask Him to assist us. Also, Allah is the Only One from whom help should be sought including help to worship Him. This does not mean we cannot ask someone to help us move to a new house! The "help" meant in the verse is supernatural aid. To make it clearer, when you take your sick child to an emergency room, you should ask Allah alone to help your child, not a dead saint or a guardian angel.

## 6. Guide us to the straight way

Human beings by nature are infirm. Today they are close to Allah, tomorrow they become distant. In this prayer a Muslim asks Allah to keep him strong, to keep him guided on the straight path. A Muslim repeats this petition in every *salah* (ritual prayer). There are always those who are better than us in the spiritual ladder. A Muslim should continuously strive to rise up the 'ladder' and get closer to the Lord of Power by increasing in one's patience, good manners, and practice of Islam. Especially, for someone new to Islam, they would really need this prayer on their journey. A Muslim should learn and find out what God wants of him at every turn of life and to carry it out with a pure intention.

## 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

This verse is a continuation of the previous verse. It is answering the question...‘exactly whose way should I be on?’ My parents, relatives, friends, fellow country-men... whose?

The answer is; those who were touched by divine grace. Who were those? They are identified in another passage of the Quran:

**“And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger - those will be with the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favor of the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions.” (Quran 4:69)**

The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

“The Jews are the ones who have earned Allah’s anger and the Christians are the ones who are astray.”[\[1\]](#)

These are the people who know the truth yet abandon it, including the Jews[\[2\]](#) and others. This should not be taken as a license for anti-Semitism.

First, Allah’s anger is not limited to the Jews. For instance, Allah says about taking an innocent life:

**“If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein, and the anger and curse of Allah are upon him.”  
[Quran 4:93]**

Second, divine wrath is for those who were not guided to the straight way, not for lack of knowledge, but their vain desires blocked them from the straight path. As any student of Old Testament knows, the Jewish rabbis possessed knowledge, but they did not act upon it and had the greatest influence in changing the Mosaic religion. Similarly, a Muslim scholar, or for that matter, any of us, who has knowledge but does not act on it also resembles the Jews in this matter. Part of being “guided” is to have a firm resolve to do what is right and to abandon what is wrong. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, has said:

“A man will be brought on the Day of Resurrection and cast into the Hellfire. His haunches will be spilled into the fire and he will go around in it as a donkey goes around a mill. The inhabitants of Hell will gather around him and say: ‘What is the matter with you? Didn’t you used to enjoin upon us what is right and forbid us from doing wrong?’ He will reply: ‘I used to enjoin upon you what is right but not do it myself and I used to forbid you from doing wrong and then engage in it myself.’”  
[\[3\]](#)

This man had knowledge. He knew right from wrong. Moreover, he would enjoin what

is right and forbid what is wrong. But he did not act upon his knowledge, so he earned his punishment.

Third, I will illustrate the point with an example. Let us take something basic. The Ten Commandments are the cornerstone of Judaism. Keeping the Sabbath is the most important ritual observance in Judaism, the only one instituted in the Ten Commandments. According to the Bible itself, the Jews were threatened, punished[4], and earned divine wrath[5] for violating it. In Islam, Friday is the most sacred day of the week and a special *salah* (ritual prayer) is held to mark it. The sanctity of Friday, set by Allah, is well known among Muslims. Altering it for any reason to another day would be analogous to Jews violating the Sabbath. It would be knowingly corrupting a divinely set ritual observance.

**“...nor of those who go astray.”**

These are the people that abandon the truth out of ignorance, like the Christians and others. The Christians are astray out of ignorance. This does not mean that obstinacy did not subsequently develop within them after some of them overstepped the mark out of their ignorance. These are the people who worship, but do so without knowledge. A Muslim who might worship God based on ignorance without textual authority resembles the Christians, so to say. For instance, Catholic worship is offered even to inanimate objects, such as the relics of a martyr, the Cross of Christ, the Crown of Thorns, or even the statue or picture of a saint. Other Christians use rock bands or singing as worship. Quite to the contrary, Jesus never worshipped God with music, singing hymns, or venerating the cross! An analogous “imitation” by a Muslim, no matter how well intentioned, would be using music and singing devotional songs as worship since the Final Prophet did not worship Allah in this manner. Prophet Muhammad has clearly laid out how God is to be worshipped; it is not allowed to deviate from it in the least.

We ask Allah to be ‘guided’ to the straight path, the path of the prophets and their righteous followers and, in way to warn us so we may not tread the same path, we pray not to be like the first group which failed to act upon their knowledge or the second group which failed to acquire it.

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Endnotes:

[1] Tirmidhi, Musnad of Ahmad, and Ibn Hibban. Quoted by Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, Grand Imam of al-Azhar in his exegesis, *‘Tafsir al-Wasit.’*

[2] Who is a Jew and what is Judaism? These are complex questions because many people today who call themselves Jews do not believe in that religion at all! More than half of all Jews in Israel today call themselves “secular,” and don’t believe in God or any of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Half of all Jews in the United States don’t belong to any synagogue. They may practice some of the rituals of Judaism and celebrate some of the holidays, but they don’t think of these actions as religious activities. In any case, the true followers of Hebrew prophets beginning from Moses are considered free of blame as they did not distort their original religious teachings. For our purposes

a 'Jew' is a believer in Judaism who does not follow the original beliefs and practices instituted by the Hebrew prophets, but perhaps rabbinate and their councils. God knows best.

[3] Bukhari, Muslim

[4] He destroyed Jerusalem for its violation (Jeremiah 17:27).

[5] "They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws—although the man who obeys them will live by them—and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and destroy them in the desert." (Ezekiel 20: 21; New International Version)

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