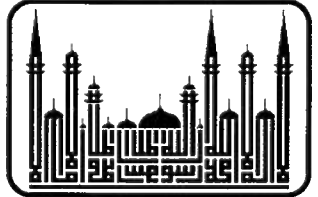


بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# Perspectives



A bimonthly newsletter published by the Foundation for Islamic Knowledge\* Summer 2000, Safar / Rajab- 1421 \* Vol. 6, No.3

## Editorial

The announcement on June 26 of the completion of the first phase of the Human Genome Project (HGP) marks the beginning of a revolutionary new era of medicine and biology. The HGP is an international effort, formally begun in October 1990. The goals of the project are to discover all the approximately 100,000 human genes (the human genome); make them accessible for further biological study to determine the complete sequence of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA; and to carry out parallel studies to develop the technology and interpret the human gene functions.

These studies are expected to result in a profound molecular-level understanding of how humans develop from embryo to adult, what makes things work, and what causes them to go wrong. As a result of these activities the next decades are likely to witness spectacular achievements in biology, biotechnology and molecular medicine, similar to the spectacular achievements in space of the last century.

All these achievements are clear signs from Allah, as stated in the Qur'an:

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ  
حَتَّىٰ يَتَّبِعِنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ .

(سورة فصلت - من آية ٥٣)

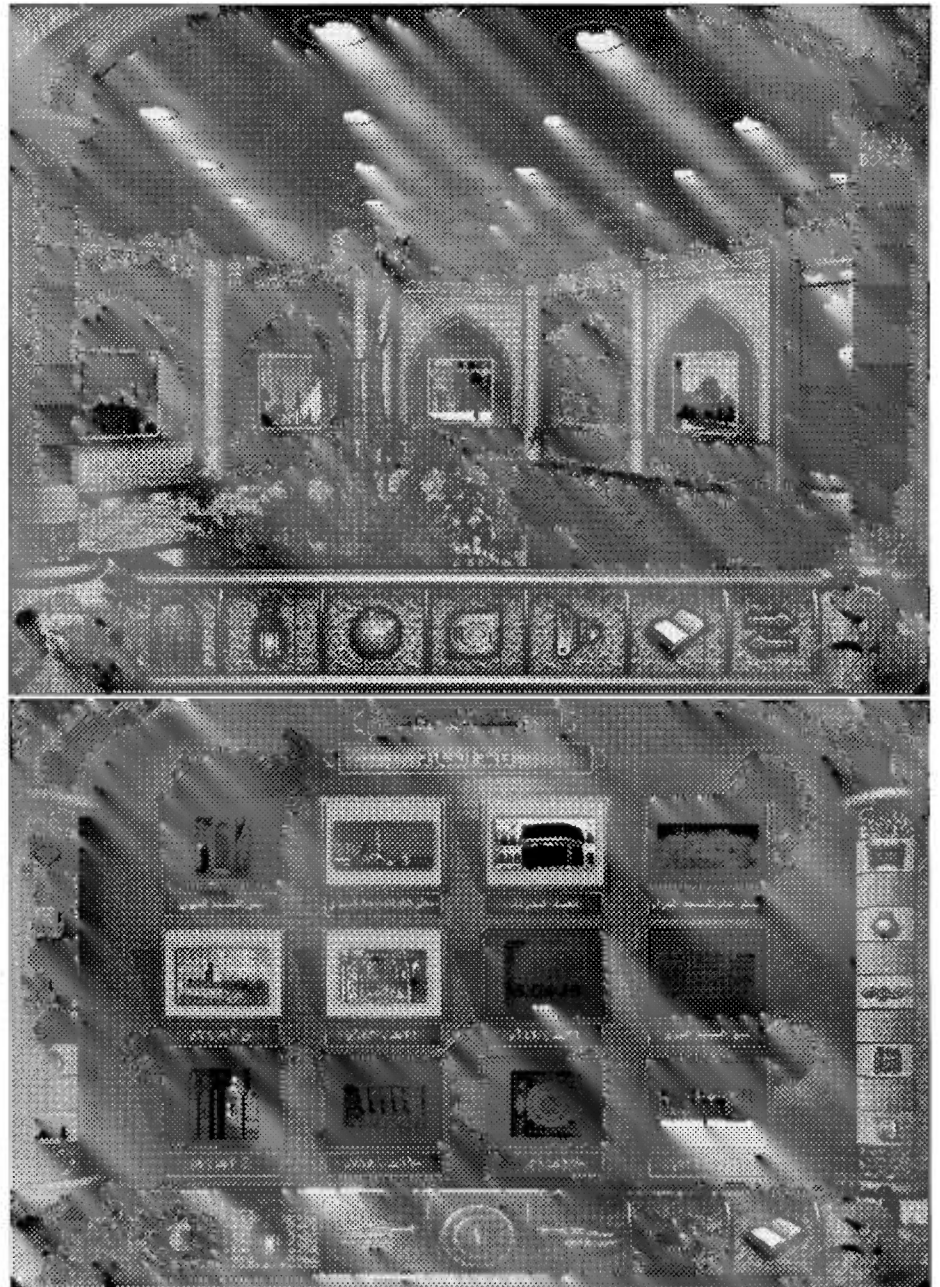
*"Soon will We show them our signs in the furthest regions (of space), and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth".*

(Qur'an 41:53)

The more we learn about the complex biological functions in our bodies, the more we should appreciate the Power and Greatness of our Creator -Allah (Qur'an 23:14). □

## New Multimedia Islamic Software

A new program entitled **Islamic Art Gallery** has been developed by **Harf Information Technology in Cairo, Egypt**. The program presents an assortment of Islamic art, including architecture, calligraphy, metalwork, woodwork, ceramics, jewelry and textiles. Audio description of each artistic work is provided in Arabic. The art work is displayed in a set of halls on two floors of an art gallery. Some of the features of virtual reality technology are used to facilitate navigation in the halls of the gallery. The program runs under Windows 95 and 98 and can be obtained from **Digitek International Inc., 7631 Leesburg Pike, Suite B, Falls Church, VA 22043, Tel. (800) 33-Sakhr.** □



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## Reflections

Dr. Ahmad H. Sakr

Dr. Ahmed K. Noor

### Surat Al-Fatiha

## سورة الفاتحة

Although all practicing Muslims memorize *Surat Al-Fatiha* (The opening Chapter of the Qur'an), only few understand its full meaning, and fewer of those reflect its meaning in their attitude and their behavior. In this article some facts, from the Qur'an and authentic sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), are given about *Al-Fatiha*, including its names, significance and virtue, the theme and meaning of each of its verses.

### Names of the Surah

The name *Al-Fatiha* refers to the fact that it is the opening, or sort of a preface, to the Qur'an. Other names given to it in the authentic sayings of the Prophet include (see the figure on page 3): The mother of the Qur'an أم القرآن , The mother of the book أم الكتاب , The seven oft-repeated (verses) السبع المثاني , The greatest سورة أعظم .

### Period of Revelation

*Al-Fatiha* is one of the early *surahs* revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) in Mecca. It is believed to be the first complete *surah* revealed. Before its revelation, only a few verses were revealed from *Surat Al-Alaq* سورة العلق (Qur'an 96), *Al-Qalam* القلم (Qur'an 68), *Al-Muddathir* المدثر (Qur'an 74) and *Al-Muzzammil* المزمّل (Qur'an 73).

### General Theme and Significance

The *surah* summarizes the Islamic ideology and describes the proper relationship between the humans and

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ الْعَظِيمَ .  
(سورة الحجر - آية ٨٧)

And We have bestowed upon you the seven oft-repeated (verses) and the Grand Qur'an. (Qur'an 15:87)

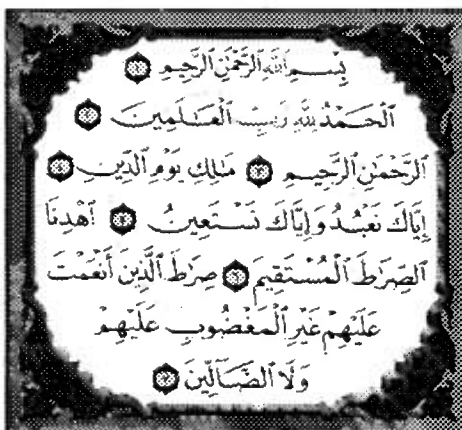
their Lord: They should acknowledge Him, praise Him, prepare themselves for meeting Him, promise to submit and surrender to Him and to none else, then turn to Him for guidance to His straight path.

In recognition of the importance of *Al-Fatiha* in Islamic worship and Muslim life, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

لا صلاة لمن لم يقرأ بفاتحة الكتاب.  
(البخارى ومسلم)

There is no prayer for those who do not recite the Opening of the book.

(Bukhari and Muslim)



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Mercy Giving.

This verse represents the etiquette of righteous beginnings. To begin every act in the name of Allah, The One who originated the existence, is to

- Acknowledge that Allah is the Only God, and that every thing in this universe is done in accordance with His will.
- Awaken one's heart to the

remembrance of Allah.

- Cultivate a sense of spiritual purpose and attitude - by making one conscious that each act relates to Allah's worship.
- Keep the person away from evil, because the very name of Allah will impel him/her to consider whether he/she is justified in associating His name with a wrong deed or evil intention.
- Seek the help and support of Allah in what one does. The person will also be protected from the temptations of Satan, because Allah turns to the person when he/she turns to Him.

The first words of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) instructed him to read in the name of Allah.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ .  
خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ .  
(سورة العلق - آيات ١ ، ٢)

Read in the name of your Lord and cherisher, Who created - Created the human out of a leech-like clot.

(Qur'an 96:1,2)

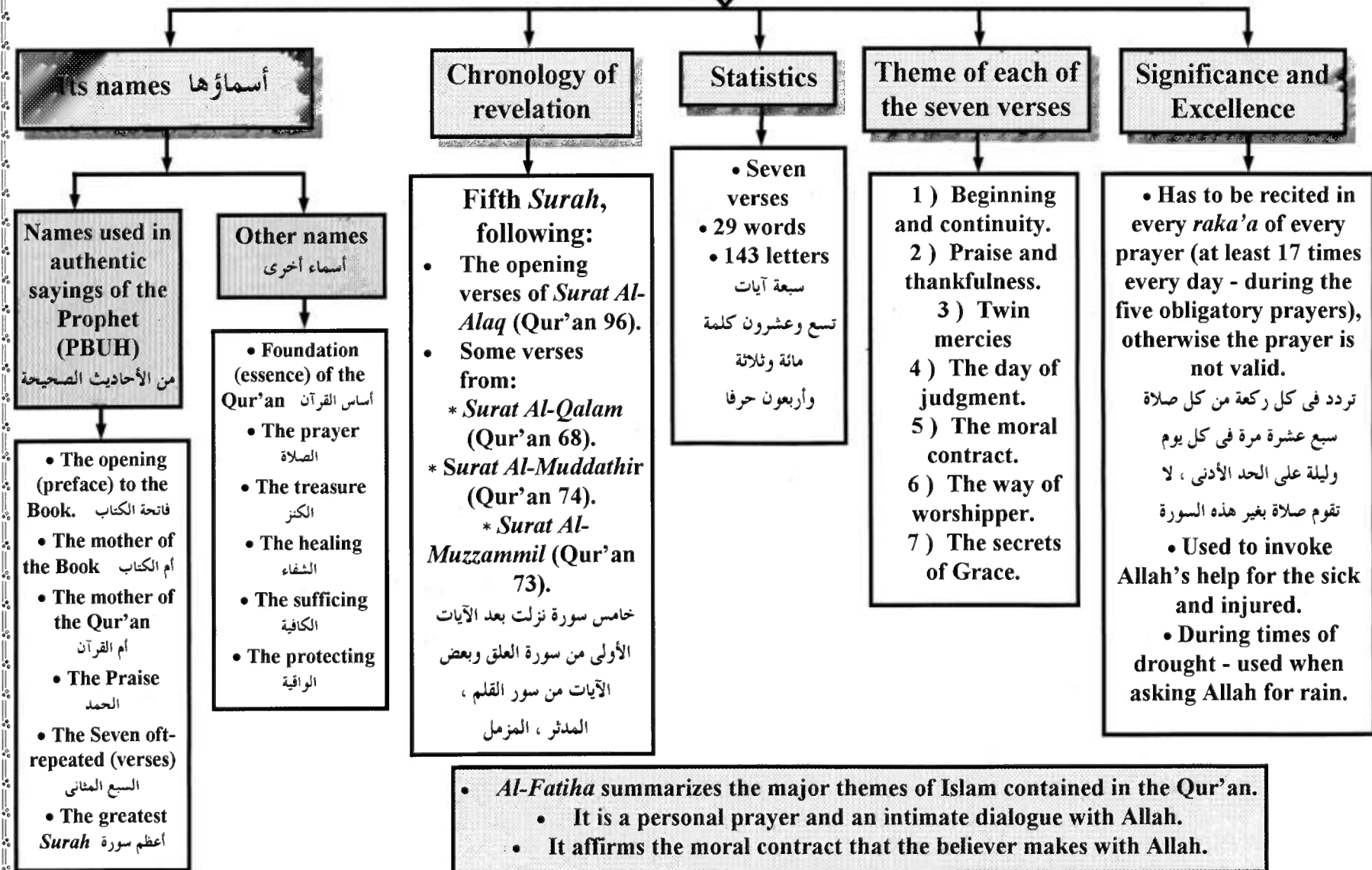
Invoking the name of Allah reflects a fundamental Islamic principle: everything in the universe derives its existence from Allah. It begins from Allah, and continues in accordance with His will, since He is the First and Last.

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ .  
(سورة الحديد - آية ٣)

He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden and He has full knowledge of all things.

(Qur'an 57:3)

## سورة الفاتحة *Surat Al-Fatiha*



The twin mercies contained in “the All-Merciful الرحمن , The Mercy-Giving الرحيم ” cover all kinds and domains of mercy, kindness and clemency. Allah showers His mercy upon both the responsive and unresponsive among His creatures in this world, but in the hereafter only the believers will receive His mercy.

By attaching the twin mercies to name of Allah, we are reminded of the full, pervasive touch of His mercy, which extends to every being that is, has been, or will be. Nothing is beyond the reach of the mercy of Allah.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

**All Praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.**

The two words *Al-Hamdul Lilahi* الحمد لله combine three meanings:

- Reverence for Allah’s exalted position and glorification of His Divine attributes, splendor, guidance, bounties and decree. Allah is the perfection of all excellencies.
- Praise for the life’s treasures created and provided by Allah, including sustenance, shelter, well-being, knowledge and dignity.
- Gratitude and thanks for the countless bounties and favors received from Allah.

وَهُوَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي  
الأولى والأخرة وله الحكم وإليه  
تُرجعون .

(سورة القصص - آية ٧٠)

*And He is Allah: there is no god but He. To Him be praise, at the first and at the last: For Him is the command and to Him shall you (All) be brought back.* (Qur’an 28:70)

Celebrating the praises of Allah brings one into harmony with everything else in the worshipping



universe.

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا  
فِي الْأَرْضِ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ  
وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ .  
(سورة التغابن - آية ١)

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth declare the Praises and Glory to Allah. To Him belongs the kingdom and to Him belongs the Praise. And He Has power over all things.* (Qur’an 64:1)

By cultivating a grateful relationship with the creator, the believer also becomes disposed to show due gratitude to the creation. This is the seed of respect and of acknowledging the good deeds, benevolent works and charity of others. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

من لم يشكر الناس لم يشكر الله .  
(مسند الإمام أحمد)

*Whoever does not thank people does not thank Allah.* (Musnad Imam Ahmad)

The Arabic word *Rabb* stands for:

- Master and Owner.
- Sustainer, Provider and Guardian.
- Sovereign, Ruler, Administrator and Organizer.

Allah is the Lord of the Universe in all these senses.

“Lord of the worlds” refer to everything in the universe - atoms and galaxies, people and beasts, the seen and the unseen. His Lordship is free from the limitations of space, time, and any other variable and dimension. He sustains the whole of creation and extends an encompassing benevolence to each of its creatures in every condition. All are cherished by the Lord of the Worlds.

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

**The All-Merciful, the Mercy-Giving.**

The third verse restates the twin Divine attributes of Allah’s Mercy, kindness and clemency. A person’s

hope expands with the realization that the extent of the mercy of Allah covers everything in the universe.

وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ .  
(سورة الأعراف - من آية ١٥٦)

*But My Mercy extends to all things.*

(Qur’an 7:156)

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

إن لله مائة رحمة فمنها رحمة بها يتراحم  
الخلق بينهم وتسعة وتسعون ليوم  
القيامة .  
(صحيح مسلم)

*Allah has created hundred mercies. It is through one of these mercies that all creatures show mercy to one another, while ninety-nine mercies remain (with Him) for the day of resurrection.*

(Sahih Muslim)

We learn from the mercy of Allah to have mercy on His creations. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

الراحمون يرحمهم الرحمن ارحموا من في  
الأرض يرحمكم من في السماء .  
(سنن الترمذی)

*Those who show mercy, the All-Merciful (Allah) will have mercy on them. Have mercy on those on earth, The One in Heaven will have mercy on you.*

(Sunan Al-Termidhi)

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

**Master (and owner) of the Day of Judgment.**

“The day of judgment” refers to the beginning of the next world, at which time each soul will be held accountable for its performance in the present life. On that day, all human measures will perish, and the only measure will be that of Allah.

قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتُبْعَثُنَّ ثُمَّ لَتُنَبَّؤُنَّ  
بِمَا عَمِلْتُمْ .

(سورة التغابن - من آية ٧)

Say: "Yea, by my Lord, you shall surely be raised up: then shall be told (the truth) of all that you did".

(Qur'an 64:7)

The belief in the day of judgment reinforces the reality that existence extends beyond the confines of the world to an eternal life in the next world. It liberates the person from servitude to the lower desires and appetites, and from the constraints of temporal existence, including the harms committed against one another, injustices and oppression.

Having certainty in the eternal life in the next world fulfills human nature's yearning for everlasting existence, and for absolute justice, which may not be established in the present world.

Allah, as the Lord of Power (and Rule) in both worlds, does give whomever He pleases from His creation power and rule in this world.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ  
Only to Allah we make Ibadah, and only Allah's help we seek, and pray for.

The Arabic word *Ibadah* عِبَادَة refers to:

- Worship and devotion.
- Submission and obedience.
- Subjection and servitude.

In this verse *Ibadah* implies all the three. The Muslim is entering into a moral contract with Allah, and making commitment to Allah by saying "I am Your worshipper, Your subject and Your servant", "I keep these relations with You and You alone", and "I make none else the object of my worship in all the three senses".

The contract frees the human conscience from servitude to, and subjection by, anyone or anything other than Allah, thereby one is fulfilling the object of his/her creation

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ .

(سورة الذاريات - آية ٥٦)

I have only created Jinns and humans,

that they may worship (and serve) Me. (Qur'an 51:56)

One turns to Allah for help and fulfillment of his/her needs because He is the Lord of the whole universe. He is the Master and He has powers over everything. He can change the weakness and humility of any person to strength and honor. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

إِذَا سَأَلْتَ فَاسْأَلِ اللَّهَ وَإِذَا اسْتَعْنَيْتَ فَاسْتَعْنِ بِاللَّهِ . (سنن الترمذی)

If you ask, ask Allah (only), and if you seek help, seek the help of Allah (only). (Sunan Al-Termidhi)

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ  
Guide us to the straight path.

Allah, in His mercy, taught us the most important *du'a* (supplication) we should be making "Guide us to the straight path". He made it obligatory to repeat this *du'a* at least seventeen times every day. This is the beginning of the practical application of *la ilaha ila Allah* لا إله إلا الله (the declaration of faith). The straight path is the path that keeps the person absolutely free from errors and evil consequences in every walk of life, and brings him/her success and felicity in the end. It is the path of Allah.

إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ . (سورة هود - من آية ٥٦)

Verily, it is my Lord that is on a straight path. (Qur'an 11:56)

Guidance is of two kinds:

- Directional guidance هداية , pointing the way through the Divine revelations, and the preaching by Allah's Messengers and pious people who preach Islamic monotheism.

- Supporting guidance هداية المعونة , which is a special blessing, totally from Allah- to

open one's heart to receive the truth.

In this verse, the person is making supplication to Allah to guide him/her in every walk of life, and save him/her from the labyrinths of doubt and uncertainty, which result from the lack of true knowledge. The person is also asking Allah's help in discerning the straight path from the many by-paths and crooked ways.

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ  
غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ  
The path of those whom You have bestowed grace, not those who incurred Your wrath, nor gone astray.

The nature of the straight path is identified in this verse. It is the path which has always been followed by the people favored by Allah, and which has always brought Allah's favors and blessings.

The favored people are those who receive blessings and permanent rewards on account of their righteous living, and from winning the pleasure of Allah. They are not those who go astray and incur the wrath of Allah, even though they might be enjoying the transitory good things of life. Allah describes the characteristics of those favored by Him, upon whom He has bestowed His grace.

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ  
مَنْ التَّيِّبِينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ  
حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ  
وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا  
وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَى  
عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ حَرَّوْا  
سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًا .

(سورة مريم - آية ٥٨)

Those were some of the prophets on whom Allah did bestow His Grace, of the posterity of Adam, and of those whom We carried (in the Ark) with



*Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel - of those whom We guided and chose. Whenever the Signs of (Allah) the All-Merciful were rehearsed to them, they would fall down in prostrate adoration and in tears. (Qur'an 19:58)*

Choice is a foundation of belief, and where there is choice, there are alternatives, and potential for opposition. The concluding appeal - Guidance to the same path followed by the favored people, and not to be like those upon whom there is wrath, nor those who go astray (referring to any people who abandon, reject, or manipulate revealed truth).

### Epilogue

In essence, *Al-Fatiha* is a personal prayer and an intimate dialogue with Allah, as explained in the following Divine hadith (Hadith *Qudsi*) related by the Prophet (PBUH):

asked for."

So when the worshipper says, "All Praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds," Allah says, "My worshipper has praised Me."

When he says, "The All-Merciful, the Mercy-Giving," Allah says, "My worshipper has extolled Me."

When he says, "Master of the Day of Judgment," Allah says, "My worshipper has magnified Me and entrusted Me with his affairs."

When he says, "It is You we worship, and it is You we ask for help," Allah says, "This is between Myself and My worshipper - and My worshipper shall have what he has asked for."

When he says, "Guide us to the straight path, the path of those upon whom You have bestowed grace, not those upon whom there is wrath, nor those who go astray," Allah says, "this is for My worshipper - and My worshipper shall have what he has asked for."

(Sahih Muslim)

In answer to the prayer for Guidance, Allah places the whole Qur'an in front of the Muslim, as if to say: "This is the Guidance you made *du'a* (supplication) for (Qur'an 2:2).

*Al-Fatiha*, the short *Surah* with seven verses, 29 words and 143 letters summarizes the major themes of Islam contained in the Qur'an (the book it opens). It affirms the moral contract that the believer makes with Allah: Faith in the true and only merciful God; gratitude to the Sustainer of the Universe; certainty in the day of Judgment; sincerity in worshipping Allah alone, and seeking help from Him alone; a resolve to adhere to the straight path of the rightly - guided people through the ages; and avoidance of the ways of the rebellious, the wrong doers, and the lost.

I pray to Almighty Allah to give us the guidance and support to fulfill the moral contract contained in *Al-Fatiha*.

Ameen □

قال الله تعالى قَسَمْتُ الصَّلَاةَ بَيْنِي  
وبين عبدى نصفين ولعبدى ما سأل  
فإذا قال العبد (الحمد لله رب  
العالمين) قال الله تعالى حَمَدَنِي عَبْدِي  
وإذا قال (الرحمن الرحيم) قال الله  
تعالى أثنى على عبدى وإذا قال  
(مالك يوم الدين) قال حَمَدَنِي عَبْدِي  
وقال مرة فَوَضَّ إِلَى عَبْدِي فَإِذَا قَالَ  
(إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين) قال هذا  
بينى وبين عبدى ولعبدى ما سأل  
فإذا قال (اهدنا الصراط المستقيم  
صراط الذين أنعمت عليهم غير  
المنغضوب عليهم ولا الضالين) قال  
هذا لعبدى ولعبدى ما سأل .  
(صحيح مسلم)

Allah, the Almighty and the Majestic, has said, "I have apportioned the Prayer (*Al-Fatiha*) between Myself and My worshipper in two parts - and My worshipper shall have what he has

### Facts about some of the words of *Al-Fatiha*

- The first verse of *Surat Al-Fatiha - Bismi Ellahi Al-Rahman Al-Rahim* . (In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Mercy-Giving) appears in the beginning of every *Surah* except *Surah 9 (Al-Tawbah - The Repentance)*. It also appears in Qur'an 27:30.
- Each of the three words Allah , الرحمن *Al-Rahman* , الله *Raheem* الرحمن appears twice in *Surat Al-Fatiha*.
- The two words *Al-Rahman Al-Raheem* (the All-Merciful, the Mercy-Giving) are repeated five times (Qur'an 1:3; 2:163; 27:30; 41:2; 59:22), in addition to the beginning of the *Surahs*.
- The two words *Al-Hamdu Lilahi* الحمد لله (All Praise is for Allah) are repeated 23 times in the Qur'an. The four words *Al-Hamdu Lilahi Rabbi Al-A'lameen* الحمد لله رب العالمين (All Praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds) are repeated six times (Qur'an 1:2; 6:45; 10:10; 37:182; 39:75 and 40:65).
- The two words *Yawm Al-Deen* يوم الدين (Day of Judgment) are repeated 13 times (Qur'an 1:4; 15:35; 26:82; 37:20; 38:78; 51:12; 56:56; 70:26; 74:46; 82:15,17,18; 83:11).
- The two words *Sirat Mustaqeem* (straight path) صراط مستقيم are repeated 33 times.
- The word *Dha'leen* ضالين (gone astray) is repeated six times (Qur'an 1:7; 2:198; 6:77; 26:20,86; 56:92).

□

