



How Should Surah Al-Fatihah Impact our Lives as Believers?

Surah Al-Fatihah, named as The Opening, is known as the *Umm Al-Kitab* (the Mother of The Book) because it contains the meaning of the entire Qur'an in it and the central basic ideas and beliefs of Islam. Abu Ja'far, Muhammad bin Jarir At-Tabari recorded Abu Hurayrah (ra) saying that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said regarding Al-Fatihah,

« هِيَ أُمُّ الْقُرْآنِ وَهِيَ فَاتِحَةُ الْكِتَابِ وَهِيَ السَّبْعُ الْمَثَانِي »

“It is Umm Al-Qur'an, Al-Fatihah of the Book (the Opener of the Qur'an) and the seven repeated (verses).”

Ibn Jarir said, "The Arabs call every comprehensive matter that contains several specific areas an Umm." Indeed, the Prophet (saw) described Surah Al-Fatihah as the greatest Surah in the Qur'an.

Sahih Muslim records on the authority of Ibn Abbas (ra) who said,

حَدَّثَنَا حَسَنُ بْنُ الرَّبِيعِ، وَأَحْمَدُ بْنُ جَوَّاسٍ الْحَنْفِيُّ، قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْأَحْوَصِ، عَنْ عَمَّارِ بْنِ رُزَيْقٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عِيسَى، عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ جُبَيْرٍ، عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ بَيْنَمَا جِبْرِيلُ قَاعِدٌ عِنْدَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ سَمِعَ نَقِيضًا مِنْ فَوْقِهِ فَرَفَعَ رَأْسَهُ فَقَالَ هَذَا بَابٌ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتُفْتَحُ الْيَوْمَ لَمْ يُفْتَحْ قَطُّ إِلَّا الْيَوْمَ فَنَزَلَ مِنْهُ مَلَكٌ فَقَالَ هَذَا مَلَكٌ نَزَلَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ لَمْ يَنْزَلْ قَطُّ إِلَّا الْيَوْمَ فَسَلَّمَ وَقَالَ أَنْبَشِرُ بِنُورَيْنِ أَوْتِيَهُمَا لَمْ يُؤْتِيَهُمَا نَبِيٌّ قَبْلَكَ فَاتِحَةُ الْكِتَابِ وَخَوَاتِيمُ سُورَةِ الْبَقَرَةِ لَنْ تَقْرَأَ بِحَرْفٍ مِنْهُمَا إِلَّا أُعْطِيَتهُ

“While the Messenger of Allah (saw) was sitting with Jibril he heard a creaking sound above him. Jibril looked up and said, “This is [the sound of] a gate that has been opened in heaven today and has never been previously opened.” Then an Angel descended through it and came to the Prophet (saw) and said, ‘Rejoice in the good news of two lights that have been given to you such as no prophet before you has been given. [They are] Surah Al-Fatihah and the concluding [two] verses of Surah Al-Baqarah. You will never recite a word from them without being given the blessings they contain.”

The *Salah* (prayer) is also incomplete without the recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah in every *rakat*, hence the believer will recite it at least 17 times a day. Muslim recorded that Abu Hurayrah (ra) said that the Prophet (saw) said,

«مَنْ صَلَّى صَلَاةً لَمْ يَقْرَأْ فِيهَا بِأَمِّ الْقُرْآنِ فَهِيَ خِدَاجٌ - ثَلَاثًا - عَيْرٌ تَمَامٌ»

“Whoever performs any prayer in which he did not read Umm Al-Qur'an, then his prayer is incomplete.” He (saw) said it thrice.

Surah Al-Fatihah therefore has a great position in Islam and many blessings as well as a central place in the heart and daily life of the Muslim. However, how should these beautiful words that we utter in every single prayer shape the manner by which we as Believers live our lives as individuals and as an Ummah? For us to answer this question, requires us to truly appreciate the meaning, weight and implications of the words contained in these seven short verses.

After the *Basmalah*, the *Surah* starts with, ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ **“Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.”** The word, ‘*Al-Hamd*’ conveys the meaning that ALL-PRAISES, and ALL-THANKS for every blessing and bounty that we enjoy and witness in life belongs to Allah (swt) alone. It should create a mentality in the believer that the road to every moment of happiness and contentment, every success and achievement we acquire, and every skill and ability that we have, leads back firmly to Allah (swt) alone. The Qur'an says,

﴿وَهُوَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْأُولَى وَالْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

“And He is Allah; there is no god but He! To Him belongs all praise in the first and the last, and His is the command, and unto Him ye will be brought back.” [Al-Qasas: 70]

The Prophet (saw) also said, «اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدُ كُلُّهُ، وَلَكَ الْمُلْكُ كُلُّهُ، وَبِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ كُلُّهُ، وَإِلَيْكَ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ» **“O Allah! All of Al-Hamd is due to You, You own all the ownership, all types of good are in Your Hand and all affairs belong to You.”**

Abu Ja'far bin Jarir said, "The meaning of ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ﴾ (Al-Hamdu Lillah) (all praise and thanks be to Allah) is: all thanks are due purely to Allah, alone, not any of the objects that are being worshipped instead of Him, nor any of His creation. These thanks are due to Allah's innumerable favors and bounties, that only He knows the amount of. Allah's bounties include creating the tools that help the creation worship Him, the physical bodies with which they are able to implement His commands, the sustenance that He provides them in this life, and the comfortable life He has granted them, without anything or anyone compelling Him to do so. Allah also warned His creation and alerted them about the means and methods with which they can earn eternal dwelling in the residence of everlasting happiness. All thanks and praise are due to Allah for these favors from beginning to end."

The consequence of appreciating this point when reciting the words ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ﴾ is a feeling of such deep gratitude to Allah (swt) and overwhelming appreciation towards Him in our heart that one cannot express in words. It is a feeling that makes every loss or difficulty or moment of pain we may experience in life pale into insignificance compared to the debt that we owe our Rabb for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us – whether it be the wealth and pleasures we have enjoyed, the opportunities we have been given, or our health, our family, our home, or every morsel of food that we have been granted, and most importantly the Deen that we have been blessed with. Reflecting on the words ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ﴾ should even nurture a sense of gratitude for the losses, hardships or disappointments we face in life by realising that Allah (swt) opens up a door and opportunity to gain closeness to Him, and forgiveness and rewards through patience for such events in life.

However, this gratitude to Allah (swt) should not simply be felt with the heart and uttered by the tongue. Rather it should also manifest through the limbs in the performance of deeds and in total submission and obedience to ALL of His (swt)'s Laws without distinction, alongside constantly striving to seek His (swt)'s Pleasure.

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو هِشَامٍ الرَّفَاعِيُّ، مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَزِيدَ حَدَّثَنَا بِحَيْبِ بْنِ يَمَانَ، حَدَّثَنَا الْأَعْمَشُ، عَنْ أَبِي صَالِحٍ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يُصَلِّي حَتَّى تَوَرَّمَتْ قَدَمَاهُ فَقِيلَ لَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ غَفَرَ لَكَ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ. قَالَ: «أَفَلَا أَكُونُ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا»

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah (ra) said: The Messenger of Allah (saw) used to pray until his feet became swollen. It was said: 'O Messenger of Allah, Allah has forgiven you your past and future sins.' He said: **‘Should I not be a thankful slave?’**

The scholar ibn al-Qayyim states that the pillars of being grateful to Allah are:

- 1- Submission of the believer to Allah
- 2- Love of Allah
- 3- Acknowledging His favors
- 4- Praising Him for His favors
- 5- Refraining from utilizing the favors in a way displeasing to Allah

To have true and sincere gratitude to Allah (swt) therefore, is not to be selective in acceptance and obedience to His Commands and Limits but to embrace and implement ALL of His regulations and obligations. So it is not to accept the *salah* and *sawm* while neglecting

the Islamic dress or our duty to our family or the segregation of men and women, or carrying the dawah for Islam, or other actions we may find difficult. It is not to accept the *adhab* (morals) of Islam while rejecting the *hudud* (legal punishments) of Islam, or the Islamic laws on polygamy, inheritance, apostasy, Jihad or marital roles and responsibilities because they are controversial in the societies that we live. And it is not to accept the Zakat and Hajj while neglecting our duty to ensure that the political, economic, judicial, and social Laws of Allah (swt) are implemented through the establishment of the Khilafah based upon the method of the Prophethood that will ensure all the Commands of Islam are applied correctly, in the manner obligated by our Rabb (swt).

This concept of total submission to Allah (swt) should also be re-enforced by appreciating the true meaning of the other words and verses in Surah Al-Fatihah. For example, the mention of Allah's name when uttering الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ should cause us to reflect on the attributes of our Creator (swt).

﴿هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ * هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ * هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

“He is Allah, beside Whom La ilaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) the Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. He is Allah, beside Whom La ilaha illa Huwa, the King, the Holy, the One free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness. Glory be to Allah! (High is He) above all that they associate as partners with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the Fashioner of forms. To Him belong the Best Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth declares His glory. And He is the Almighty, the Wise.” [Al-Hashr: 22-24]

Furthermore, the word ‘Ar-Rabb’ in ﴿رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ (Lord of the Worlds) linguistically means The Master or the one who has the authority to lead, and the owner who has full authority over His property; while ‘Al-Alameen’ is plural for ‘Alam which encompasses everything in existence except Allah (swt) – i.e. the different creations that exist in the heavens and earth, land and sea and every generation of creation. The scholar Qatadah said about ﴿رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾, ***“Every type of creation is an `Alam.”*** Az-Zajaj also said, *“Alam encompasses everything that Allah created, in this life and in the Hereafter.”* And Al-Qurtubi commented, *“This is the correct meaning, that the `Alam encompasses everything that Allah created in both worlds.”* In addition, ‘Al-Malik’ in ﴿مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ﴾ also means the true owner of everything and everyone, the One who has no partners, rivals or equals, and the One who has the right of disposal of affairs in whatever He wishes, defining what is good and evil.

All this should lead us as believers, as we recite Surah Fatihah, to reflect on the absolute sovereignty of Allah (swt) over all beings – that He alone has the right and perfect ability to Command and Forbid; to legislate laws and define how humanity should live according to that which is best for mankind. Recognising and truly appreciating this point should surely cause us as Muslims to reject any ideology or system that places a man or the people as sovereign and the legislator of laws, for this positions the human being as a partner and rival to Allah (swt). It should also surely lead us to acknowledge without a shadow of doubt that the rule belongs ONLY to Allah (swt) and that the only System of Ruling acceptable to Him (swt) is the one that implements His Laws alone, which is the Khilafah based upon the method of the Prophethood.

The problem today, is that many Muslims accept Allah (swt) as the sole Creator but do not recognize the true meaning of Ar-Rabb and Al-Malik for they accept multiple deities to have sovereignty and authority in their lives by following or placing the laws of human beings – whether it be friends, family, their community or parliaments - over the laws of Allah (swt), making the creation a rival and partner to the Creator (swt). How can we accept to do this, when in every *rakat* of our every prayer we declare that Allah is sovereign, that all authority belongs to Him alone? And how can we do this, when we also say, ﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾ **‘You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help!’** each and every time we recite Surah Al-Fatihah? Qatadah said that the Ayah, ﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾ **“Contains Allah’s command to us to perform sincere worship for Him and to seek His aid concerning all of our affairs.”**

Indeed, the One we worship is not simply the One we do *sujood* to, but also the One from whom we take our source of laws from or who defines how we live. For example, Allah (swt) says,

﴿أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ﴾

“Have you seen him who takes his own lust (vain desires) (hawaa) as his ilah (god)” [Al-Jathiya: 23]. And He (swt) also says,

﴿اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَابَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَآ إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

“They (Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him. Be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)!” [At-Tawbah: 9:31]. When this verse was revealed, ‘Uday bin Haatim who used to be a Christian said to the Prophet (saw) **“We did not worship them (the rabbis and priests).”** The Prophet (saw) replied:

“Did they (the rabbis and priests) not forbid what Allah permitted and hence you forbade it; and they permitted what Allah forbade and thus you permitted it?” ‘Uday replied ‘Yes’. The Prophet (saw) then said, **“That is how you worshipped them.”**

The recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah in every prayer that we perform should therefore cause us to reflect deeply on the relationship we have with our Rabb (swt) and to ensure that we are sincere to the words that we utter – ‘that we truly worship none but Him’. This should make us shape our lives according to the verses we recite which require total submission and obedience to every command from Ar-Rabb, Al-Malik, and the One to whom all praise and thanks belongs.

﴿فَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبِّ الْأَرْضِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ * وَلَهُ الْكِبْرِيَاءُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

“Therefore to Allah is due (all) praise, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, the Lord of the worlds. And to Him belongs the greatness in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.” [Al-Jathiya: 36-37]

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