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Gowhar Quadir Wani
al-Fātiḥah
(The Opening)
Introduction

Title: due to its merits, this sura has many names. The most well-known is: al-Fātihah (The Opening) or Fātiḥat al-Kitāb (The Opening of the Book; al-Bukhārī: 756, Muslim: 394) because the Qur’an begins with it. Its other names include: Umm al-Kitāb (The Mother of the Book; al-Bukhārī: 1165), Umm al-Qur’ān (The Mother of the Qur’an; al-Bukhārī: 4704), al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm (The Grand Qur’an), Asās al-Qur’ān (The Foundation of the Qur’an), Sūrat al-Ḥamd (The Sura of Thankfulness). It is also called al-Sab‘ al-Mathānī (The Oft-repeated Seven) because it is read in every rak‘ah– unit of Prayer. Additionally, it has other names that denote its healing power: al-Shif‘a’ (The Cure) and al-Ruqyah (The Incantation; al-Bukhārī: 2276).

Merit: this is the greatest, most-often repeated sura in the Qur’an. Abū Sa‘īd Ibn al-Mu‘allā (nasr) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (g) said to him: “I shall inform you of the greatest sura of the Qur’an before you leave the mosque”. Abū Sa‘īd continues: “He took me by the hand and as he was about to leave to leave the mosque, I said: “Messenger of Allah! You said: “I shall inform you of the greatest sura of the Qur’an”. He said: “﴾<span style="font-family:"times new roman","serif">نّۚاَمِرُنَّكُمُ الْمَلَأَ عَلَى ٍمُسْلِمٍ (Gratitude be to Allah the Lord of all beings). It is al-Sab‘ al-Mathānī (The Oft-repeated Seven) and al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm (The Grand Qur’an) that I have been given” (al-Bukhārī: 4703). No Prayer will be accepted of those who do not recite The Opening (al-Bukhārī: 756; Muslim: 394). It is also a light that no other Prophet before Muhammad (g) was given. Ibn ‘Abbās (g) narrated that: “While Gabriel was sitting with the Prophet (g), he heard a creaking sound from above, lifted his head and said: “This is a Heavenly door. It is opened today and never ever has it been opened before”. Then an angel descended to Earth through it. He ‘Gabriel’ said: “This is an angel who descended to Earth and never ever has he descended before”. The angel greeted them and said: “I bring you glad tidings of two lights that you are given and never have they been given to any Prophet before you: Fātihat al-Kitāb (The Opening of the Book) and the endings of al-Baqarah. You shall never read a letter of any of them without your prayer being answered”. (Muslim: 806) In addition, through this sura communication takes place between Allah and His servants. Abū Hurayrah (g) narrated that the Prophet (g) said: “Almighty Allah said: “I divided Prayer into two halves between Me and My servant and to
My servant shall be granted all what he asks for”. When the servant says: “Gratitude be to Allah the Lord of all beings”, Allah says: “My servant has thanked Me”. When the servant says: “The Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful”, Allah says: “My servant has praised Me”. When the servant says: “Owner of the Day of Judgement,” Allah says: “My servant has glorified Me”. When the servant says: “Only You do we worship, and only from You do we seek help”, Allah says: “This is between Me and My servant and to My servant shall be granted what he asks for”. When the servant says: “Guide us to the straight path; the path of those on whom You have bestowed your Grace, not those on whom is Your Wrath nor the misguided”, Allah says: “This is for My servant and to My servant shall be granted what he asks for”. (Muslim: 395)

Theme: the main theme of al-Fātiḥah is that all acts of worship should be dedicated wholly and solely to Almighty God and shall be carried out with total devotion. Additionally, al-Qurṭubī (1: 112) is of the opinion that it is called al-Qurʾān al-ʿĀzīm because it encapsulates the totality of Qur’ānic knowledge: “Praise of Almighty God with the Attributes of His Mightiness and Perfection, the command to worship Him with devotion, confessing that one is unable to carry out worship without seeking Divine help, beseeching God for guidance to the Straight Path, saving one from the ways of the misguided and making clear the final destination of the Deniers”.

Key: the key to understanding al-Fātiḥah is to think of it as a form of prayer or supplication, in which Believers begin by extending their thankfulness to Allah and praise to Him, then they tell of their dedication to His worship alone, only to ask Him at the end to guide them to the Straight Path, which leads to the Almighty’s Pleasure, the ultimate goal that one strives to achieve in this life.
1 In the Name of Allah(1), the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful(2). Gratitude be to Allah the Lord(3).

Allah (الله) is God’s most unique Name, grandly referred to as *Lafz al-Jalālah* (The Word of Majesty). It occurs in the Qur’an 2,697 times in 85 of its 114 suras. Allah is considered the Almighty’s Supreme Name (*al-Ism al-A`zam*) by Abū Ḥanīfah (quoted in al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār*, 1: 1616). According to the vast majority of scholars Allah is linguistically unique in that it is originally a proper and underived noun (cf. al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-Awtār*: 1: 18). None other than the Almighty is named by it: “Do you know any other of a Name like His?” (19: 65)

In Abrahamic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the concept of God basically has the same referent. He is unlimited with regards to knowledge (omniscience), power (omnipotence), existence (omnipresence) and benevolence. However, there are points of departure regarding how each religion perceives God. The most outstanding of which is that Islam Believes in a One and Only God without the slightest form of Association (cf. 3: 64): “Say: He is God, Unique. *God is the Oft-Beseeched. *He begot none, nor was He begotten. *None is equal to Him” (Sura al-Ikhlās, Q. 112). Additionally, God in Islam has unique Names and Attributes and in accordance with Muslim belief (*Ñaqādh*) the Muslim conception of God is not anthropomorphic in the slightest form: “*Nothing is like Him; He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing*”. (42: 11)

2 The ‘Most Beneficent’ and the ‘Most Merciful’ here stand for the Arabic *ar-Rahmān* and *ar-Rahīm*, respectively. They are both intensive forms derived from the noun rahmah, mercy. Whilst they both denote the trait of mercy, semantically, however, they are different; *ar-Rahmān* is more intensive than *ar-Rahīm* (cf. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, root: *r h m*). According to exegetes, *ar-Rahmān’s* Mercy encompasses all creatures, whereas *ar-Rahīm*’s is reserved only for Believers (cf. 33:43, al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurtubī, al-Shinqīṭī, al-Sa’dī). The extent of God’s Mercy is highlighted in the following tradition: Abū Hurayrah (ﷺ) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “God has one hundred mercies. He sent down one of them on humans, jinn, animals and venomous creatures. Through it they show mercy to each other, and through it wild beasts show mercy to their young. God has reserved ninety-nine mercies with which He bestows mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgement” (al-Bukhārī: 6000; Muslim: 2752).

3 The Arabic *rabb* translated here as ‘Lord’ is semantically and lexically related to *tarbiyah*, which means to nurture, but with much care and attention (cf. Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, 2: 381). When used in its absolute form with the definite article, *al-Rabb*, it could only mean God Almighty, Who is the One Who takes care and provides for all beings.
of all beings\(^4\); The Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful; Owner of the Day of Judgement\(^5\).

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\(4\) ‘All beings’ here stands for al-\(\text{á}lamaha, usually translated as ‘worlds’. It means the Heavens the Earth and all that is within them and all that is between them (cf. 26: 23-24).

\(5\) ‘The Day of Judgement’, a translation of \(\text{yawm ad-dīn} \) in this aya, is a recurrent theme in the Qur’an. However, its nomenclature differs according to the effect intended, and whereby it is variously \(\text{Yawm ad-Dīn} \) (the Day of Judgement), \(\text{Yawm al-\(\text{hīsāb} \) (the Day of Reckoning), \text{Yawm al-Qiyāmah} \) (the Day of Resurrection), \(\text{al-Wāqī`ah} \) (the Befalling), \(\text{al-Tā`mah} \) (the Dumbfounding), \(\text{aṣ-\(\text{ṣā`khah} \) (the Deafen)ing), \text{ar-Rājīfah} \) (the Quaking), \(\text{al-Fāzā` al-Akbar} \) (the Great Fright) and \(\text{al-\(\text{hāqqah} \) (the Real). These many names for one and the same thing, some of which are indeed heart-rending, signify its magnitude and drive home the message: “Be Mindful of a Day on which you shall be returned to Allah”. (2: 281)

\(6\) \(\text{al-\(\text{ṣī`rāt} \text{al-Mustaqīm} \) is the road (an Arabicized word after the Latin word \(\text{strēta}, \) i.e. road) which is straight, clear and has no turns or curves (al-Tabarī). It is used figuratively in the Qur’an to denote the correct manner in which God is to be worshipped and which leads to His Pleasure. It also denotes being spared torment in the Hereafter (cf. 6: 153).

\(7\) Those who know the Truth and follow it: “Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, then those are among the ones on whom Allah has bestowed His Grace—of the Prophets, the Affirmers of Truth, the martyrs and the pious—indeed the companion of these is well off” (4: 69)

\(8\) Those who know the Truth and do not follow it. (al-Tabarī)

\(9\) Those who are ignorant of the Truth and worship God following only their whims and wishful thinking. (al-Tabarī)
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