



INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT AL-Fātiḥa, 1

- First comes that beautiful Sūra,¹⁵
The Opening Chapter¹⁶ of Seven Verses¹⁷.
Rightly called the Essence of the Book.
It teaches us the perfect Prayer.
For if we can pray aright, it means
That we have some knowledge of Allah
And His attributes, of His relations
To us and His creation, which includes
Ourselves; that we glimpse the source
From which we come, and that final goal
Which is our spiritual destiny
Under Allah's true judgment: then
We offer ourselves to Allah and seek His light.
- Prayer is the heart of Religion and Faith
But how shall we pray? What words shall convey
The yearnings of our miserable ignorant hearts
To the Knower of all? Is it worthy of Him
Or of our spiritual nature to ask
For vanities, or even for such physical needs
As our daily bread? The Inspired One
Taught us a Prayer that sums up our faith,
Our hope, and our aspiration in things that matter.
We think in devotion of Allah's name and His Nature;
We praise Him for His creation and His Cherishing care;
We call to mind the Realities, seen and unseen;
We offer Him worship and ask His guidance;
And we know the straight from the crooked path
By the light of His grace that illumines the righteous.

15. Each chapter or portion of the Qur-ān is called a Sūra, which means a Degree or Step, by which we mount up. Sometimes whole Sūras were revealed, and sometimes portions, which were arranged under the Prophet's directions. Some Sūras are long, and some are short, but a logical thread runs through them all. Each verse of the Sūra is called an *Āyat* (plural, *Āyāt*), which means also a sign. A verse of revelation is a Sign of Allah's wisdom and goodness just as much as Allah's beautiful handiwork in the material creation or His dealings in history are signs to us, if we would understand. Some *Āyāt*s are long, and some are short. The *Āyāt* is the true unit of the Qur-ān.

16. *Al-Fātiḥa* = Opening Chapter.

17. These seven verses form a complete unit by themselves, and are recited in every prayer and on many other occasions. Cf. xv. 87.

Al-Fātiḥa, or the Opening Chapter.¹⁸

1. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.¹⁹
2. Praise be to Allah
The Cherisher and Sustainer²⁰ of
the Worlds:
3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
4. Master of the Day of Judgment.

سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

18. By universal consent it is rightly placed at the beginning of the Qur-ān, as summing up, in marvellously terse and comprehensive words, man's relation to Allah in contemplation and prayer. In our spiritual contemplation the first words should be those of praise. If the praise is from our inmost being, it brings us closer to Allah. Then our eyes see all good, peace, and harmony. Evil, rebellion, and conflict are purged out. They do not exist for us, for our eyes are lifted up above them in praise. Then we see Allah's attributes better (verses 2-4). This leads us to the attitude of worship and acknowledgment (verse 5). And finally comes prayer for guidance, and a contemplation of what guidance means (verses 6-7).

Allah needs no praise, for He is above all praise; He needs no petition, for He knows our needs better than we do ourselves; and His bounties are open without asking, to the righteous and the sinner alike. The prayer is *primarily* for our own spiritual education, consolation, and confirmation.

That is why the words in this Sūra are given to us in the form in which we should utter them.

19. The Arabic words "*Raḥmān*" and "*Raḥīm*" translated "Most Gracious" and "Most Merciful" are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of Allah's attribute of Mercy. The Arabic intensive is more suited to express Allah's attributes than the superlative degree in English. The latter implies a comparison with other beings, or with other times or places, while there is no being like unto Allah. Mercy may imply pity, long-suffering, patience, and forgiveness, all of which the sinner needs and Allah Most Merciful bestows in abundant measure. But there is a Mercy that goes before even the need arises, the Grace which is ever watchful, and flows from Allah Most Gracious to all His creatures, protecting them, preserving them, guiding them, and leading them to clear light and higher life.

Opinion is divided whether the *Bismillāh* should be numbered as a separate verse or not. It is unanimously agreed that it is a part of the Qur-ān in Sūra An-Naml. Therefore it is better to give it an independent number in the first Sūra. For subsequent Sūras it is treated as an introduction or head-line, and therefore not numbered.

20. The Arabic word *Rabb*, usually translated Lord, has also the meaning of cherishing, sustaining, bringing to maturity. Allah cares for all the worlds He has created.

5. Thee do we worship,²¹
And Thine aid we seek.
6. Show²² us the straight way,
7. The way of those on whom
Thou has bestowed Thy Grace,
Those whose (portion)
Is not wrath.²³
And who go not astray.²⁴

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ

الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

21. On realizing in our souls Allah's love and care. His grace and mercy, and His power and justice (as Ruler of the Day of Judgment), the immediate result is that we bend in the act of worship, and see both our shortcomings and His all-sufficient power. The emphatic form means that not only do we reach the position of worshipping Allah and asking for His help, but we worship Him alone and ask for His aid only. For there is none other than He worthy of our devotion and able to help us. The plural "we" indicates that we associate ourselves with all who seek Allah, thus strengthening ourselves and strengthening them in a fellowship of faith.

22. If we translate by the English word "guide", we shall have to say: Guide us to and in the straight Way". For we may be wandering aimlessly, and the first step is to find the way; and the second need is to keep in the Way: our own wisdom may fail in either case. The straight Way is often the narrow Way, or the steep Way, which many people shun (xc. 11). By the world's perversity the straight Way is sometimes stigmatized and the crooked Way praised. How are we to judge? We must ask for Allah's guidance. With a little spiritual insight we shall see which are the people who walk in the light of Allah's grace, and which are those that walk in the darkness of Wrath. This also would help our judgment.

23. Note that the words relating to Grace are connected actively with Allah: those relating to Wrath are impersonal. In the one case Allah's Mercy encompasses us beyond our deserts. In the other case our own actions are responsible for the Wrath,—the negative of Grace, Peace, or Harmony.

24. Are there two categories?—Those who are in the darkness of Wrath and those who stray? The first are those who deliberately break Allah's law; the second those who stray out of carelessness or negligence. Both are responsible for their own acts or omissions. In opposition to both are the people who are in the light of Allah's Grace: for His Grace not only protects them from active wrong (if they will only submit their will to Him) but also from straying into paths of temptation or carelessness. The negative *gair* should be construed as applying not to the way, but as describing men protected from two dangers by Allah's Grace.