

Al-Fatiha (1:2)



Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds.

MUHAMMAD HUSAIN TABA TABAI (AR)

QUR'AN: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

People often take the name of one of their great and powerful personalities at the time of doing or beginning a work. By this association, it is believed, the work would achieve success, greatness and blessings; or that it would be a memorial to keep the named one's memory alive for ever. This is also observed in naming a child, a project, a house or an association - they give it the name of a deeply loved or highly respected person, so that his name would continue in this form; for example, a man names his son after his father, in order to perpetuate the father's memory.

This verse runs on the same line. Allah began His speech with His Own name - Great is His name - so that the ideas taught in this chapter be stamped by, and associated with it. Also, it teaches a lesson to mankind, showing them the perfect manner of starting all their talks and actions; it guides them to put the stamp of the divine name on all their activities; doing every work for the sake of Allah, associating it with His good names and attributes. In this way that action would neither be rendered null and void, nor remain incomplete; it has been started in the name of Allah, and negation and annihilation cannot reach that sacred name.

Allah has declared variously in the Qur'an that what is not for His Person must perish, is in vain; He Will proceed to the deeds not done for His sake and shall render them as scattered floating dust; He shall forfeit what they have done and shall nullify their deeds; and that nothing shall remain except His honored Person.

Therefore, what is done for the sake of Allah and performed in His name, shall continue and will not perish. Everything, every work and every affair shall have its share of eternity - as much as it is related to Allah. It is this reality that has been hinted at in the universally accepted tradition of the Prophet: "Every important affair, not begun with the name of Allah, shall remain incomplete...." The word al-abtar (translated here as "incomplete") means a thing whose end is cut off, an animal whose tail is severed.

The preposition "bi" (in, with), in the phrase "In the name of Allah", is related to an implied verb, "I begin". This verse, at this particular place, begins the speech which is a single action; this singleness comes from the singleness of its meaning; that is, the meaning intended to be conveyed, the aim and purpose of the speech.

Allah has mentioned the purpose for which His speech the whole Qur'an - has been revealed: . . . indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety. . . (5:15 -16). There are other verses which show that the aim with which the Book - the speech of Allah - has been sent down is the guidance of the people.

Therefore, the full import of the sentence would be as follows: The guidance, total guidance is begun with the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; He is Allah, Whom the servants return to; He is Beneficent, Who has opened the way of His All-encompassing mercy for believers and disbelievers alike, the mercy which provides them with all that is necessary and good for their existence and life; He is Merciful, Who has reserved His special mercy for the believers, the mercy which ensures their happiness in the life hereafter and their nearness to their Lord. Allah has said: . . . and My mercy encompasses all things; so I will ordain it (specially) for those who guard (against evil) and pay zakat, and those who believe in our signs (7:156). This explanation has been written, putting this verse in the framework of the whole Qur'an, of which it is the first sentence.

Again, Allah has repeatedly mentioned "chapter" in His speech. For example: Say: "Then bring a chapter like this... (10:38); Say: "Then bring ten chapters like it, forged. (11:13); And whenever a chapter is revealed . . . (9:86); (This is) a chapter which We have revealed . . . (24:1). It shows that Allah Himself has divided His speech in various parts, each part being called a chapter. It naturally means that every chapter is a single unit in structure and in fullness of meaning; and that that unity is not found between various verses of a chapter or between one chapter and the other. It necessarily follows that the theme of every chapter is different from the other; every chapter is revealed with a certain aim in view, and when that aim is achieved the chapter comes to its end.

Therefore, the verse, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" coming at the beginning of every chapter, refers to the particular theme of that chapter.

Accordingly, this verse, at the beginning of this chapter of "The Opening", refers also to the theme of this chapter. It appears from its semantic flow that its purpose is to praise Allah and to pledge the believer's servitude (declaring that he worships only Allah and seeks help from Him only) and then to pray for divine guidance. This speech has been uttered by Allah, on behalf of His servant, so that the servant may learn how, by repeating these words, he may show his gratitude to, and servitude before, Allah.

This pledging of servitude is the important work which the servant of Allah intends to do; and which he begins in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. In this context, this verse would mean: In Your name, I pledge my servitude to You.

In this first verse of this chapter, therefore, the preposition, "in", is related to the implied verb, "I begin"; and the aim is to perfect the sincere servitude by addressing the pledge to Allah Himself. Some people have said that the implied verb is "I seek help" (by); although this view is not objectionable, but "I begin" is more appropriate - the chapter explicitly seeks divine help, "and to You do we beseech for help"; therefore, is not necessary in the beginning.

"al-Isim " (= name) is the word that points to the named thing or person. It is derived from as-simah (= sign, identifying mark) or as-sumuww (= height, eminence). In any case, it is the word by which an individual thing or person is spoken of or spoken to. Naturally, it is other than, and separate from, the named thing.

The following is a sample of the academic exercises so much loved by the ancients:

There is a name that means "the person himself seen in the light of an attribute"; such a name is not separate from the named person; it is the person himself. The word al-Alim (= The Knower), one of the divine names, points to the Person of Allah as seen in the light of His attribute of Knowledge. At the same time, it refers to Allah Who cannot be known except by one or the other of His attributes.

Let us explain this matter in another way: "Name" points to the named person; likewise the personal traits and characteristics point to the holder of those traits and characteristics - in this way, we may say that the personal traits are the "names" of the person concerned. "Name", accordingly, can be of two kinds: in words, and in substance.

The direct name is of the second type, that is, the personal trait that points to its own subjects - for example, the "Knowledge" that points to Allah, the holder of the knowledge. And the word "the Knower" is in reality an indirect name - it points to the direct name, that is, the attribute of knowledge, which in its turn directly points to its holder, that is, Allah. "Knowledge" is, thus, the name of Allah, and "the Knower" is "the name of the name".

The above was the result of the academic analysis (or should we say, mental luxury!) mentioned earlier; but such things should not be imposed on language and literature. "Name", according to the "plain Arabic language", means what we have written earlier. There was a lot of controversy going on among the theologians of the early centuries of Islam: whether the name was separate from the named person or not. Such unnecessary polemics is out of place at present times; it is self-evident that "name" and "named" are two things, and not one. We should not waste time and energy in quoting the ancients' arguments and counter-arguments, and in judging who was right.

"Allah" (= the divine name) was originally al-Ilah; the "I"; in the middle was omitted because of frequent use. al-Ilah is derived from alaha (= he worshipped) or from aliha or waliha (= he was bewildered). It is on paradigm of al-fi'al in meaning of al-maf'ul (= object-noun). For example, al-Kitab means al-Maktub (= the written); likewise al-Ilah means al-Ma'luh that is, the One who is worshipped, or the One about whom minds are bewildered.

Quite clearly, it has become the proper name of God. It was commonly used in this meaning in Arabic long before the Qur'an was revealed. The fact that even pre-Islamic Arabs used this name for God, may be inferred from the following verses:

And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: "Allah" (43:87)

... and they say: "this for Allah" - so they assert - "and this is for our associates". (6:136).

Other divine names may be used as adjectives for this name; for example, "the Beneficent and the Merciful Allah"; also, this name is used as subject of the verbs derived from other divine names; for example, "Allah knew", "Allah had mercy", "Allah gave sustenance" etc. But the word, "Allah", is never used as adjective to any other name, nor is the verb derived from it used to describe other names. It is a clear proof that it is the proper name of God.

The divine existence, in as much as Allah is the God of everything, presupposes that He should have all the attributes of perfection; and, as a result, this name points to all perfect attributes. That is why it is said that the name, "Allah", means "the Person Who is the Essential Being, and Who encompasses all the attributes of perfection". But the fact is that it is the proper name of God and no other meaning (except that related to worship or bewilderment) has been taken into consideration here.

"ar-Rahman ar-Rahim (= The Beneficent, the Merciful) are two adjectives derived from ar-rahmah (= mercy).

When you see someone suffering from a deficiency which he cannot remove. by himself, the reaction which you experience and which tells you to provide him with what he needs in order to make up his deficiency, is called mercy. Ultimately, mercy means giving and bestowing to fulfill other's need. It is this latter meaning in which this attribute is used for Allah.

"ar-Rahman" is on a paradigm which is used for magnification and exaggeration. "ar-Rahim" paradigm of as-Sifatu 'l-mushabbah (= perpetual adjective, inseparable attribute). Therefore "ar-Rahman" (translated here as "the Beneficent") relates to that all-encompassing mercy that is bestowed upon the believers and the unbelievers alike. It is used in the Qur'an, mostly in this meaning. Allah says: The Beneficent (God) is firm in power (20:5); Say: 'As for him who remains in error, the Beneficent (God) will surely prolong his length of days . . . (19:75). "ar-Rahim" (translated here as "the Merciful"), on the other hand, is more appropriate for that mercy which shall remain for ever, the perpetual inexhaustible mercy that shall be bestowed on the believers in the life hereafter. Allah says: . . . and He is Merciful to the believers (33:43); surely to them (i.e., the believers) He is Compassionate, Merciful (9:117). That is why it is said that the mercy of "ar-Rahman " is common for the believers and the unbelievers, and that of "ar-Rahim" is reserved for the believers.

QUR'AN: All praise is due to Allah

It has been said that "al-hamd" is to praise someone for a good acquired by his own intention, "al-madh" (also translated as praise) is more general - it is used to praise even that good which someone is given without his will and power. If you praise someone for his benevolence, you may use either word - al-hamd or al-madh but if you want to praise a pearl for its luster, you may use the verb al-madh, but not al-hamd because the pearl has not acquired that luster by its own will and power.

"al" (translated here as "all") in "al-hamd" denotes either species or praise, or each and every praise. The end-result is the same in either case; that is why it has been translated here as "all".

Allah says: That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of every thing (40:62). Whatever there is, is created by Allah. Again, He says: ...Who made good everything that He has created (32:7). Everything is good because it has been created by Allah and is attributed to Him.

In other words, a thing becomes good because it is created by Allah; and everything created by Him is good. Every creature is good and beautiful because Allah has made it so; and every good and beautiful thing is created by Allah, attributed to Him.

Allah says: He is Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all) (39:4); And the faces are humbled before the Living, the Self subsistent God . . . (20:111). In other words, He has created the creatures by His own knowledge, power and will, and not because He was compelled by someone else to do so. Therefore, everything is His own good work, done by His own will.

The above discourse was about Allah's action. Coming to His names, He has said: Allah is He besides Whom there is no god; His are the very best names (20:8); And Allah's are the best names; therefore call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names (7:180). It is clear that Allah is good in His names and good in His actions; and that every good and beauty emanates from Him.

Therefore, Allah is praised for His good names as He is praised for His good actions. Every praise, uttered by any speaker for any good deed is in reality addressed to Allah only; because every good (which is the object of praise) emanates from Him only. In short, to Him belongs the species of the praise and all and every praise.

The verse: "Thee do we worship", shows that the whole chapter is revealed on behalf of man. Allah teaches him in this chapter how to praise his Lord and how to show his allegiance to, and humility towards, Him. And the phrase, "All praise is due to Allah", further strengthens this inference, as will be seen in the next paragraph.

The praise means to attribute, to ascribe; and Allah has declared that He is above all that His servants ascribe to Him. He has said: Hallowed be Allah (for freedom) from what they ascribe, except the servants of Allah, freed (from sins) (37:159 - 160). This declaration is general and unconditional; and it is further proved by the fact that not a single verse in the Qur'an ascribes the action of "praise" to anyone except Allah and some of the prophets (who were doubtlessly freed from sins).

Allah addresses Nuh (Noah - a.s.) in these words: . . . Say: "All praise is due to Allah who delivered us from the unjust people" (23:28).

And He quotes Ibrahim (Abraham - a.s.) as saying: "Praise be to Allah, Who gave me in old age Isma'il and Ishaq (I4:39).

Also, He told His Prophet, Muhammad (S) in several places, And say: "Praise be to Allah. (27:93).

Further, he says about Dawud and Sulayman (peace be on both of them): . . . and they both said: "Praise be to Allah. . . " (27:15).

Another exception is of the people of the Paradise and they also are freed from spite and rancor as well as from vain and sinful words: . . . and the last of their cry shall be: "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds" (10: 10).

As for other creatures, the Qur'an never says that they "praise" Allah - they always "glorify Allah with His praise". Allah says: . . . and the angels declare His glory with the praise Of their Lord. . (42:5); and the thunder declares His glory with His praise . . . (13:13); and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise . . . (17:44).

In all these verses "praise" is preceded by glorifying; rather "glorifying" is the main verb and "with praise" is only a clause, attached to it.

None except Allah may comprehend the beauty and perfection of His work, nor can anyone else understand the beauty and perfection of His names and attributes. Allah says: they do not comprehend Him in knowledge . . . (20:110).

In this background, if they were to praise Him it would mean that they had comprehended Him in their knowledge; in other words, Allah would be surrounded by their limited understanding, confined within the boundary of their comprehension. Therefore, they were careful enough to first declare His glory from all the limits of their comprehension, before starting His praise. Allah says: . . . surely Allah knows and you do not know (16:74).

So far as His purified servants are concerned, He treats their utterance of praise as though He Himself has said it, because they are free from sins and defects.

From the above discourse, it becomes crystal-clear what the good manner of servitude demands: The servant should praise his Lord in exactly the same words the Lord Himself has chosen for Himself; no deviation from it would be tolerable, as the Prophet has said in a universally accepted tradition; *I do not enumerate Your praise; You are as You Yourself has Praised Yourself.*

Therefore, the divine word, "All praise is due to Allah", is a sort of a training to the servant - a training without which he could not know how to declare the praise of Allah.

QUR'AN: the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgment

"ar-Rabb" is the Master Who manages the affairs of His servant. The word, thus connotes the idea of ownership. Ownership (in our social structure) is a special relationship of one thing with another - a relationship that allows the owner to do with the owned thing as he wishes. When we say, "This thing belongs to us", it shows that it has a special relationship with us that allows us to do with it as we wish; had it not been for this relationship, we would not have had this authority over it.

In this social context, it is an idea which the society has laid down but which has no existence outside imagination. This idea is derived from another real and positive concept, which too is called "ownership": Our limbs and faculties, like the sight, the hearing, the hands and the feet, belong to us - they exist because of our own existence, they have no independent existence, they depend on us for their existence and continuity, and we use them as we like. This is the real ownership.

The ownership that may be attributed to Allah is the real one, and not that which is based on subjective outlook. Obviously the real ownership cannot be disjoined from management of the affairs of the owned thing. The owned thing depends on the owner in its existence, as well as in all affairs related to its existence. Allah is "ar-Rabb " the Lord of everything because the Lord is the owner who manages the affairs of, and looks after, the owned thing - and only Allah has this attribute.

"al-'Alamin" is the plural of al-'alam (= the world) which literally means, "what one is known with". This paradigm is used for "instrument", like al-qalab (the mold, the form), al-khatam the seal, (the instrument of sealing) and at-taba' (the stamp, the impress).

The word al-'alam is used for the universe - the whole creation taken together. Also it is used for each genes or species taken separately, for example, the inorganic world, the vegetable world, the animal world, the human world. It is also used for a class of a species, like the Arab world, the African world etc. This last meaning is more appropriate in the context of these verses: The verses that enumerate the good names of Allah until they come to "the Master of the Day of Judgment". The judgment is reserved for mankind alone or together with the jinn. Therefore, the "worlds" should refer to the worlds of the human beings and the jinn, that is, their various groups. The word al'alam (the worlds) has been used in this sense in other Qur'anic verses too. Allah says:..... and has chosen you above the women of the worlds (3:42);..... so that he may be a warner to the worlds (25:1); What! do you commit an indecency which any one in the worlds has not done before you (7:80).

"The Master of the Day of Judgment": We have explained above the meaning of ownership, that is, mastership. The word "al-malik" is derived from al-milk (possession, to possess). Some reciters have read this word as "al-malik" (the sovereign, the king); it is derived from al-mulk (country; kingdom). The king is the one who has the authority to manage his nation's affairs; nevertheless he does not own the nation or the country. In other words, he holds the authority for management and administration.

The reciters have given the reasons for their preference. of either recitation. But the fact remains that Allah is the Master as well as the King, and both words are equally correct, so far as the divine authority is concerned. Looking at it from linguistic point of view, the word, "King" is generally used in context of time and period. It is said, "the King of that time"; but they do not say "the master of that time", as it would be stretching the meaning too far. In this verse, Allah has used this word in reference to a certain "day"; therefore, linguistically, it would be more proper to say, "the King of the Day of Judgement". Moreover, Allah has used the word, "Kingdom" in context of the same day in other verse: To whom belongs the kingdom of this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all) (40:16).

TRADITIONS

ar-Ridha (a.s.) said in explanation of the divine words: In the name of Allah:

It means: 'I mark my soul with one of - the marks of Allah',
and it is (His) worship." He was asked: "What is the
'mark'?" He said; "The brand.
(Uyunu 'I-akhbar and Ma'ani 'I-akhbar)

The author says: This meaning emanates from the explanation given earlier that the preposition "in", herein connotes beginning. As the servant marks his worship with the name of Allah, he brands his soul - real doer of the worship - with one of the divine marks.

It is narrated in at-Tahdhib from as-Sadiq (a.s.), and in 'Uyunu 'I-akhbar and at-Tafsir of al-Ayyashi from ar-Ridha (a.s.) that this verse *is nearer to the Greatest name of Allah than the iris of the eye is from its white.*

The author says: This tradition will be explained when we shall talk about the Greatest name.

Amiru 'l-mu'minin (a.s.) said that (this verse) is from the chapter of The Opening; and verily the Apostle of Allah used to recite it and count it as one of its verses, and he used to say,

The Opening of the Book is 'the seven oft-repeated'
(verses).
(Uyunu 'I-akhbar)

The author says: This matter has also been narrated by the Sunni narrators. ad-Dar-qutni narrates from Abu Hurayrah that he said:

The Apostle of Allah said: When you recite (the chapter of) The Praise (i.e., The Opening), you shall recite, In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, because it is the source of the Book and (is) the seven oft-repeated (verses), and, In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful is one of its verses.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

What have they done? May Allah destroy them! They proceeded to the greatest verse of the Book of Allah, and thought that it would be an innovation (unlawful act) if they recited it loudly!
(al-Khisal)

al-Baqir (a.s.) said:

They stole the most exalted verse of the Book of Allah, (that is) In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. It should be recited at the start of every big or small work, so that it may be blessed.

The author says: There are numerous traditions of this meaning coming from the Imams of Ahlu 'I-bayt (a.s.). All of them prove that the verse (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) is a part of every chapter, except the ninth ("Repentance"); and the Sunni traditions also prove it:

Anas (ibn Malik) said that the Apostle of Allah said:

Just now a chapter has been sent down to me. Then he began reciting, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful."
(as-Sahih, Muslim)

Abu Dawud narrates from Ibn 'Abbas (and they say that its chain is "correct") that he said:

Verily, the Apostle of Allah did not know the separation of a chapter (and in another narrative it is 'end of a chapter') until came down to him: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

The author says: This matter has been narrated by Shi'ite narrators also from al-Baqir (a.s.).

It is reported in al-Kafi, at-Tawhid, Ma'ani 'I-akhbar and at-Tafsir of al-'Ayyashi that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, inter alia, in a tradition:

And Allah is God of everything, ar-Rahman (the Beneficent) for all His creations, ar-Rahim (the Merciful) especially for the believers.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) has said:

ar-Rahman (the Beneficent) is a special name with a general attribute; and ar-Rahim (the Merciful) is a general name with a special attribute.

The author says: The preceding commentary may explain why the mercy of "the Beneficent" is general for the believer and the unbeliever alike, and why that of "the Merciful" is reserved for the believer only. The description given in this tradition that "the Beneficent is a special name with a general attribute, and the Merciful is a general name with a special attributed, perhaps this refers to the fact that the mercy of the Beneficent is limited to this world and is common for the whole creation; and that of the Merciful is common to this world and the hereafter but is reserved for the believer.

In other words, the mercy of the Beneficent is reserved for the creative blessings that are bestowed on believers and unbelievers alike; and that of the Merciful is common to the creative and legislative blessings (the latter opening the way to happiness and felicity) and is reserved for believers, because only the bounties bestowed upon will last for ever, and the (good) end is for guarding (against evil) and for piety.

It is narrated in Kashfu 'I-ghummah that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

A mule of my father was lost. He said: if Allah brought it back to me, I would thank Him with Praises He would pleased with.' Shortly afterwards, it was brought before him with its saddle and rein (intact). When he sat on it and arrayed his clothes, he raised his head towards heaven and said: 'Praise be to Allah.'

He said nothing more.

Then he said: 'I did not omit nor did I leave out, anything; I have declared that all Praises are for Allah, Powerful and Great is He!; because there is no praise but it is included in this (formula).

It is narrated in Uyunu 'l-akhbar that 'Ali (a.s.) was asked about its explanation. He said:

Verily, Allah has explained to His servants broadly some of His bounties on them, as they can not know all His bounties in detail - they are beyond enumeration and description. Therefore, He said: Say: 'All praise is for Allah on what He has bestowed upon us.' "

The author says: The Imam points to the fact mentioned earlier that the praise, in this verse, is from the servant, and that Allah has revealed it to teach him the manners of servitude and worship.

FROM PHILOSOPHICAL POINT OF VIEW

Reason tells us that an effect, as well as all its characteristics and affairs, depend on its cause; whatever perfection it may be having, is a shadow of the cause. If beauty or goodness has any existence, then its perfect and independent entity is for Allah only, as He is the Cause of all causes. The praise and thank is addressed, in reality, to the cause which creates the perfection and excellence referred to. As every perfection is caused by Allah, every praise and thank, in reality, is addressed to Allah. Therefore, all praise is for, and due to Allah.

MIR AHMED ALI (AR)

AL HAMDU

Alhamdu means that (all) praise, thanks, gratitude, be to Allah alone, not to any one else, from the beginning of the universe to its end, not under compulsion, but because He alone, and none else, deserves to be praised, not only for the fulfilment of his particular desires but also, mainly, for all the bounties and blessings made available to man in his existence.

The love of the merciful for His creation is so deep and fulfilling that no compensation, even in the form of gratitude, can be offered to Him. In fact He needs no return. The divine mercy is independent of gratitude. It reaches and covers all the created beings whether the creatures show gratitude or not for the benefits and bounties they make use of and enjoy. The smallest bounty is an unconditional favour. Man does not deserve it, nor has he any right to claim any favour from the Lord. It is the all-embracing mercy of the merciful Lord which reaches one and all, whether any creature asks for it or not, whether the recipient acknowledges it or not.

A person likes to be praised if he accomplishes or acquires something extraordinary, novel or very important, after investing his best efforts, but the good in Allah is with Him. He has not acquired it.

He is goodness itself in its fullness and perfection. He is not in need of praise. In a prayer, He is praised, only to make the pray-er love and cherish the attributes which are praised, because as a matter of course, he would like to possess the attributes which he is praising.

The all-knowing Lord-nourisher is fully aware of the needs and wants of all His creatures more than they themselves know. He bestows His favours and bounties without receiving petitions from them, yet to educate, train and discipline the mankind; prayer, in which He is praised, is necessary, so that man remains attached with the merciful creator, while enjoying the divine bounties, conscious of the absolute sovereignty of the Lord of bounties and grace.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

To find out the truth in connection with the praise and the praising (hamd), the question as to who praises whom, must be answered. Man can praise Allah if his existence is presumed to be as eternal as Allah, whereas, in fact, it is Allah who created man and taught him how to praise. Truly, the praise as well as the praising both belong to Allah. Allah is the hamid, the praiser, and also the mahmud, the praised. There is none else other than Allah who is the subject as well as the object of the praise, and in this sense no one can share His praise. This is implied in the preposition li (for), which signifies the exclusive authorisation.

Hamd, adoration through praise, takes the place of gratitude to be expressed for getting favours and bounties. Man, by nature, shows his readiness to yield to love and compassion, even to the extent of unconditional surrender. To depend upon the co-operation and help of others is human. When he finds that someone, attached to him, is taking interest in his well-being, he is automatically drawn to him. His desire for a happy life makes him go after that which helps and protects, and avoid that which he finds harmful to his existence and welfare.

By realising that praise, in any form or content, must be for Allah, and for no one else, and that Allah alone deserves every praise and adoration, man is freed from the fear of awesome tyranny, corruption and servitude which he presumed that the dreadful and false gods would inflict upon him. On the contrary now he knows that his real master is the Lord of beneficence and mercy whom he approaches through His praise. He is free to get as near to Him as he likes in order to earn more and more from the bountiful benefactor who Himself is ready to bestow favours and bounties, in abundance, on the sincere seeker and on those on whose behalf He is beseeched.

The Arabic word shukr implies gratitude for some particular favour, whereas hamd, without reference to any particular quality, is an objective gratitude, for all that is good and gracious, profitable and advantageous. It may also involve the idea of free, unrestricted and unqualified admiration.

But, again, admiration refers to the Arabic word *madh* which is used both for the animate as well as the inanimate objects, without necessarily implying that existence of the qualities admired depends on the conscious will of the object, in which case admiration will relate to the qualities admired, not to the possessor of those qualities. Allah is never praised in this sense. The prefix *al* confirms that *hamd* is for no one but Allah who alone, not merely on account of the manifestations of the divine attributes, but because He is the sole owner of those glorious qualities, deserves to be praised; identifying His self-existent absolute self. The qualities belong only to Him alone, to none else, and it is so for all times since eternity, and will be so till eternity. So, in this sense the English word "praise" should be understood and used as a translation of *hamd*.

Hamd (the praise) is Allah's. It has no beginning and no end. We, the created beings, do our best, within our limitations, to give expression to the "real praise" (*hamd*). His *hamd*, as His grace, is unlimited and continuous. No one can praise the merciful even for a whole life-time and say that justice has been done, because every time one gives thanks to Allah he inhales and also exhales, drawing in the good life-giving air and exhaling the bad air, two bounties he is receiving for which only once can he say "I thank the bountiful Lord". It is impossible to thank Allah for the innumerable bounties He has put at the disposal of man, right inside his body, and in the world where he lives as an individual as well as a member of the community. Even the thanks and praises he offers to the bountiful have been taught to him by the Lord of the worlds. Therefore, every creature is, all the time under the obligation of the bountiful grace of Allah.

By praising, we reach the stage where the infinite goodness of our Lord purges out of us the taste for evil and creates in us the eagerness to get nearer and nearer to Him to earn His mercy which purifies us and reflects in us the divine attributes.

RABBUL ALAMIN

Rabb in Arabic stands for nourisher, cherisher, and sustainer. According to Raghīb, an Arab lexicologist, the word rabb signifies "the fostering of a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until its goal of completion".

Our Lord is He who gave unto everything its form, and then guided it aright. (TAHA; 50)

This is rahmah, mercy, from the rabbul alamin.

The love and mercy of Allah towards His creatures surpasses, in quantity and quality, the love of both the father and mother put together. From the birth to the last breath everything in the universe depends upon the rububiyat, the nourishing, cherishing, sustaining and protecting aspect of the mercy of the Lord of the worlds. No single English word to give the meaning of the word rabb could be found, but "Lord" seems to be the only alternative if readers remember the above noted description whenever the word "Lord" appears in our text.

RUBUBIYAT

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

Rububiyat speaks of another attribute - lutf, meaning tenderness and refinement in diffusing through every one's mind and feelings to know the needs and make available the necessary means of satisfaction. This position gives authority to exercise legislative powers which, in fact, justifies the establishment of the office of nabuwat and imamat.

By making Allah known as the rabbul alamin, Islam has disclosed the truth to mankind that He is the Lord of everything in the universe, be that human, animal, vegetable, mineral, perceptible or imperceptible, visible or invisible, near or far, in the earth or in the heavens, or in between them. With infinite power, able to do all things, the all-wise almighty creator of matter and meaning is a supreme sovereign in every aspect of His absolute authority. His independent will extends to and covers all kinds of the worlds created by Him.

The five "mystic" classifications of the worlds are as under:

Material or physical NASUT

Metaphysical MALAKUT or supernatural

Spiritual JABARUT

Divine LAHUT

Imperceptible and GHAYBUL GHAYUB unknowable

The rububiyat begins to operate as early as the will to create a being takes effect, and continues to nurture the created being with love, care and never-ceasing vigilance, providing all its needs according to the changes it goes through. It is like a self-imposed duty to guide the creature to make conscious efforts to avoid harm and avail profit.

"Verily, We have created everything by (the right) measure". (QAMAR: 49)

Things necessary for the living beings, all over the universe, in all times, are available to satisfy various wants and needs. The quality and quantity of the "resources" have been determined according to the collective requirements of all that which has been created. Some things are rare, some things are plentiful, but at all events nothing is less or more. A thoughtful study of the complex of "things" brings the obvious fact to light that there is only one single owner master who has set the wonderfully harmonious working of the universe in motion, allowed life to be created, and in addition, enabled each and every creation to put into effect the aim of its being brought into existence.

The heat of the sun changes the water into a mass of fog and the wind takes it to the sky in the shape of rolling clouds and drives them over various parts of the earth; and when the stored water in the clouds melts on account of the solar glow, it rains all over the earth. The earth receives the water and grows "food" for all the living beings. Every being finds, all that which serves to maintain life on earth, ready, as soon as it comes into being, duly provided and arranged in the required quantity and quality. The milk, a new-born baby feeds on, is ready in the mother's breasts well in advance of its birth.

The merciful rabbul alamin has provided manifold bounties for the survival and happiness of the incomprehensibly large number of the members of each of the innumerable species in the universe. There is perfect harmony and undisturbable control in the continuous working of nature. Each creature, perfectly formed and fully equipped, has an inherent capacity to make use of the available "resources of the bounties", and obtain its own means of sustenance from one complete regular system. This orderly arrangement, according to the Quran, takes effect by means of taqdir and hidayat.

Taqdir means "consider a thing well; fix in measure and quantity, render possible".

Imam Ali ibn abi Talib had said:

Allah had conditioned and circumstanced the operation of all that has been created under precise (self) regulating laws, in the sphere of time and space, made their unlike, complex and diverse dispositions agree and fit well together, implanted and infused rhythm and balance and co-ordination in their nature, to give them the inbuilt discipline that follows an orderly system. (NAHJ AL BALAGHA)

The appropriate assignment of a prescribed condition is taqdir, a precise system of laws which cannot be tampered with or led astray outside its logical course by any force except by almighty Allah, who is omnipotent and able to do all things. The perfect working of the well defined plan under definite laws depends upon His justice. As the 26th verse of Ale Imran says: "In Thy hand is all good", the almighty Lord through these precise laws, governing the operation of creation, has provided the living beings all the opportunities to make effort and win success by relying upon them.

The whole complex of the immeasurable universe is working in perfect harmony, keeping the living beings inhabiting it, and the living conditions and circumstances provided for them, in co-operative accord. No one can make the slightest attempt to disturb the "predestined nature of creation". The law of cause and effect can never be made to stop its inevitable function. The various elements can never do otherwise than as they have been directed under the divine laws of the nature. In this sense the meaning of the word taqdir should be understood.

Hidayat means "right guidance". All the living beings, all over the universe, are motivated to exercise their free choice and do that which is meaningful and profitable, and avoid that which is absurd and harmful, by discovering, understanding and making use of the "controlled by precise laws" environment.

Taqdir governs every natural phenomenon and hidayat directs all the activities of the living beings. Their combined application is universal. Every being in the universe is so perfectly designed that each fulfils its own individual needs from one and the same environment. But in order to refer to the particular aspect of sustenance and preservation which the nourishing and preserving Lord justly and mercifully supplies for the benefit of His creatures, a few typical examples are sufficient.

A newly born child at once sucks the mother's breast. The roots of the plants and trees absorb from the earth only that which helps their growth, leaving out the unessential, notwithstanding its presence in the soil. As soon as a fish is born it swims. Every creature functions under the divine guidance.

Glorify the name of your Rabb (the Lord) the most high;

He who creates then fashions in the proportion.

And He who has planned, then guided, (A'LA: 1, 2, 3)

The whole universe has been designed, created and guided (to function according to the divine laws) by one single authority who is eternal., almighty, all-knowing, all-just, benevolent and merciful.

The perfect unity and harmony found in the sustainment of the creation points towards the supreme authority of one Lord of the worlds. There is no room for anyone to claim the position of a false god or goddess because for sustenance he or she also depends on the rabbul alamin. So all unreasonable beliefs in the false imaginary deities are destroyed for ever.

(He is) the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that which is in between them. (SHU-ARA: 23, 24)

Alamin means the heavens and the earth and that which is in between them. According to the Quran, out of the seven heavens, the lowest is the starry space (sama ud dunya), above which, there are six heavens, not physical in nature, but controlling the physical region as the intermediary stage to the ultimate.

The physical directions, up and down, are relative definitions. The ultimate, the goal or the termination is the Lord of the worlds. The most sublime being, who encompasses and penetrates the whole universe, is the absolute high (up).

They ask you of "the hour"; whereto (is) its anchorage? Wherein are you (concerned with) its notion? Unto your Lord (alone) is its termination, (NAZI-AT: 42-44)

The most finite and least encompassing and penetrating or the lowest (down) is the water, as described by the Quran.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

The above noted verses give the most credible explanation of the anchorage of all "efforts" or "strives". It is the sa-at or the qiyamat. As explained above the absolute ups and downs is a guidance for the solution of many theological terms of utmost importance such as mi-raj, qiyamat, the angelic spheres and the other abstract realms.

By introducing Allah as the rabbul alamin, Islam has warned and alerted mankind not to do injustice to any creation of Allah. He will punish the unjust offender because even the smallest degree of injustice displeases the just Lord of the worlds. Also, this term makes man realise that Allah is the master not only of mankind or animate and visible objects but He is the Lord of everything in the universe - human or animal, vegetable or mineral, visible or invisible, perceptible or imperceptible, near or far.

AYATULLAH KAMAL FAQIH IMANI AND SEVERAL SCHOLARS

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

Contents of the Sura

The Holy phrase 'In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful' / bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim / is, in fact, mentioned both at the onset of the Qur'an and at the beginning of every Sura, except Sura 9, (Sura Taubah - Repentance) . And, since the purpose of Allah's Word, i.e. the whole Qur'an, is to guide people; as Sura Al-Ma'idah, No. 5, verses 15-16 say : "...Indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah ", " With it Allah guideth him who follows His pleasure to the ways of peace and safety ..."; therefore, this guidance, being a grant and a fundamental principle, begins with Allah's Holy Name.

This Sura, among all Suras of the Qur'an, has an extraordinary radiance which originates from the following merits :

1. The Tone of the Sura:

This Sura, The Opening, in comparison with other Suras of the Qur'an regarding its tone and melody, has a particular style which is clearly different and extraordinary. The other Suras contain instructions from Allah, Who gives commands and admonishments to His servants, but, in this Sura, His words are uttered on behalf of the servants. In other words, in this Sura, Allah has taught His servants how to supplicate and speak to Him, simply and without a mediator.

2. Al-Fatihah, the Basis of the Qur'an:

It is narrated that the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) has said :

" By the One, in Whose hand is my soul, Allah has not sent down a similar Sura to this Sura (Al-Fatihah) , neither in the Turah, nor in the Gospel, nor in

34 the Psalms, nor even in the Qur'an, and it is Umm-ul-Kitab ";(1) which means that it is the basis and origin of all excellence.

In fact, besides referring to the Resurrection, this Sura presents facts concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence, Unity of Attributes, Unity of Divine Acts, and Unity of Worship. It is the essence of the whole meaning of the Qur'an.

It is narrated from Hadrat Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) that :

" All secrets of Allah are in Divine Books; and the contents of all those Divine Books are comprised in the Qur'an;and what is found in the Qur'an is condensed in Sura Al-Fatihah, and what is in Al-Fatihah is gathered in /bismillah /, and what is in / bismillah / is concentrated in /b/, (the first letter of ' Bism-il-lah ') ..."
(2)

Based on the entirety of great commentators' statements, it is understood that this tradition indicates clearly the importance of both the Holy Qur'an and /bismillah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/ in which science and knowledge, from the beginning to the end, is comprised. The interpreter and elucidator of these sciences is the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) , and after him there are his true vicegerents including Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) . (3)

3. Al-Fatihah, Magnificent Honour of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) :
Sura Al-Fatihah, more so than the other Suras in the Holy Qur'an, was revealed to the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) as a great bounty. It stands on a par with the whole Qur'an. The seven verses in the Sura sum up the whole Qur'an : "And We have bestowed upon thee the Seven Oft-repeated (verses) and the Grand Qur'an " , (Sura Al-Hijr, No. 15, verse 87) . This meaning is also referred to in a narration from Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) quoting the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) tradition who said : " Verily, Allah, the Exalted, has bestowed (His) favours on me particularly for ' The Opening ' (Al-Fatihah) and has positioned it on a par with the whole Grand Qur'an, and surely Fatihat-ul-Kitab (the Opening of the Qur'an) is the dearest (item) in the treasures of the 'Arsh, (Throne of

(1) Majm'-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 17

(2) Makhzan-ul-'Irfan, Commentary, vol. 1, p. 28 & Masabih-ul-Anwar vol. 1,p.435

(3) Manhajus-Sadiqin, vol. 1, p. 90

35 Heaven) .(1)

4. The Importance of its Recitation :

The recitation of this Sura, because of its extreme importance, is frequently emphasized in Islamic traditions and narrations. As for its virtue, it is narrated from the holy Prophet(p.b.u.h.) that: " The reward of any Muslim who recites the Sura ' Opening ', is like that of a person who has recited two thirds of the Qur'an,

and so much reward would he receive as if he has given every believing Muslim, man or woman, a free will offering ". (2)

5. The Titles of the Sura :

There are ten titles given to this Sura, as taken from Islamic narrations and commentary books, thus: Fatihat-ul-Kitab, Umm-ul-Kitab, Umm-ul-Qur'an, Sab'-ul-Mathani, Al-Wafiyah, Al-Kafiyah, Ash-Shafiyah, Al-Asas, As-Salat, and Al-Hamd. (3)

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(1) Al-Burhan Fi Tafsir-il-Qur'an, vol. one,p. 21; & Atyab-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p.83

(2) Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. one, p. 17 .

(3) Rauh-ul-Janan, Abul-Futuh Razi, Commentary, vol. one, p. 16

" In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful."

Commentary :

It is a custom among most people of the world to recite the name of one of their great and very beloved personalities that the worthiness of their work might be elevated. That is, they relate that work to that personality from the very beginning of their endeavour.

Among all beings, the One Who is eternal is only Allah, and, therefore, everything and every activity should begin with His Holy Name. It should be enveloped in His Light, and help should be always asked only from Him. So, in the first verse of the Qur'an, we recite 'Bism-illah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim', (In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful) . This action should not be done only with the tongue, but it should be done truly and meaningfully, because this kind of connection with Him sets work in the right direction and keeps it far

38 from any deviation. For this very reason, such a work will certainly be successful and blessed.

The holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) , in a tradition, has said : " Any important work that begins without mentioning / bismillah /, will remain invalid. " (1)

After narrating this tradition, Hadrat Aeir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) added: " For every action that a person wants to do, he/she should recite / bismillah-ir-

rahman-ir-rahim /, which means that he/she begins the action with the Name of Allah, and every action that begins with the Name of Allah is blessed. " (2)

On the excellence and importance of / bism-il-lah /, it is narrated from Ali-ibn-Musa-r-Rida (a.s.) , who has said thus: " (The holy phrase) 'Bism-il-lah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim' is closer to 'the Exalted Name of Allah' than the pupil is to the white of the eye ". (3)

Again, Ibn-Abbas narrates from the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) thus: As soon as a teacher tells a child to say 'Bism-il-lah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim' and the child says it, Allah records immunity (from fire) for the child,his or her parents and the teacher". (4)

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has said: " No Holy Book ever came down from heaven but that it began with 'Bism-il-lah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim' ". (5)

In 'Khisal' by Shaykh Saduq it is cited that Imam Baqir (a.s.) has said: "... When we begin an action, great or small, it is appropriate to recite /bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/ and that action may be blessed ". (6)

In short, the stability and permanence of an action is due to this very relation to Allah.

The phrase / bism-il-lah / at the start of the Sura, teaches us to seek the help of Allah from His pure perfect Essence when we begin any action. That is why Allah, the Exalted, in the first verses revealed to the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) instructed him to ö initiating the

(1) Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 76, chapter 58, p. 305 (according to ' Tafsir Al-Bayan ', vol. 1, p. 461)

(2) Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 76, chapter 58

(3) Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 18

(4) Ibid

(5) Al-Mahasin by Barghi p. 40 Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 92, p. 234

(6) Tafsir-us-Safi, vol. 1, p. 70 Al-Mizan, vol. 1, p. 26 (Persian version)

39 proclamation of Islam ö perform this great task with the Name of Allah: " Proclaim in the Name of your Lord..."(Sura Al-'Alaq,No.96, verse 1) ; and the words of Noah (a.s.) to his followers, at the time of the Flood are: " So he said: 'Embark ye on the Ark, in the Name of Allah, whether it moves or be at rest! ... " (Sura Hud, No. 11, verse 41) . Again, Soloman's letter to the Queen of Sheba begins, thus: " It is from Soloman, and is (as follows) :'In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful' " , (Sura An-Naml, No. 27, verse 30) .

Based on the same principle, all of the Suras of the Holy Qur'an, (except Sura At-Taubah, No. 9) begin with /bism-il-lah/ (1) in order to pursue the essential aim of guiding man and leading him to prosperity with success, far from getting a taste of defeat.

In any event, when we begin our work with reliance upon the Supreme Power of Allah, Whose Power is above all power, we feel, psychologically speaking, far more powerful; therefore, we may be more confident. We may try more, be more persevering, and more courageous in challenging with difficulties, more hopeful, and, similarly, our intentions and the essence of our actions may be more purified. At the time of beginning any affair, reciting the Name of Allah is the secret to its success.

To whatever extent we further explain this verse, it will still be seen insufficient, because, according to a narration, Hadrat Ali (a.s.) , regarding the commentary of the verse, talked to Ibn-Abbas from the beginning of a night until the next morning, but it was only for the commentary of /b/, the first letter of /bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/.(2)

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Explanation :

Is the Phrase 'Bism-il-lah' a Part of Each Sura ?

Almost all Islamic scholars unanimously hold the opinion that / bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/ is, as was stated before, a part of Sura

(1) The phrase /bism-il-lah/ is used as a contraction of /bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/.

(2) Makhzan-ul-'Irfan, vol. 1, p. 28

40 Al-Fatihah and, also, of the other Suras of the Qur'an (except Sura At-Taubah, No. 9) . In essence, the inclusion of /bism-il-lah/ at the beginning of all Suras of

the Holy Qur'an, except the above mentioned one, is a vital piece of evidence bearing witness to this very fact, and the belief is so firm that no change has been made in the Qur'an and nothing has been added to it since it was revealed to the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.) .

Mu'awiyat-ibn-'Ammar, one of the companions of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) , said that he had asked the Imam whether he should say /bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim / at the beginning of Sura Al-Fatihah when he stood for prayer, and he (a.s.) replied: " Yes ". He had questioned him (a.s.) , again, as to if he should recite /bism-il-lah/ when Sura Al-Fatihah ended and before reciting the next Sura. Then, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) , again, answered: " Yes ". (1)

Dar Qutni, a Muslim learned researcher, according to a sound document, narrates from Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) that someone asked him (a.s.) : " What is As-Sab'-al-Mathani (Seven Verses) ?" " It is Sura Al-Hamd ", he (a.s.) answered. The man said: " Sura Al-Hamd consists of six verses ". He (a.s.) replied: " 'Bism-illah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim ' is also one verse. " (2)

Moreover, Muslims have always preserved the practice of reciting / bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim / at the beginning of every Sura (except Sura 9) when reciting the Holy Qur'an, and it has been proven, on numerous accounts, that the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) used to recite it, too.

It has been said that Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) was asked to say whether / bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim / was a part of Sura Al-Fatihah. He (a.s.) answered: " Yes, the Messenger of Allah used to recite it and considered it one verse (of the verses) of the Sura, and he said that ' Fatihat-ul-Kitab (The Opening) is the same as ' Sab'-al-Mathani ' (seven verses) "(3)

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(1) Al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 312

(2) Al-Itqan, vol. 1, p. 136

(3) Atyab-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 92

41

Allah, the Most Inclusive Name of God

The term / ism / in the phrase / bism-il-lah /, as men of letters in Arabic literature say, is originally derived from / sumuww / with the meaning of 'height, elevation'. The reason why any 'noun' is called by an ' appellation ' is that after

choosing to call a 'noun' by the particular given 'name' (ism) , the hidden meaning of the expression appears, and the sense of the 'name' is elevated, therefore forsaking meaninglessness.

In the phrase / bism-il-lah /, the word Allah is the most complete and comprehensive name among the Lord's many names. This is because each of Allah's names, which are found in the Holy Qur'an, as well as in other Islamic sources, truly reflects one particular aspect of Allah's Attributes. In other words, the only name that refers to all of His Attributes of Glory and Beauty, is Allah. That is why other names are often used as modifiers for the word 'Allah'. For example, " Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful", (Sura Al-Baqarah, No. 2, verse 226) , refers to Allah's forgiveness; " ...Allah heareth and knoweth all things ", (No. 2, verse 227) shows His being well-acquainted with what is audible and what comes to pass, respectively; " And Allah sees well all that you do", (Sura Al-Hujurat, No. 49, verse 18) states that He has information on every thing that is done by anyone; " Surely Allah is He Who gives (all) sustenance, the Lord of Power, steadfast (for ever) ", (Sura Ath-Thariyat, No. 51, verse 58) points to His giving sustenance to all creatures and, at the same time, discloses that He is powerful and firm in His actions.

And, finally, Sura Al-Hashr, No. 59, verses 23,24 reveals some other Attributes of Allah. The terms ' Creator ' and ' Evolver ' are suggestive of His creativeness and inventiveness, and ' Bestower of Forms ' indicates His giving shapes: " Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god;öthe Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection) , the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Supreme (in creating all creatures)" " He is Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of Forms, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names... ."

Another piece of evidence which is a clear indication that this Name, Allah, is all-inclusive is that the acceptance of Faith, in Islam, is

42 possible only by reciting the sentence: / la ilaha illallah / " There is no god, but Allah "; and each of the other phrases such as: ' All-Knowing ' or 'Creator ', or ' Bestower of Sustenance ', and the like, alone, is not sufficient enough to proclaim as evidence of Monotheism in Islam. And, that is why in religions other than Islam, the God of Muslims is referred to as ' Allah ', because it is only Muslims who use ' Allah ' to refer to what they do worship.

* * * *

Allah's General and Specific Mercy:

The words 'ar-Rahman' (The Beneficent) and 'ar-Rahim' (The Merciful) are adjectives, both derived from 'ar-Rahmah' (Mercy) . The former word, the

Beneficent, as it is popularly recognized among some commentators, refers to the General Mercy of Allah which is bestowed upon all creatures, among them are the believers and the disbelievers, good-doers and evildoers. And, as we can see, the Divine bounties of life are distributed everywhere and all human beings enjoy the endless merits therein. This is their sustenance. They draw it out of the abundant blessings encompassing the whole world of existence.

The word 'ar-Rahim' (The Merciful) refers to that Specific Mercy that is endowed upon the believing, obedient servants alone. The believers, because of their true belief, good actions, and faithful active obedience, deserve this special, exclusive mercy, of which the disbelievers are deprived.

The particular fact ratifying this topic is that the word Rahman is always used in the Qur'an with the meaning of an infinite form of mercy, which is a sign of its generality, while the word Rahim is sometimes used with the meaning of a finite form, which is a sign of its specificity such as: "... And He is full of Mercy to the Believers ", (Sura Al-Ahzab, No. 33, verse 43) . And it is sometimes used in an infinite form such as in Sura Al-Fatihah.

A narration from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says: " Allah is the God of all things and is Beneficent to all His creatures, and He is Merciful, especially

43 to the believers." (1)

Therefore, at the moment that we initiate any action, when we begin with the Name of Allah, we must seek His Mercy, General and Specific Mercy, both.

It is interesting to note that this power, which has a broad concept much the same as gravitational pull, and has the ability to draw hearts closer together, is the very Attribute of Mercy. This Attribute of Mercy is the very means by which men can attain a close relationship with the Creator, also.

That is why true believers, when reciting the holy verse /bism-il-lah-ir-rahman-ir-rahim/, at the beginning of their affairs, detach their hearts from everything else and rely only upon Allah, and seek help only from Him, because He is the only One Whose Mercy is 'All-Encompassing' and no creature is deprived of it.

Another fact that can also be understood from / bism-il-lah / is that Allah's acts are based on Mercy, and, punishment has an exceptional aspect which will not be fulfilled unless there are some exact, clear reasons for it.

When we recite the supplication entitled, ' Jaushan Kabir ', Section 20 thus : " O' Lord, Whose Mercy surpasses His Wrath... " the above point becomes clear.

Human beings should attach importance to mercy and affection and behave accordingly in their daily lives and use violence and harshness only for those times when it is clearly warranted.

We conclude this discussion with a tradition, rich in meaning, from the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) , who, when commenting on the many different kinds of His All-Encompassing Mercy, said : " Verily, there are one hundred mercies belonging to Allah, from which, He has sent down to the Earth only one and distributed that one among His creatures. All the mercy and affection they have, issue from it. He, the Merciful, withheld the other 99 for Himself to show mercy upon His servants on the Day of Resurrection ". (2)

(1) Kafi, Tauhid by Saduq, and Ma'ani-yul-Akhbar, (according to Almizan Commentary)

(2) Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. 1, p. 21

" (All) praise is (only) Allah's, the Lord of the Worlds "

Commentary:

The World is Full of His Mercy

After reciting the phrase / bism-il-lah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim /, to begin the Sura, our first duty is to bring to mind the Great Creator and Cherisher of the world of being, and His endless bounties which have surrounded us thoroughly. In doing so, it is both ' a guide ' for us to observe the existence of Providence and ' a motive ' for showing our servitude and worship to Him.

It is 'a motive' because any man, after receiving a gift, wishes to know its giver at once, in order to show his gratitude and thankfulness to him. This quality is in man's innate disposition prompting him to manifest his acknowledgment of Him.

This same quality in man, in discussing the theological motives of ' the necessity of expressing thankfulness to the Bestower ', according to what man's nature and rationale leads him to, is considered one of those motives.

And it is 'a guide' to knowing the Lord and His bounties, because the best and the most direct way towards the acknowledgment of the Origin is the study of the secrets of creation, especially, the existence of the bounties of life as related to human beings.

Therefore, perhaps, it is for these two reasons that Sura Al-Fatihah, alongside /bism-il-lah/, begins thus: " (All) praise is (only) Allah's, the Lord of the Worlds ".

Or, in other words, the verse " (All) praise is (only) Allah's, the Lord of the Worlds " points to both the Unity of Divine Essence, and the Unity of Divine Attributes and Acts.

Originally, qualifying Allah (s.w.t.) , here, with the phrase /rabb-il-'alamin/ (the Lord of the Worlds) is, in fact, mentioning the reason after stating the claim. It seems that someone has asked why all praise is (only) Allah's, and the response is that it is for the reason that

45 He is ' the Lord of the Worlds'.

This is one of the characteristics of Allah. In another occurrence, the Holy Qur'an says: " He Who has made every thing which He has created most good ...," (Sura As-Sajdah, No. 32, verse 7) .

And again, in Sura Hud, No. 11, verse 6, it says: " There is no moving creature on the earth but its sustenance depends on Allah... " .

It is, also, clearly understood from the word /al-hamd/, ' praise ', used in this verse, that Allah has created all these bounties and benefits, basically, by His Choice and His Will.

It is interesting to note that by stating the phrase, ' (All) praise is (only) Allah's ', it is not only helpful to use it for the commencement of affairs, but, as the Qur'an teaches us, it is also used as a conclusion, like in Sura Yunus, No. 10, verse 10, about the good-doers in Heaven, it says: "(This will be) their cry therein: ' Glory to Thee, O God! ' And 'peace' will be their greeting therein! And the close of their cry will be: 'Surely, the Praise is Allah's, the Lord of the Worlds! ' " .

Virtue of the Verse

Concerning the virtue of this Holy verse, there is a narration from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) which says that in a tradition from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) , he has said: " When a believing servant says ' The Praise is (only) Allah's, the Lord of the Worlds ', such a praise that befits Him and His Rank, the angels are unable to record it. They will be asked by Allah why they did not record the reward of the phrase which the believing servant stated. Then, in response to their not recording the reward, they will ask how it is that they could even understand and estimate the high standard of saying such a phrase which contains the praise befitting and deserving only to Him. Allah, the Exalted, will tell them that they should record the phrase and it would be for Him to endow the servant with the reward of the praise as befitting Him " . (1)

The word /rabb/ originally means ' the owner of something who proceeds to train and improve it ' .

This word is absolutely applied to Allah, alone, and if it is

(1) Ma'ani-ul-Akhbar, p. 32, tradition 8; and, Tafsir Furat-ul-Kufi, vol. 1, p. 52

46 applied, in Arabic, for other than Him, it is certainly used in a possessive form, as / rabb-ud-dar / ' the owner of the house ', or / rabb-us-safinah / ' the owner of the ship '. In any case, the word, itself, conveys the meaning of ' training '.

There is another idea mentioned in Majma'-ul-Bayan that says: " /rabb/ means: ' an important person whose orders are obeyed '." However, it is probable that both meanings refer to the same origin.

The term /'alamin/ is the plural form of /'alam/ 'the world' and we cite it, here, with the meaning of 'a collection of different creatures with common characteristics or a common time and place'. For example, we say: the world of Man, the world of animals, and the world of plants, or, we say: the world of the East and the world of the West, or: the world of today and the world of yesterday. Therefore, when /'alam/, which has a plural sense by itself, is used in a plural form, it refers to the 'universe'.

The writer of the Al-Manar Commentary says that it is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that he has said /'alamin/ means 'peoples', only. Then, the writer adds that the term is used in the Qur'an with the same meaning; for example: "...That it may be an admonition to all peoples ", (Sura Al-Furqan, No. 25, verse 1) .(1)

It is true that the term /'alamin/ in many occurrences, in the Qur'an, is used with the meaning of 'peoples', but, sometimes, it is also used with a broader scope of meaning which envelops other creatures; for instance: " Then Praise be to Allah, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, öLord and Cherisher of all the worlds! ", (Sura Al-Jathiyah, No. 45, verse 36) . And, also, like: " Pharaoh said: ' And what is the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds ? ' (Moses) said: ' The Lord and Cherisher of the heavens and the earth, and all between them ...", (Sura Ash-Shu'ara, No. 26, verses 23,24) .

It is interesting that in a narration from Hadrat Ali (a.s.) , Saduq has cited in the book ' 'Uyun-ul-Akhbar', that he (a.s.) , commenting on the verse, has said: " (The phrase) /rabb-il-'alamin/ refers to all creatures whether they are inanimate or living ". (2)

There is, of course, no contradiction between these traditions,

(1) Al-Manar Commentary, vol. 1, p. 51

(2) Nur-uth-Thaqalayn Commentary, vol. 1, p. 17

47 because, although the meaning of the term /'alamin/ is very vast, Man is the most significant being among all creatures of the world, so, he is sometimes especially considered the central point of them, and other creatures are dependent upon him and in his shadow. Therefore, when, in the tradition of the Imam (a.s.) , the term is rendered into ' peoples ', the reason is that the main purpose of creation, in this great gathering of beings, is Man.

This point is, also, interesting that some have introduced two forms of /'alam/ 'the world': 'the great world' (macrocosm) and 'the lesser world' (microcosm) by which they refer to Man as 'the lesser world', because the entity of a person alone, is a collection of different powers which govern 'the great world'. In fact, 'man' is a sample of the whole world. So Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (a.s.) in one of his poems, addressing Man, says: " You think that you are a small body, while (you should know that) you contain 'the great world' (macrocosm) inside you." (1)

One of the factors that causes us to emphasize the vast meaning of / 'alam / 'the world', is that the term has occurred after the phrase /al-hamd-u-lil-lah/, in which we devote all the praise to Allah, only, and, then, we reason our statement with /rabb-il-'alamin/ ' The Lord of the Worlds '. We say the praise is only Allah's, because all perfections, all bounties and all blessings, in this world, belong to Him, the Lord, the Cherisher.

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(4) From the collection of Poems of Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali-ibn Abitalib (a.s.) ,p. 175