

Sûrat al-Fâtiḥah (The Opening)

Some personal study notes by Jos M. Strengholt

سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾ الرَّحْمَنِ
الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾ إِيَّاكَ
نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾ أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ
الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

1. Usage of Sûrat al-Fâtihah in Islam

This opening chapter of the Qur'ân is recited at least 17 times each day by those Muslims who follow the religious precept to pray five times a day.

In Islam, prayer is not acceptable without reciting this sûrah. The Imâms Muḥammad ibn Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî (810-870) and Abû al-Ḥusayn Mûslim (821-875) reported that the prophet Muḥammad said: 'There is no prayer for which you do not need to read the Fâtihah.'

According to all Islamic theologians, the reader of this sûrah and any other sûrah should say: 'ûdhu bi-llâhi min al-shaytân al-rajîm ('I seek Allâh's protection from the accursed Satan'). This is in accordance with Sûrat al-Naḥl (verse 98): 'So when you want to recite the Qur'ân, seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan'.¹

In various aḥâdîth this sûrah is described as 'the mother of the Book' (Umm al-Kitâb) and 'the mother of the Qur'ân' (Umm al-Qur'ân). Muslims believe that Sûrat al-Hijr (verse 87) refers to it: 'And indeed, we have bestowed upon you seven of al-Mathânî (seven repeated parts) and the Great Qur'ân'.

According to certain aḥâdîth going back on Ibn 'Abbâs and others, Sûrat al-Fâtihah is a Makkan sûrah; according to some aḥâdîth going back to Abû Ḥurayrah and others, it is a Madînan sûrah. The former view is more widely accepted, although some believe that it was revealed in both Makkah and Madînah.

2. Translation

2.1 Bi-ismi Allâhi al-raḥmâni al-raḥîmi

By (or 'with') the name of Allah, the All-Merciful

¹ Imam Mohamed Baianonic in a Friday speech delivered at the Islamic Center of Raleigh, North Carolina (USA) on 25 November 1988. See www.islam1.org (6 September 2007).

‘By’ or ‘with’ the name of Allāh is a better translation than ‘in’ the name of Allāh. This last translation is probably influenced by Christian usage. The Christian term ‘in the name of God’ means either ‘on behalf of God’ or ‘unto God’. The words *bi-ismi Allāhi* do not have that connotation. One Muslim writes:

With the Name of Allāh, meaning I start with every name that belongs to Allāh, the Exalted. [...] The action that the servant intends to do has been omitted in the sentence in order to generalize the statement. Therefore it is as if the servant is saying ‘I seek the help of Allāh with every Name of His, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful in the action I am about to do.’²

The Islamic term should therefore be understood as ‘I seek refuge with Allāh’s name(s)’, or ‘I seek help from Allah’s name(s)’ or something similar.

Allāh comes probably from pre-Islamic *al-Ilāh* (Arabic) or *Alāh-a* (Aramaic), both referring to the highest deity, hence ‘the God’. The Makkans at Muḥammad’s time recognized him as the supreme deity, higher than the intermediate gods. Muḥammad rejected the intermediate gods and focused religion on the one *Ilāh*. By his statement that there is no god but Allāh, that word developed into a personal name of God.³

The verb *raḥima*, *yirḥamu* means to have mercy, to have compassion, to be merciful. Hence, *al-rahmān* means the merciful, compassionate; *al-rahīm* seems to mean the same. The meaning of the words is possibly closer to ‘the benefactor’ and the ‘benevolent’ than to ‘the merciful’, as that last word implies forgiveness with its Christian connotations.⁴

² www.muhababah.com/islamicblog (27 October 2007).

³ See H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (ed), *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 33ff.

⁴ See Rudi Paret, *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Qum, 1981), p. 11. Some suggested translations of the words *Rahmān* and *Rahīm*, based on Paret, *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali (translator), *The Holy Qur'an* (Beirut, n.y.), Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ghâli (translator), *Towards Understanding the Everglorious Qur'ân* (Cairo, 2002,2005), Fred Leemhuis (translator) *De Koran* (Houten, 1989,1990), Ahmad and Dina Zidan (translators), *The Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo, 1979), Sayyid Abul A'lâ Mawdûdî, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ân* Vol 1, Sûrahs 1-3 – translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq

The usage of both words in the *Bismillâh* is meant to intensify the meaning. Muslim scholars do believe the words have a slightly different focus though:

These are two descriptions of Allâh the Exalted and two of the Names from amongst His Beautiful Names derived from al-Raḥma (Mercy) in a way to express intense and exaggerated meanings. Al-Raḥmân is more intense than al-Raḥîm because al-Raḥmân is the one endowed with Mercy that extends to all of the creations in this world and to the believers in the Hereafter. Al-Raḥîm on the other hand is the One endowed with Mercy that extends to only the believers on the Day of Judgment - this being the understanding of the majority of the scholars.⁵

According to Qur'ân translator Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Raḥmân is used of God alone, while Raḥîm is also used of human beings.⁶

2.2 Al-Ḥamdu li-llâhi rabbi al-‘âlamîna

Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds

Al-Ḥamdu is from the verb *ḥamida-yaḥmadu*, and means to praise, commend, laud, extol.

Rabb (pl: *Arbâb*) means Lord, Master, Owner.

‘*Âlam* (pl: ‘*âlamûna*) is an Aramaic loanword, meaning ‘world’. In the Qur’ânic context it usually only refers to the people of the world.⁷ However, it is often also translated in its plural as referring to *the worlds*. That cannot (only) refer to this world

Ansari (Leicester, 1988), J.H. Kramers (translator), *De Koran* (Amsterdam, 1956,1990)

English: The Merciful, the Compassionate (Mawdûdî, Zidan)

English: The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful (Ghâfî)

English: Most Gracious, Most Merciful (Yusuf Ali)

Dutch: de erbarmer, de barmhartige (Leemhuis)

Dutch: de barmhartige erbarmer (Kramers)

German: allbarmherzig (Paret)

German: des Gnädigen, des Barmherzigen.

French: le Tout Miséricordieux, le Très Miséricordieux

Spanish: el Compasivo, el Misericordioso

⁵ www.muḥajabah.com/islamicblog (27 October 2007)

⁶ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*, p. 14.

⁷ Paret, *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz*, p. 12.

and the world to come, because for two worlds Arabic would have used the dual form for ‘*alam*. (i.e. in this case, ‘*alamayni*)⁸ The plural is probably intended as intensification, referring to the total universe, but with a focus on all people in that universe.

Imam Mohamed Baianonic’s rendering of *Alamîn* as ‘mankind, Jinns, and all that exists’, is a common one among Muslims commentators.⁹ Yusuf Ali views it in more modern terms. He speaks of ‘many worlds: astronomical, physical, world of words, thoughts, spiritual worlds and so on.’¹⁰

2.3 Al-Raḥmâni al-Raḥîmi

[See above] The All-Merciful

2.4 Mâliki yawmi al-Dîni

Owner of the Day of Judgement

Mâliki is genitive, as it is still going back to the previous *al-ḥamdu li-llâhi*.

It is unsure whether the first word should be read as *malik* (king) or as *mâlik* (owner). One Muslim commentator writes:

The reciters have two different ways of reciting the first word of this verse, both of which have been reported via continuous (mutawâtir)¹¹ transmission from the Prophet as well as Abû Bakr and ‘Umâr [As mentioned by al-Tirmidhî (824-892)]:

⁸ Hence:

Dutch: Heer der wereldwezens (Kramers)

Dutch: Heer van de wereldbewoners (Leemhuis)

German: Herr der Menschen in aller Welt (Paret)

English: The Lord of the Worlds (Ghâli, Zidan)

English: Lord of the Entire Universe (Mawdûdî)

⁹ Imam Mohamed Baianonic, on November 25, 1988.

¹⁰ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*, p. 14.

¹¹ Mutawâtiris means consecutive. It is often used as an Islamic term within the science of hadîth. A hadîth is said to be mutawâtir if it was reported by a significant number of narrators at each chain in the narration, and therefore through multiple chains of narration leading back to Muḥammad. This provides confirmation that the hadîth is ṣahîh to a level beyond reasonable doubt, as it is beyond historical possibility that narrators could have conspired to forge a narration. Aḥadîth can be mutawâtir in both actual text and meaning.

1. Reciting it as Malik, or the King.

So the meaning of the verse would be that on that Day, Kingship belongs to Allah Alone and not to any of the creation who before then used to be kings on earth, vying with each other for power and dominion, exulting in what they had, pompously boasting about their grandeur and trying their best to outdo their competitors. However on that day they will come to know with certainty that in reality they are powerless and humiliated and that Grandeur, Power and Authority belongs in its entirety to Him Alone.

2. Reciting it as Mâlik, or the Owner.

So the meaning of the verse would be that on that Day, everything would belong to Him and no one else. No one will be able to voice an opinion or enforce a ruling as they used to do on this world.¹²

Malaka, yamliku means to take in possession, take over, acquire, possess, be the owner, rule, reign etc. Hence, mulk means rule, reign, dominion, sovereignty, kingship etc. Milk (Pl. amlâk) means property, possessions, wealth, estate, fortune. Malik (Pl. mulûk) means king, or sovereign.¹³

The Arabic word dîn is almost certainly a loan from the Aramaic dînâ, just as the Hebrew dîn that has an identical meaning within the Jewish tradition. The Hebrew word is in turn a 6th century BC loan word from the Old Persian dên, which meant the system of ritual practices of the (Zoroastrian) state religion.

Some Muslims do not accept the common-language translation of dîn as ‘religion’, seeing this as a human-made or ideological concept. They instead use the untranslated Arabic word to signify something above and beyond that concept, perhaps more approximating ‘faith’ (or ‘way’ or ‘path’). The argument is that in

¹² www.muhammadjah.com/islamicblog (27 October 2007)

¹³ Translation:

English: The Master of the Day of Recompense (Mawdûdî)

English: The Possessor of the Day of Doom (Ghâli)

English: Master of the Day of Judgment (Zidan)

Dutch: De Heerser op de Dag des Gerichts (Kramers)

Dutch: de heerser op de oordeeldag (Leemhuis)

German: der am Tag des Gerichts regiert! (Paret)

Islam, *dîn* consists of living according to the laws prescribed in the Qur'ân.¹⁴

The difficulty to translate the concept of *dîn* into English is clear from the many translations used by Muslims writers: power, supremacy, ascendancy, sovereignty, lordship, dominion, law, constitution, mastery, government, realm, decision, definite outcome, reward, punishment, obedience, submission, allegiance, honor, empire, monarchy, rulership, subordination, slavery, servitude, subjection, to account, to give judgment, dispense reward and punishment of actions, subjugation, authority, ruling, having charge, submission due to subjugation, reward, judgment, obedience.

Baianonic said that *dîn* has a fourfold linguistic meaning, implying a comprehensive system of life that is composed of four parts:

- The rulership and the authority belong to Allâh.
- The obedience and submission to this rulership and authority by those who embraced this *dîn*.
- The comprehensive system (intellectual and practical) established by this authority (Allâh).
- The reward given by this authority (Allâh) to those that followed the system and submitted to it and the punishment inflicted upon those who rebel against it and disobey it.

Dîn means a complete code of life and is inclusive of religion.

¹⁴ Abu Ala Maududi, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*, translated by Abu Asad (Lahore, 1979), quotes from the Qur'an 64:65, 3:2,3,11,14,17, 16:52, 3:83, 98:5 to assert that 'the word has been employed to signify the vesting of the Supreme authority in Allah alone that there should not be even the slightest element of association and treatment of anyone else having sovereignty or authority and being entitled to obedience and submission of independent right'. The verses Qur'an 3:19 and Qur'an 3:85, Mawdûdî declares, state that only Allah's Laws and religion are acceptable. The third verse proclaims that the 'it was the primary purpose of the Prophet's mission that he should make this Deen prevail in their stead and triumph over all other ways of life'. And in the fourth verse 'the believers have been ordered to fight all non-believers until every system of thought, belief, and action which is not based on recognition of Allah as the Supreme Authority, and which therefore will perpetually remain the source of all strife and unrest- has been wiped out, and the entire humanity adopts the approved way of life, Allah's Deen.'

2.5 Iyyâka na‘budu wa iyyâka nasta‘înu

You [alone] we worship and you [alone] we ask for help¹⁵

Iyyâ – with nominal suffix expresses the accusative.

‘abada, ya‘abidu means to serve, worship, adore, venerate, be subservient. ‘Ibâdah is worship, service, and ‘abd (Pl: ‘abîd) means servant or slave. According to Mawdûdi, ‘ibâdah means worship and adoration, obedience and submission, service and subjection.¹⁶

The verb ista‘âna, yasta‘înu means to ask for help [form X of the verb ‘awwana, to help], hence ‘awn means help, support, relief, backing]

2.6 Ahđinâ al-şirâta al-mustađîma

Lead us to [or: guide us on] the straight path¹⁷

Hadâ, yahđî means to guide on, to lead to, to show the way; it always has a positive meaning. Therefore, hudan is (good) guidance, and min ghayr hudan means aimlessly, at random.

Al-şirâť is path, way, road

Mustađîm means straight, erect, correct, right, sound, proper, upright, righteous.

The term ‘straight path’ is usually used for Islam, but also for the preaching of Moses (Qur’ân 37:118) and Jesus (Qur’ân 3:44) as well as for a religious lifestyle in general (Qur’ân 7:15)

¹⁵ English: You alone do we worship, and You alone do we turn to for help (Mawdûđi, Zidan)

English: You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help (Ghâđi)

German: Der dienen wer, und dich bitten wir um Hilfe (Paret)

Dutch: U dienen wij en U vragen wij om hulp (Leemhuis)

Dutch: u dienen wij en U vragen wij om bijstand (Kramers)

¹⁶ Mawdûđi, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ân*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Translation:

English: Direct us on to the Straight Way (Mawdûđi)

English: Guide us (in) the straight Path (Ghâđi)

English: Guide us to the Righteous Way (Zidan)

Dutch: Leid ons op de juiste weg (Leemhuis)

Dutch: Leid ons langs het rechtgebaande pad (Kramers)

German: Fuhre uns den geraden Weg (Paret)

2.7 Şirâṭa alladhîna an‘amta ‘alayhim ghayri al-maghḏûbi ‘alayhim wa lâ al-ḏâllîna

the path of those whom you have favored, against whom you are not angry and who are not going astray.¹⁸

alladhîna (Nominative, PL, male) is an adjective, from *alladhî*. The plural means ‘those of whom can be said that...’ The construction *şirâṭa alladhîna* is because SG and PL do not decline, only the Dual does.

An‘ama, yun‘imu ‘alay means to make good for, comfortable to, pleasant for, bless, to be gracious to (form IV of *na‘ama* means to live in comfort and luxury, lead a life of ease, be happy). Ni‘mah is related and means blessing, favor, grace

Ghayr means not, or without.

Ghadiba, yaghdabu means to be angry, irritated. Hence, *maghḏûb ‘alay* is to be angry at

Dalla means: he lost his way, he went astray, he erred. *Ḍall* is an error, while *ḏâll* is straying, roaming, wandering, astray. The plural is *al-ḏâllîna*, those who go astray.

¹⁸ English: The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring. (Ghâlf)

English: The Way of those on whom You have endowed Your grace, not the way of those who earn Your wrath, nor of those who go astray.

English: the way of those whom You have favoured, who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray. (Mawḏûf)

English: The Way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, Those whose (portion) Is not wrath, and who go not astray. (Yusuf Ali)

German: den Weg derer, denen du Gnade erwiesen hast, nicht (den Weg) derer, die d(ein)em Zorn verfallen sind und irgehen! (Paret)

Dutch: de weg van hen aan wie u genade geschonken hebt, op wie geen toorn rust en die niet dwalen (Lecmhuis)

Dutch: Het pad dergenen, wie Gij uw weldaden schenkt; over wie geen toorn is en die niet dwalen. (Kramers)

3. Comments on the Fâtiḥah

3.1. *The Usage of the Bismillâh*

This verse appears at the start of every sûrah in the Qur'ân (except for *Sûrat al-Tawbah*). The verse is said before reciting a sûrah or part of a sûrah during daily prayer, and also before public proclamations and indeed before many personal and everyday activities in many Arabic and Muslim societies as a way to invoke God's blessing and proclaim one's motives before an undertaking.

According to Islam, the *Bismillâh* was used by Muḥammad and His Household (Ahl al-Bayt), before doing anything. Calligraphers have written *Bismillâh* in many ways. The *Bismillâh* here



below is taken from a letter that Muslims believe was written on

behalf of Muhammad to the Ruling Archbishop of Egypt, in the fifth year after the Hijrah (627 CE). This letter is preserved in the Topkapi Museum, in Istanbul (Turkey). It is highly unlikely that this parchment, found in a monastery in Akhmîm (Egypt) by a French orientalist, is original or refers to an actual letter written by Muḥammad to a leader in Egypt. Here three other examples of how calligraphers have written the Bismillâh:



Early theologians from Madîna, Baṣrah and Syria believed that the words of the *Bismillâh* were originally not part of the *suwwar* (*Pl. van sûrah*), but added later to separate the *suwwar*, and as a benediction. ‘Abû Ḥanîfa held this view. Learned Muslims will in most cases say that it is Muḥammad who added the *Bismillâh* to the revealed texts with the purpose of underlining that the *sûrah* was not man-made but given by Allâh. Related to this view is that of early theologians from Makka and Kûfah who believed that the words were always part of the revealed *suwwar*. Shafî’î for instance supported this view. This matter is of great interest as it relates to the early Islamic views of the format of the revealed text. Of a major issue of this sort, there were divergent views. The numbering of Qur’ânic verses suggests that the *Bismillâh* precedes the actual *sûrah*, as only after the *Bismillâh* the numbering starts.

It is likely that in pre-Islamic times, Arabian pagans used similar formula’s with the name of their gods, like al-Lât or al-‘Uzza. Christians used similar formulas, like ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’.

Muslims believe in the extraordinary powers of the *Bismillâh*. They think it was written on Adam’s side, on Gabriel’s wings, and on the tongue of Jesus. The usage before a good action makes that action *ibâdah* (worship). The words also have the power to heal the sick, to make the poor wealthy, and to save people from dangers. It is often used in talismans. Teaching a child to do say the words brings forgiveness to the teacher, the parents and the child.

According to Sayyid Abul A‘la Mawdudî, saying the *Bismillâh* has three positive effects: It reminds people to obey the one whose name they mention; it will ensure that both the acts and the mental orientation will be good; man will enjoy Allâh’s support, as Allah turns to man when man turns to Allah.¹⁹

The pronouncement of the *Bismillâh* is called *basmala* in Arabic, just like *hamdala* means to say the *al-hamdu li-llâhi* and *takbîr* is saying *Allâhu akbar*.

¹⁹Mawdûdî, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ân*, p. 35.

3.2 *The Names of God and Grammatical Matters* (rather tentative!)

Allâh is written in Arabic with three *lam*'s and it is pronounced as if it has an *âlif*. The Qur'ân however does not print that *âlif*; Arabic study books do it though.

In the *li-Ilâhi*, the name *Allâh* has lost its first two letters, *âlif* and *lam*. That is strange if *Allâh* is a personal name. The fact that in this grammatical construction the *âlif* and *lam* are dropped, suggests that *Allâh* was originally *al-Ilâh* (double 'l?') if it was originally Arabic, and if originally Aramic, *alâh-a*, the God. The Makkans, before and during Muḥammad's time, seem to have recognized *al-Ilâh* as the supreme God, but they mostly worshipped lower deities that were more approachable.

The manner of pronunciation with an emphatic *âlif* that is differently pronounced than would be expected from classical Arabic (namely closer to O as in English 'border') suggests that Arabic was originally pronounced rather differently than presently, or that the name *Allâh* is derived from a non-Arabic (Aramaic?) source.

The *âlif* was not (always) part of the earliest stenographic scripts. In order to enable the proper pronunciation of this stenographic form of Arabic, *âlifs* were possibly in a later time (fully) introduced into the Qur'ânic text. Possibly it was considered not acceptable to change the written name of *Allâh* in the holy text.

The three words *Allâh*, *Raḥmân* and *Raḥîm* are the first three of the 99 names of God, hence, highly important for Muslims. The *âlif* is not part of the word *Raḥmân*; it is placed above the word, probably for the same reason as given above for *Allâh*.

The *âlif* in '*âlamîna* is a 'floating one', not written as part of the word. This may be related to the fact that the word is a loan-word from Aramaic.

As *Allâh*, *Raḥmân*, and *Raḥîm* all theoretically can be proper names of god(s), there were some few local speculations in early Islam as to whether the *Bismillâh* was referring to one or three gods. Some Makkans in the first years of Islam did see in this a form of polytheism. This idea died out; since then there have been very few attempts to interpret the *Bismillâh* as a trinity

equal to the one in Christianity.²⁰ These speculations in Makka do however suggest that some Makkans may have considered *Rahmân* and *Rahîm* as part of their own pantheon beside Allâh.

3.3 Several Comments

3.3.1 A Sûfi Interpretation of the Fâṭihah

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, a Muslim sufi:

We said that when you praise the Ultimate, you must have some knowledge of it. That knowledge could be that of avoiding the non-Ultimate, which is what we are trying to do now. The way to that knowledge is by avoiding that which is unreal, uncondusive, unfulfilling; that which does not permanently rehabilitate our hearts.

Up to a certain point, it is alright to praise an aspect of it since we do not have complete cognizance of rabb. If we are true to ourselves, we aim for the ultimate in everything. We only want to praise the Ultimate.

The characteristics of the Lord whom we love and adore are ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, the all-beneficent, the all-compassionate. There is only mercy, but we do not see it because of our ignorance, expectations, and desires which only arise from the use of our intellect. Was the mercy not there when you were in your mother's womb? You stayed there for nine months and yet you were unequivocally content. It is the mercy of Creation that we are able to die, so that there may be breathing and standing space for others to come. It is only we who interfere. It is the ego, the nafs, the vanity of expectation which frustrates and sabotages our recognition of Allah's mercy. It is the evil I which we hear whispering in our ear. Shaytan is only a name. He too is from the Creator. If you know how to tackle Shaytan, then you would see nothing other than ar-Rahman. There is a cult in the Middle East of some two to three million people that worship Shaytan. They say that we know the Lord through Shaytan, and that at the Yowm al Qiyama, Shaytan will be forgiven because he has been testing all the good ones and the bad ones. They say he will be the first to be forgiven. If you

²⁰ Tore Kjeilen, 'Bismillah', in *Encyclopaedia of the Orient*, see <http://icias.com/cgi-bin/co-direct.pl?bismilla.htm> (28 September 2007)

see anything other than mercy, it is your own doing. It is your own expectations, desires and illusions. You yourself are the author.²¹

3.3.2 The Meaning of Praising Allâh

3.3.2.1 Honor and Shame

One Muslim writes:

The meaning of ḥamd is praise and extolling. It is the opposite of dhamm, or blame. Its meaning is more general and inclusive than that of shukr, or giving thanks, because it encompasses this as well as giving the meaning of praise. Similarly shukr is only expressed as a response to a favor whereas ḥamd is expressed both as a response to a favor as well as a spontaneous action of dhikr. [B]y saying al-Ḥamdu li-llâh, the servant is praising and thanking Allâh Alone due to His greatness, unity, perfection, His Beautiful Names and Attributes and His innumerable favors and blessings that none can encompass save He.²²

It could be that the terms ‘praise’, and its opposite ‘blame’ are parallel expressions to ‘honor’ and ‘shame’.

3.3.2.2 Praise brings the Worshipper into Union with Allâh

Yusuf Ali writes in his Qur’ân commentary:

If the praise is from our inmost being, it brings us into union with Gods will. 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. The prayer is for our own spiritual education, consolation and confirmation.²³

²¹ <http://tariqhabib.com/Fatiha.aspx> (15 March 2008)

²² www.muhababah.com/islamicblog (27 October 2007)

²³ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p. 14.

3.3.2.3 Praise for the Sake of Allâh Alone

Haeri, the aforementioned sûfi, writes:

The man of greater perception sees the rabb, Sustainer, even in times of constriction. To use hamd as an expression of a mood or feeling is shirk. Praise is for Allah at all times and under all circumstances. Hamd does not allow for the separation between you as a praise giver and the object of praise: you merely echo hamd.²⁴

A comment by Mawdûdî:

[W]e ought not only to love Him for nourishing and sustaining us and for His compassion and mercy towards us, but should also hold Him in awe because of His justice, and should not forget that our ultimate happiness or misery rests completely with Him.²⁵

3.3.3 The Concept of ‘Ibâdah

One Muslim wrote:

In Islam, the word ‘ibâdah, or worship, is a comprehensive term referring to everything, inward and outward that Allah Loves and is Pleased with. Its pillars are love, hope, fear, submission and humility. Worship can only be considered to be true worship when the way of performing it is taken from the Messenger seeking only the Face of Allah. So these two conditions have to be present for the action to be considered worship and hence acceptable to Allah.

...Meaning that we do not seek aid from anyone but You because the affair in its totality is under Your control Alone, no one else has even an atoms weight of control over it. Again the object of the verb has been brought before the verb to stress this fact. In this statement's following His saying, "You Alone we worship" lies an indication that it is not permissible to put our trust in

²⁴ <http://tariqhabib.com/Fatiha.aspx> (15 March 2008).

²⁵ Mawdûdî, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ân*, p. 36.

anyone except the One Who deserves worship because no one else has control over the affairs.

The whole of the religion of Islam revolves around these two principles: we do not worship except Allah and we do not put our trust in anyone or anything except Allah. These are the means to everlasting bliss and security from all evils - so there is no path to victory except by establishing these two pillars.²⁶

3.3.4 The Prayer for Guidance

Yusuf Ali says that the prayer is for guidance to the right way as well as on the right way.²⁷ Mawdudi says that the prayer is for guidance while on the straight path, but for being led toward that straight path:

We beseech God to guide us in all walks of life to a way which is absolutely true, which provides us with a properly-based outlook and sound principles of behavior, a way which will prevent our succumbing to false doctrines and adopting unsound principles of conduct, a way that will lead us to our true salvation and happiness. This is man's prayer to God as he begins the study of the Qur'ân. It is, in short, to illuminate the truth which he often tends to lose in a labyrinth of philosophical speculation; to enlighten him as to which of the numerous ethical doctrines ensures a sound course of conduct; to show which of the myriad ways and by-ways is the clear, straight, open road of sound belief and right behavior.²⁸

3.3.5 The Straight Path

One Muslim says:

After praising Allâh, the servant then proceeds to ask of Him from His bounty and blessings. This is the most virtuous way of asking Allâh by first praising Him and then asking of Him. The

²⁶ www.sunnahonline.com/ilm/quran/0018.htm (15 March 2008).

²⁷ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p. 15.

²⁸ Mawdûdî, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ân*, p. 37.

word *hidāyah*, linguistically meaning direction and guidance is used in two senses in the Qur'ān.

1. Guidance of clarification and direction, not taking into account whether the person to whom it has been clarified traverses the path of guidance or not.

2. The specific type of guidance which is Allāh bestowing His Grace upon the servant by making him conform to the Way of Truth.

There is also a third sense to the word guidance that was mentioned by *ibn al-Qayyīm*, and that is guidance on the Day of Judgement to the path to Paradise - this being the bridge leading to it. So the one who is guided in this life to the Straight Path will be guided to the straight path in the Hereafter that leads to His Paradise. His firmness on the path that Day will be dependant on how firmly he trod the Straight Path in this life. [*Ibn al-Qayyim*, "Madaarij as-Saalikeen" [1/16]]

...The Straight Path is the path that the one journeying to Allah traverses and it is none other than obedience to Allah and His Messenger.²⁹

Şīraṭ al-Jahīm (The Bridge of Hell) is, in Islam, the hair-narrow bridge, which according to Muslim belief every person must pass on the Day of Judgment to enter Paradise. It is said that it is as thin as a hair and as sharp as a sword. Below this path are the fires of Hell, which burn the sinners to make them fall. People who performed acts of goodness in their lives are transported across the path in moments by a horse, leading them to the *Hauzu'l-Kausar* (the lake of abundance).

Muslims who offer the obligatory prayers, recite at least 17 (or more) times a day the *Sūrat al-Fāṭīḥah*, has been referred to by some scholars as a continuation (or precursor if you will) of the Bridge *al-Şīraṭ* (The straight bridge). *Al-Şīraṭ* is conceptionally similar to Zoroastrianism's *Chinvat* bridge.

One Muslim explains how this verse about the Straight Path refers to Muslims, Jews and Christians:

After the servant has requested for guidance to the Straight Path, Allah then proceeds to clarify further what this Straight Path is. *Al-Ghaḍab* linguistically means anger, it is the opposite of pleas-

²⁹ <http://tariqhabib.com/Fatiha.aspx> (15 March 2008).

ure (ridâ) and one of the Attributes of Allah. Maghđûb refer to the objects of Anger.

Dalâl linguistically means to divert from the intended goal or to diverge from the true path and it is the opposite of guidance. It is also said "the milk *dalla* in the water" when it is mixed such that it disappears.

At-Tirmidhî reports from Adî bin Hâtim who said,

I asked the Messenger of Allâh about Allâh's saying about, "those who have earned [Your] Anger", and He said, "it refers to the Jews." I then asked about, "those who have gone astray" and he said, "the Christians are those who have gone astray." [Reported by at-Tirmidhee and Ahmad and it is saheeh]

The Jews and the Christians even though both of them are misguided and both of them have Allâh's Anger on them - the Anger is specified to the Jews, even though the Christians share this with them, because the Jews knew the truth and rejected it and deliberately came with falsehood. Therefore the Anger of Allâh being upon them was the description most befitting them. The Christians were ignorant, not knowing the truth, so misguidance was the description most befitting them.

nding, the above refers to Jews and Christians who have learned the essentials of Islam and chosen to reject it, not to all Jews and Christians. People will not be called to account for what they are not aware of. And Allâh knows best).³⁰

Muslims often comment that the part on Allâh's favor is about Muslims, Allâh's anger is about Jews, and those gone astray is about Christians. This is grammatically hardly justifiable. Paret suggests that Muḥammad possibly spoke in salvation-historical terms, about the first community of Muslims, and that the sentence should be translated: 'the path of those, whom You have shown your mercy, not your anger, and who have not gone astray'.³¹ According to Mawđûdî, the second and third qualifiers make clear that with those who are blessed, Allâh does not mean:

those who appear, briefly, to enjoy worldly prosperity and success [...] in'am (favor) denotes all those real and abiding favors and blessings which one receives in reward for righteous conduct [...]

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Paret, *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz*, p. 12.

rather than those apparent and fleeting favors which the Pharaohs, Nimrods and Korahs (Qârûns) used to receive in the past, and which are enjoyed even today by people notorious for oppression, evil and corruption.³²

Yusuf Ali comments about this verse:

Are there two categories? – those who are in the darkness of Wrath and those who stray? The first are those who deliberately break God’s law; the second those who stray out of carelessness or negligence. Both are responsible for their own acts of omissions. In opposition to both are the people who are in the light of God’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 of carelessness. The negative *gair* should be construed as applying not to the way, but as describing men protected from two dangers by God’s grace.³³

For further study:

- 3 Origin of the name of God, Allâh
- 4 Meaning of Raḥmah
- 5 Meaning of ‘ibâdah
- 6 Meaning of ni‘mah

³² Mawdûdî, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ân*, p. 38

³³ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*, p. 15.