

Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ22:37

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A Prayer for Humanity

(New Year's Message based on the Muslims' Lord's Prayer the 'Fatiha' - the 'Opening')

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The first chapter of the Holy Quran is known as the *Fatiha* which means, 'the Opening'. It consists of seven verses which are recited in its original Arabic in the five daily prayers of a Muslim. The significance of its meaning will show that it is a prayer for the entire human race.

It begins by giving a description of the most significant attributes of Almighty God, in a broad universal context, that gives the suppliant a good understanding of the nature of the Deity. Armed with this knowledge of the Almighty, the suppliant is able to implore the Lord with a certainty of His existence and not with mere blind faith. The *Fatiha* starts as follows:

*Al hamdu lillah hi Rabbil
alameen:*

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Lord (*Rabb*) of all the worlds.

The significance of the attribute of God referred to as *Rabb* is 'The One Who nourishes, fosters, and sustains the whole of the creation (*alameen*) from a state of insignificance through various stages of evolution to ultimate perfection.' The Arabic is very rich in its meanings and unfortunately this is the best the English is able to render, in a nutshell, the meaning of *Rabb*. In order to fully understand these attributes of God Almighty such as *Rabb* and those that will follow herein, we need to just cast our minds on the creation and ponder and reflect on how it unfolds and functions. To illustrate my point, I recently spent some valuable time in the museum and the planetarium. My! was I humbled in the realisation that here I was, a mere tiny speck of life in the mindboggling vastness of the universe. I was blown away by the millions of stars out there that make up millions of galaxies; it was fascinating just to think that within each one of those galaxies there might just be a planet similar to ours with life on it. I realised that when you ponder on the vastness of the universe especially when you see it

with such clarity through advanced telescopes, the opening phrase of the *Fatiha* which I have just recited, *Al hamdu lilla hi Rabbil Alameen* - All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Lord (*Rabb*) of all the worlds - suddenly has a special meaning and you feel like shouting at the top of your voice: ‘Indeed All praise! All Glory! All Thanks! are due the Lord of the Worlds and to no one else.’

The sheer majesty of the universe, now scientifically referred to as the multi-verse because of the many new discoveries of other galaxies made over the years; the exactness, the order; the precision of every celestial body and whatever life is out there was telling me with such absolute force that there must indeed be a *Rabb* One Who started and controls it all and causes everything to evolve through different stages to perfection under very specific and precise Laws. This, I realised as I looked mystified at the furthest galaxies is the workings of *Rabb* unfolding before my very eyes. It occurred to me as I lay back and gazed in awe at the vastness of the celestial world above me that only a blind, mentally crippled person would deny the existence of such a Superior Being. The prayer continues:

***ArRaḥmān*– The Beneficent**

This means the ‘One Who provides sustenance for the entire creation beforehand.’ This made me realise that

there is nothing in this entire universe that comes into being at the snap of the finger. Everything is carefully pre-planned and executed with exactness and careful precision. Everything is organized; well co-ordinated – there is no chaos. This, I said to myself, is indeed the work of a caring Superior Being far beyond my comprehension. In this Book of Life before me, I read in clear, uncomplicated terms, that if life required **water** to exist, water was provided. If life required **vegetation** to sustain itself, vegetation was provided. If eyes required **light** to see and our bodies needed warmth from the cold, a sun was provided. If our lungs needed pure **air** to breathe oxygen was provided. This was *Rahman*, the Beneficent God, at work. I marvelled at the fact that like an honourable, dignified host, God, Almighty has prepared everything for me even before I arrived on earth. He has indeed made available countless provisions which I have taken for granted all the time and still do. As I reflect on the sheer wonders of it all, I realise just how important I, that small speck of life in the vast universe, really am in the sight of my *Rabb* the **Beneficent Lord of the Worlds**.

Seeing the earth, i.e. our blue planet, from a distance via cameras on the space station, floating majestically in its orbit around the sun, I was so humbled that I could shout ‘All praise is due to Allah,

the Lord of all the worlds' over and over again and felt a strong urge to prostrate there and then in gratitude. I could see the Divine wisdom of including such a prayer in our daily prayers which constitute bowing and prostration in submission to such an Almighty Being.

As I reflect and ponder more, I realise that there is more to Almighty God's **Rahman** – Beneficence than we can ever fathom. I observe that He provides air, water, fruits, vegetables herbs etc. for all His creation without making any distinction along the lines of race, religion, culture, believers, non-believers etc. – all are equally provided sustenance without having done a thing to deserve it. I realise that when Almighty God tells us in the Holy Quran to take His colours He wants us to be like Him in His attributes. Our mindsets and behaviours and approaches to life should be like His:

(We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring, and we are His worshipper. – 2:138

He wants us not to discriminate in our show of compassion and empathy to fellow man. For example when we are in positions of authority and we have to exercise justice, we should not discriminate even against our enemies. When we are called upon to extend humanitarian aid to someone in desperate need thereof we should show empathy

regardless of whether the person is an atheist, an idolater, a gay, a lesbian, a known crook or drunkard, or the enemy etc. for this is what **Rahman** means. We see this attribute of **Rahman** play out even in the spiritual realm of life just like rain falls on everyone regardless. Thus we find that even a disbelieving person such as the king in the narrative of the prophet Joseph (Holy Quran chapter 12) being granted a true dream that saved his country. This, we will see later, does not mean we accept or condone the behaviours of wrongdoers who violate the Laws of God.

The description of God continues:

ArRaheem

The Merciful

Raheem signifies the One Who rewards out of His Mercy every good deed no matter how small it might be. The rewards are the consequences of our good deeds which we see immediately in this very life and some will manifest in the next life. The principle on which this works is like that of a farmer who irrigates the land and plants seeds, waters it carefully, guards it against alien weeds and insects so that eventually he reaps a lush crop of fruit, vegetables, herbs and so forth. This is all due to the working of God Almighty's attribute known as **Raheem** i.e. the One Who manifests the fruits of our labour, physical and spiritual. Man's inventions and advancements in technology and the

sciences and the resultant benefits that they derive from it are further examples. In this regard it was fascinating to see the space stations created by man to capture information from planets that might be of benefit to us. Today, everyone has a cell-phone but if it was not for those millions of satellites placed in orbit around the earth, we would not have been able to communicate with each other across the world with such speed and efficiency. This made me realise the power of the good in man and for a moment I deliberately suppressed all thoughts of his evil nature not to spoil my fleeting moments of optimism.

I also saw in the museum that ‘quartz’ is in fact a mineral from the earth and not merely a brand name, that has various electrical qualities and therefore it is used in making watches. I saw just how many useful utensils that we take for granted come from minerals or other products that have been exhumed from the earth. It then dawned on me that these raw materials are manifestations of God’s Beneficence (*Rahman*), **which** we are able to convert into **materials with which to manufacture** huge buildings, various electrical equipment, sophisticated modes of transportation, medical equipment, etc. for the convenience of humankind. This we would not have been able to do were it

not for the Divine Laws associate with His attribute of *Raheem*.

The same principle applies with regard to humanity’s ethical and moral deeds that feed their spirituality. We are promised in the Holy Quran:

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, **they have their reward with their Lord**, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve. – (2:62)

The *Fatiha* continues:

Māliki You Mid Din

Master of the Day of Requital or
Master of the day of Judgement.

‘**Master**’ means that God Almighty alone has the authority to punish or forgive those who violate His Laws. He is not obligated like a king or a judge who are subject to the law, to execute stringently according to the letter of the law. He can grant intercession and extend clemency to offenders as He wishes.

The word translated as ‘**Day**’ does not mean a day as we understand it. It actually means a process of ‘cause and effect’ that continues indefinitely. Often the outcome of our actions manifests here on earth. These manifestations, however,

will be more pronounced and intense in the Hereafter when all veils that befog our perceptions are removed. This is an immutable Divine law based on the principle that we will be held accountable for whatever we did in this life and that the consequences of our deeds whether good or bad will yield results accordingly. We see this law unfold before our very eyes in this life. The mad race for power and the killings and human sufferings that follow as a result; the abuse of the environment and the natural disasters that it causes; the numerous crimes we are subjected to and the horrific consequences that result are but some of the examples of the hell on earth we create for ourselves. Therefore this attribute of Almighty God which the Holy Quran describes as '*Master of the Day of Requit/Judgment*' should serve as a reminder and a warning for humanity to refrain from transgressing His **Laws** and enjoin good and forbid all forms of evil with uncompromising firmness, instead, in order to avoid the undesirable consequences that such violations bring.

This concludes the first line of the the *Fatiha*. Here we were introduced to the true nature of Almighty God. We were made aware of His attributes such as *Rabb, Rahman, Raheem, Malik*, that we observe operating in the universe and in our lives every second of every day. With this evidence, we arrive at certain

knowledge of the existence of God Almighty that for now suffices for us to place our complete faith in Him alone and declare from the depths of our hearts:

I'yā ka na' budu:

Thee alone do we serve.

'**Serving God**' means complete submission and obedience to His laws and commandments. These Divine Laws cover both the physical and spiritual sides of our lives. In Islam laws pertaining to a healthy lifestyle, hygiene, proper diets etc. go hand in hand with moral laws that promote God-consciousness and harmonious co-existence with fellow humankind aimed at bringing ultimate peace in the world. These laws are contained in the Holy Quran.

The prayer continues:

Wa i' yā ka nasta' in:

And Thee alone do we beseech for help.

Man is taught not wait for natural disasters to befall him before turning to God for help. He is taught to turn to Him every moment of his life. That is why every act or deed of a Muslim begins with the words '*Bismillah hirahman nirahim*' I begin in the name of Allah (or **with the assistance** of Allah), the Beneficent, the Merciful. Despite having been endowed with the power of discretion and free choice, man is yet too weak to make the right decisions and choices on his own without the help of

a Superior Being that is responsible for his very existence. With this in mind, the *Fatiha* continues:

Iḥdinnas sirātal mustaqeem:

Guide us on the right path.

The suppliant asks for guidance for himself and the entire human race. Overall peace in the land is dependent on the conduct of the human race. The choices and decisions man makes, if driven by misguided, immoral tendencies, result in failure and ultimate chaos whereas the opposite brings success and harmony. Thus the prayer continues:

Sirātal latheena an amta alayhim:

The path of those who have earned Thy favour or with whom Thou art pleased.

The suppliant chooses to follow the examples set by the greatest of humankind that walked the earth. He asks to be placed on the path of the Prophets of God, the Saints, the Righteous, and the Truthful - all the men and women with moral integrity of the highest order that humanity produced from the beginning of time. These, to mention some, include the likes of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Ishmael, David, Solomon, Confucius, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad – those who revolutionised the world and brought about transformations of the human race from positions of low savagery to high morality. These are the honourable ones in the sight

of God, who have earned His favour because they have sacrificed their entire lives for justice and fairness; have served humanity by their true compassion and love for the oppressed; the elderly, the orphans, the needy, the widows and all of God's creation. This is the company the worshipper asks to be associated with.

The *Fatiha* concludes with the suppliant appealing:

Ghayril mahdoobi alayhim:

(NOT the path of) Those who incur Thy displeasure and anger (who reject and oppose Divine Laws).

The suppliant does not want to be influenced by and associated with those who have incurred God's wrath by wilfully opposing His Laws; who are responsible for mischief in the land through their Godless politics and immoral life-styles and its far-reaching influences; who are responsible for wide-scale aggression and human suffering which they create because of their persistent greed for material power and wealth; who murder and rape; who rob and assault; who engage in human and drug trafficking etc. The suppliant seeks protection against all of these and continues:

Wa ladhawleen

NOR those who go astray.

He pleads NOT to be placed on the path of those deviants who use religion to mislead and commit acts of immorality and terror

in the name of religion or country; those who tamper with Divine scripture to indoctrinate and encourage lewd and immoral behaviour; who worship God's creation; who make lawful what God has forbidden and destroy the moral fabric of society in the process. – Amen!

We strongly condemn all acts of aggression and terror including all violations of basic human rights specifically those carried out in the name of Religion or State!

May the Good Lord Guide Us All

AMEN!



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