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*Surah Al-Fatihah*

*By*

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# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Merciful

### Introduction

All praise and glory is only for Allah (swt). The First and the Last. The Manifest and the Hidden. The One Who has Power over all things. The Creator and the Sustainer of all that exists. The Manager and the Director over all affairs. The One True Sovereign and King Whom all of creation must obey and submit to for every second of their existence. The One True God Who has the right to be worshipped and sanctified by all of the creation.

Praise and thanks be to Allah (swt) who has favored us the children of Adam (as) by giving us a mind and senses with which we can realize His (swt)'s Existence from the signs in the universe around us. Praise and thanks be to Allah (swt) again who sent to us the prophets and the messengers with clear proofs and undeniable arguments to guide us to Him (swt) and to teach us how to worship and serve Him (swt).

I praise and thank Allah (swt) for all of His bounties and I humbly ask Him (swt) to continue to bless and bestow upon us from His (swt)'s Grace, Bounty, and Mercy. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah (swt), the One and Only, Who has no partner or equal, the Generous and the Forgiving. I bear witness that our leader Prophet Muhammad (saw) is His (swt)'s servant and Messenger, the beloved of Allah (swt) and the very best of all of the creation of Allah (swt). Allah (swt) honored the Prophet (saw) by giving him (saw) the Glorious Quran. Every prophet was given a Miracle to prove to the people that he was truly sent from the Divine. The Prophet (saw) was sent as the Final Messenger to all of mankind until the Last Day. So he (saw) was given an enduring Miracle that lasted throughout the ages. That Miracle is the Quran, the greatest Miracle that was given to any prophet.

Allah (swt) says in the Quran "*I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me*" (51:57). In this verse Allah (swt) clearly tells us that the purpose of our existence is so that we may serve Him. We do not exist for any other purpose other than this. This is the very reason why we exist. It is only so that we may know Him and dedicate ourselves to Him. Such is the only purpose for our existence. The only purpose for our being.

But how do we achieve this purpose? How do we know how to serve Him? This too our Lord has told us, for He says "*We have not omitted anything from the Book*" (6:39). The meaning of this ayah is that everything that the human being needs for guidance is in the Quran. There is nothing that has been omitted from this Book on how to guide the human being to fulfill the purpose of his creation. So for us to know how to fulfill our role of serving Allah (swt), the role for which we have been created, the Quran is the source of guidance to which we have to look. Could then there be anything that is more valuable to us?

This Quran then is what shows us the way to Allah (swt). First through it being a Miracle it establishes and strengthens our faith in Him. It allows us to be certain that this Message is indeed from Him. Then it further shows the path to Him by showing us what is pleasing to Him. It shows us what we need to do and how we need to be so that we are in a state where He is pleased with us. And when He is pleased with us that is when He is near to us. This really is all that there is to life. To be near the Divine. To seek His Contentment and Pleasure in everything that we do.

So how much then should we be grateful to Him? Not only for sending us this Quran but also for having given our hearts the ability to bear the Quran. For He says in another ayah "*Had We sent down this Quran onto a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, crushed into pieces out of fear of Allah*" (59:21). It is only from His Mercy that our hearts have the ability to bear the strength of this Book. Its words can destroy mountains but Allah (swt) has given us the ability to learn it, to reflect on it, to implement what it contains of our duties to Him and to propagate it to others. What is the strength of the heart of humans when compared to that of a mountain?

There are also many hadith from the Prophet (saw) where he (saw) has told us the great importance of the Quran. He (saw) has told us again and again to learn, teach and be attached to the Quran throughout of our lives. The Prophet (saw) has said in a hadith recorded by Muslim that "The Quran is either an argument for you or against you". On the Day of Judgment when all of mankind is brought before Allah (swt) the Quran will be brought forth also. It will be an argument in support for those followed it and called to it. And it will be an argument against those who neglected it and those who opposed it.

The Prophet (saw) also said in a hadith recorded by al-Bukhari that “The best of you is he who learns Quran and teaches it”, meaning Allah (swt) will be well pleased by the one who learns His (swt)’s Book and teaches it to others. Not only is Allah (swt) well pleased with such a person, but also He (swt) considers that person to be the best of the believers. What could be better than that? What could be better than to know that you are among those who the Divine is most pleased with? So by attaching yourself to this Quran, by learning it and by teaching it to others you could be the best. In other words you could be the most pleasing to Allah (swt), what could be better than that? The Prophet (saw) also said in a hadith qudsi that Allah (swt) declared “If anyone is distracted from asking of Me by the Quran and remembering Me (with it), I will give him better than what I give the askers”. This means that for the one who occupies himself with the Quran, Allah (swt) will give him better than what He gives those who are asking of Him. So if you occupy yourself with this Quran then Allah (swt) will give you what is even better than what He gives to those who are asking of Him (swt). The Prophet (saw) also said “The Excellence of the words of Allah over all other words is like the Excellence of Allah over his creation”. Could there be any comparison between Allah (swt) and the creation? Similarly there is no comparing the Words of Allah (swt) over all other words. In another hadith recorded in At-Tirmidhi he(saw) said “There will be trials like patches of dark night”. When he (saw) was asked how the Muslim community could escape these trials, he (saw) said “The Book of Allah, Blessed and Exalted, contains your history, news about what came before you, news about what will come after you, and correct judgment between you. It is decisive and not a joke. Allah will destroy any oppressor who abandons it and Allah will misguide whoever looks for guidance from other than it. It is the Firm Rope of Allah, His Clear Light and the Wise Reminder. It is the Straight Path. Passions are not misguided by it, tongues do not become sated with it, and the ones that fear Allah do not become bored with it. It does not wear out when it is repeated a lot and its wonders never cease”. Look at all the descriptions that the Prophet (saw) gives for the Quran in this hadith. It is clear that the Muslim Ummah today is going through such trials that the Prophet (saw) described in this hadith as “patches of dark night”. He (saw) said this to describe the difficulty and the evil of such times. Then he (saw) said that they only way for us to survive such times is with the Quran.

Now do you realize the importance of this Quran? Do you realize how critical it is for us to learn this Book? This is why I have started this project called "Quran-Tafsir.org". This is a web site where I plan to post Quran Tafsir PDF Books for everyone to come and read for free. Through this website and with the Permission of Allah (swt) I hope to facilitate a greater understanding and appreciation of this blessed Book. First of all you should know that this is a work in progress. There are a few Surahs available now, but Insha Allah with the Permission and Support of Allah (swt), I plan to add more Surahs in the future. Insha Allah, with the Help and Support of Allah (swt), I plan to complete the entire Quran. These books are free for you to download, keep and give it to whomever you wish. I only ask you for your dua.

Allah (swt) gave us the Quran in the Arabic language, and anything that is not in Arabic is not Quran. So what we are giving you here is not the Quran, rather it is only an attempt to convey some of its meanings. Now it is true that you need to be an expert in the Arabic language to learn the deep and profound meanings of the Quran and it is a duty upon every Muslim to make their best effort to learn the Arabic language. But until we get there, there is still a large part of this Ummah who do not have the Arabic language and so have no access whatsoever to the Book of Allah (swt). Not only is the Quran itself in Arabic but the vast majority of the Tafsirs of Quran that explain the Quran are also in Arabic. So for those Muslims who do not have the Arabic language, they have very little access to what their Creator and Master is telling them. We do not feel that the current translations available do justice to the meaning of the Quran. This predicament is what we seek to correct with this endeavor. Insha Allah through these books we hope to give those who do not have the Arabic language a small understanding of the deep and profound meanings of this Book. At the same time we also encourage every one of our readers to make an effort to learn the Arabic language so that they can understand Quran as it was revealed from Allah (swt), and also so that they can read the classical Tafsir books that our scholars have written. We truly need to make an effort do to both. We have to strive to learn the Quran and we have to strive to learn Arabic. Both are a part of our Din and so both are extremely important. But at the same time we cannot say that we are going to wait until we are masters of Arabic before learning the Quran. That will take time and we cannot remain ignorant of the Quran for so long.

When compiling this Tafsir I have tried my best to stick to the meaning of the words that Allah (swt) gives in the ayahs. So as you read this Tafsir you will not find anything that is not given in the language of the ayah or anything that is not supported by another ayah in the Quran or in a hadith of the Prophet (saw). The only thing that I have done is to try and connect the meaning of the ayah to the present day situation that our Ummah is facing. I have also tried to derive lessons from that ayah for our lives today. Because the Quran is a Book of guidance. And we all need guidance from Allah (swt). We all need to be shown the way to Him. So for every ayah I have tried to extract the lesson for our lives. I have tried to see how we can please Him, how we can draw closer to Him, through that ayah. But I am not perfect and that is why I say that if there is anything here that is correct and good then it is from Allah (swt) and if there is anything here that is wrong then it is from me and I seek His forgiveness for any misinterpretation I may have unintentionally done of His (swt)'s Book.

Since these are the words of Allah (swt) we do not intend by this Tafsir any kind of comprehensive explanation of the Quran's meanings. As we said that what we have given here only scratches the surface of the meaning that is in Allah (swt)'s Book. Allah (swt) has told us in Quran that if the trees of the world were pens and if the oceans of the world were ink this still would not be enough to write His (swt)'s words. Ali (ra) is reported to have said 'If I wished I could load seventy camels only with the Tafsir of Surah Fatihah'. This shows the extent of knowledge and meaning that is contained in the Quran. So our humble project is by no means an extensive explanation of the meanings of the Quran. You can think of each ayah as an iceberg and the meaning that we give in this Tafsir as only the tip of the iceberg. There is still a wealth of knowledge and guidance in each ayah that we cannot even touch upon here. So do not allow this tafsir to be the only one that you read, rather you should read more and more so that you can discover more and more of the meanings in the Book of your Lord. You should listen to audio and video lectures of Quran tafsir, as well try to attend any classes or sittings of Tafsir that you can find. You should also try to read the Quran yourself and contemplate on it yourself. Your life is nothing but a journey to your Lord and the Quran is your guide, should it not then be your everything? Should you not spend all of your time with it?

The one rule that we have to always keep in mind when we read any ayah of the Quran is that we must always be asking ourselves how that ayah can be a source of guidance for us. We have already said how the Quran is the manual or the guidebook for us to know how to serve our Creator. Allah (swt) created us for the noble purpose of serving Him (swt) and the Quran is the manual on how to accomplish that purpose. So as we read each ayah of the Quran, Insha Allah, we should try to learn its meaning and we should ask ourselves how the meaning of this ayah can help us to better serve our Creator. We have to always remember this intention when approaching this Book. So we have to always be looking for the practical implementation of that ayah in our day to day life. If we keep this rule in mind then Insha Allah for every ayah that we learn we would be fulfilling the purpose for which the Quran was sent down. To show us how to serve Allah (swt) so that we can earn His Pleasure. It is only when we get His Pleasure that we will get His Mercy and it is only when we get His Mercy that we can enter His Garden.

I am not part of any group or movement. Neither am I affiliated with any organization or government. I am just trying to learn the Book of Allah (swt) and teach it to others That is the only objective that I hoped to achieve when I wrote this tafsir. This tafsir does not in any way call to acts of unjustified violence or terrorism. I do not want anyone to harm others or harm themselves as a result of reading these books. Insha Allah if you read this tafsir we will show you how all acts of terrorism directed against civilians and non-combatants is wrong and is not permitted in the Law of Allah (swt). Insha Allah I will show how Islam is a religion of peace and how it was only sent for the betterment of mankind. Even when it comes to jihad and fighting this Din has specific rules on how combat should take place. I personally am not against any government or nation. I believe that all people are the children of Adam and so all people are our brethren in humanity. I believe that all people are good unless they do something to prove otherwise. So I have nothing against anyone whatsoever. All that I say in this tafsir is what Allah (swt) Himself has said. All that I do is explain and elaborate on what is already there in the text. If you think that I have said something that is not supported by the Quran or Sunnah please e-mail me and bring it to my attention. I want nothing but good for all mankind to come from this work.

I pray to Allah (swt) to accept this humble work and to forgive its many shortcomings. I ask Allah (swt) to allow these books to facilitate a greater understanding of the Quran by our brothers and sisters in the Muslim Ummah. I ask Allah (swt) to allow these books to allow non-Muslims to gain insight into the knowledge and wisdom that the Quran contains. If Allah (swt) guides even one person through these books then I believe that all of my efforts were worth. You are welcome to print out these books and use them for dawah. You can distribute them to anyone whom you feel will benefit from them. I pray that these books will allow the Quran to be a source of guidance and a comfort for all who read it like just it has been for me. There is healing and mercy in this Quran just as there is light and guidance, we only have to look for it. I pray that this Quran be a light for all those who search for Him (swt) with it. A beacon that guides to His Pleasure and His Paradise. I beg Him to allow this work to be even the smallest of help for the Muslim Ummah on the great mission that He (swt) has given us on this earth. Ameen!

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The following abbreviations are used in this Tafsir.

(swt) – Subahana Wa Ta’ala , “Perfect and Pure and the Most High”

This is used whenever we mention the Name of Allah (swt), our Lord and Master.

(saw)- Sallahu Allahi wa Salam, “Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him”

This is used whenever we mention the Prophet (saw), our Messenger and Leader.

(as) – Allahi Salam - “On him be peace”

This is used whenever we mention a previous prophet or an angel.

(ra) – Radi Allahu an – “May Allah be pleased with him”

This is used whenever we mention a companion of the Prophet (saw).

These have only been used for the sake of brevity and we do not intend to diminish the meaning of them in any way. When you read these you should try to pronounce them out loud to show your respect for your Creator and His Messenger and those whom He (swt) is pleased with.

## Surah Al-Fatihah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

### **1. In the name of Allah, The Extremely Merciful, the One Who always shows Mercy.**

The first ayah of every Surah in the Quran with the exception of Surah Tawbah is this collection of words that are known as the Basmallah. So this is the first ayah in one hundred and thirteen out of the one hundred and fourteen Surahs in the Quran. The fact that Allah (swt) in His infinite Knowledge and Wisdom has decided to repeat this ayah so many times in the Quran should show us what an important ayah it is. The scholars have said that all of the previous revelations can be summarized in the Quran, and all of the Quran can be summarized in Surah Fatihah, and all of Surah Fatihah can be summarized in the Basmallah. So in reality these five words summarize all of the revelations that were ever sent down from Allah (swt) to mankind. Can you then even begin to understand the importance of this ayah? Let us now look into each word of this ayah in the hope that Insha Allah we can derive some of the tremendous meaning and benefit that it contains. As always we ask Allah (swt) to guide us and we ask Him (swt) to open up for us the knowledge and benefit that is in His (swt)'s Book.

The first word in this ayah is the Arabic word *Ba*. This word means "with" or "in". This type of sentence is what is known in English as an ellipses or a sentence in which a portion of the words has been purposely left out. This is clear because we can see that Allah (swt) is teaching us to say in His Name but He is not telling us what is in His Name. The scholars say that the reason why this has been done is so that in its place we can put any action that we do. This way any action that we do we can do in the Name of Allah (swt). That is why when we make ablution for prayer we say the Basmallah, when we have our meal or drink water we say the Basmallah, when we perform our jobs or drive our cars we say the Basmallah. In other words for every single action that we do from the time we wake up to the time we go to bed we can say these words. This way every single action that we do is an action in the Name of our Lord and Master. Every single action that we do can be part of our servitude to Him and by it we can draw closer to Him.

The scholars point out at least five benefits that we can derive from saying these words at the beginning of every action that we do. First is it helps us to remember Allah (swt). It helps us to remember the Divine. It helps us to remember that Tremendous and Magnificent Being Who is so close to us. How can you know that there exists such a Being as He and still be heedless of Him? Yet this is what many of us do. We know of Him but we forget Him. How can we remember It is by always repeating the words of this ayah. Allah (swt) has told us in other ayahs that only in His (swt)'s remembrance do the hearts find solace. Meaning that when we remember Him our hearts will be tranquil and at peace. And how can they not be? When you know that there is so Majestic and Beautiful a Being Who is so close to you. Who will love you if you love Him. How can you not just think of Him and be completely content? How can you not just think of Him and have all of your worries and fears fade away? Not only does remembering Him bring this solace into our hearts but it is also among the most beloved of acts to Him. Just this act of remembering Him. Just this act of bringing Him to mind. It does not require much effort at all. It is an action of your heart. And yet it is so pleasing to Him. It draws you so close to Him.

The next benefit of saying these words before each of our actions is that it reminds of our slavehood to Him. It reminds us of the purpose of our existence. Just as we tend to forget Him, we also can forget what we are doing here. Sometimes when this world distracts us, when our own egos and desires overpower us, then we start to think that we are in this world to live for ourselves. We think that we are here to serve ourselves. So in our actions we only seek to benefit ourselves. And often times we do not even act. Rather we remain idle and lethargic. Thinking that there is no purpose to existence other letting the moments pass by. We forget that we are being tested at every moment. We forget the great purpose for which we were created. But when become in the habit of always saying these words before each of our actions. Even for the smallest and most mundane then we remind ourselves that we are here for a greater purpose than just serving ourselves. We remind ourselves of Him. We remind ourselves of the onus upon us to live in slavehood to Him. So how important then are these words, how blessed are they, in that through them you could always remind yourself of your purpose. You could always remind yourself of the sublime and noble reason for your being.

The third benefit is that these words can change every act that we do into an act of slavehood to Him. Every action that we do can be considered part of our slavehood of Allah (swt) if we perform that action with the hope of drawing closer to Him (swt) and with the intention of abiding by His (swt)'s Law in that action. So by saying the *Basmallah* before every action, we are turning that action into an act of slavehood to Him. With that action we can seek to get closer to Him and we hope that action will be a source of reward for us on the Day of Judgment. Just think for a moment how beautiful this is. You can journey closer to Him at every moment of your life. For no matter what you do, if you do that action seeking Him sincerely, then you can draw closer to Him through that action. You can find true peace and contentment through that action. You can find purpose and meaning through that action. Even for as mundane an act as cooking or working in your job. It is no longer just about you, rather it is about Him.

The fourth benefit of saying is that we can get Allah (swt)'s help and support in that action. The scholars of language have pointed out that the word *Ba* in this ayah is the *Ba* of *Istiyanna*, which means "to seek help". So every time we say these words before any one of our actions not only are we seeking to closer to Allah (swt) with that action but we are also seeking His help in that action. We are asking for His support and His enabling grace. We are asking Him to make it easy for us. Because we know that we are so weak. We know that our ability and our strength is so limited. We know that all Might and all Power is only with Him. Just think that if He were to help you in what you are doing then how could you not meet with success? If He were to support you then what obstacle is there that you cannot overcome? You only have to ask of Him. He is both Able to help you and unlike most of the creation He loves to help you.

The fifth benefit of saying these words before all of our actions is that it prevents us from doing the forbidden actions. If we are in the habit of saying these words before every single one of our actions no matter how mundane that action might be, then whenever our desires might prompt us to do an evil action, Insha Allah we would say these words and then immediately remember Allah (swt). Insha Allah this should prevent us from doing that action. These five are only a few of the many benefits that we can receive by making it a habit of saying the Basmallah before all of our actions. How beautiful is that then? How beautiful is it to do each and every one

of our actions only for Allah (swt)? He is the One Who created us and He is the One Who is sustaining us for every moment of our lives. Do we not then owe it to Him (swt) to dedicate each and every one of our actions for Him (swt)?

Although we should say the Basmallah at the beginning of every action, one of the most important times to say it is before we start to read the Quran. Since we are turning to the Quran as a source of guidance for us, could there be any time in which need Allah (swt)'s help more and seek His Pleasure more than at the time when we read and study His Book? He wants us to mention His Name and call on Him as we approach His Book. That is why He has made this ayah as the first ayah in almost every Surah. It is His way of telling us that we always need to renew our intentions as we approach His Book. It always has to be for Him. We read this Book, we study this Book, we contemplate on this Book, and we call to this Book only for Him. And in all of these we beseech and implore His help. That is why every time we start a Surah. Every time we even approach the Quran we should say the Basmallah.

Another important reason why Allah (swt) begins Surahs of the Quran with the Basmallah is to declare a promise in His Name that everything in that Surah is the Truth. Allah (swt) speaks only the Truth, but in the Quran He (swt) makes an oath in His own Name to testify to the Truth of what He (swt) says. So by placing the Basmallah before a Surah He is swearing by His Own Name that everything in the Surah is the Truth. Everything that Surah has in terms of news must be believed in without a doubt and everything that Surah has in terms of laws must be followed without question. So if anything in the Quran is hard for you to accept then remember that the Lord and Master of this entire universe has taken oath in His own Name to what in this Book.

However as we mentioned perhaps the greatest benefit for us in this ayah is that it helps us to remember our Lord. There is nothing more important than remembering Him. So when we do an action in His Name it is very important that we bring Him to the forefront of our minds while we are doing that action. He is the Perfect One and He is the Source of all good in our life. How then can we not glorify Him? How then can we not dedicate ourselves to Him completely? By doing all of our actions only for Him. Such is the only way our lives can have true purpose and meaning. We are so weak. We are so limited. So we are not worthy of our dedication. Only He is.

We should also note here that the language gives the meaning that not only is the action done for Allah (swt) but it done *only* for Him (swt). This means that when we say these words before an action then we are doing that action in the Name of Allah (swt) and *only* in the Name of Allah (swt). We are doing that action for Allah (swt) and for no one else. So we cannot say these words before an action and then intend by that action anything but His Pleasure. This is a very important concept for all Muslims to remember because it prevents pride and arrogance from surfacing in any of our actions. It is very important that we always strive to protect ourselves from these demons. We as Muslims currently live in an Ummah where although a large portion of the community is not known for piety, those who are pious are still held in high regard and looked up to by the community. So when a Muslim does an action of piety in a community that is not so pious then a small sense of arrogance may also try to come in to the intention of that action. The Muslim may be doing that action to make himself or herself feel better than the rest of the community. But when he or she says the Basmallah, and remembers that part of the meaning of these words is that the action can only be for Allah (swt), Insha Allah that should prevent him or her from having any other motive besides the Pleasure of Allah (swt) in that action. Insha Allah it will ensure that the sincerity is present in all actions. We all know the terrible punishment in the Hereafter that Allah (swt) has reserved for those who do righteous and pious acts with the intention of showing off in front of the people. By always saying the Basmallah before every action and always reminding ourselves that we are doing that action for Him Alone Insha Allah we can save ourselves from this terrible fate. We can save ourselves from the demons of arrogance.

So the first part of this ayah gives the meaning that we are doing all of our actions in “**the Name of Allah**”. We know from authentic hadith that Allah (swt) has over ninety-nine Names and that each Name describes our Lord and Master in a different way. Each Name is a different way for us to know our Creator. But the Name “Allah” is most likely the greatest of His Names. It is not the Arabic word for “god” but rather it is a proper Name. So unlike the English word “god”, this Name does not have a plural or feminine equivalent. While you can say “gods” and “goddess” nothing like this can be done with the Name “Allah”. Allah (swt) is One and Only and He (swt) is above differentiation between masculine and feminine. Is this not how the Creator should be?

Can you imagine the Creator and Sustainer of this universe to be limited in any way or to have partners or equals? "Allah" means the One Who is Perfect in every way and that is how we should know the Creator to be. So we see how the Quran matches the reality perfectly, it is said that the Quran is a mirror for the universe and the universe is a mirror for the Quran because they are both from the same Source. So from our contemplation of the world around us we can arrive at the conclusion that this universe must have a Creator and Sustainer and that this Being must be Perfect in every way. This Being has to be without partner and without limitations. Even above the limitation of being male and female. And this is exactly how the Quran describes Him to be. The Quran matches what we see from the universe perfectly. This in and of itself is one of the strongest of proofs for the Truthfulness of this Book. Because all other religions place some kind of restriction or limitation upon Him. Only Islam describes Him to be as we would know Him. As absolutely Pure and Perfect. The One without weakness or flaw. The One Who deserves that all our actions be for Him. The One Who deserves to be submitted to by all creation.

So the meaning of the Name "Allah" is "The One Who possesses Who all of the attributes of perfection". Allah (swt) is the One Who is Perfect in every way and because of that Perfection, because of that Majesty, because of that Tremendousness, He (swt) deserves the submission of all creation. Allah (swt) has several Names that describe His (swt)'s Perfection and all of these Names are contained in the Name "Allah". So for example we know that Allah (swt) is All-Powerful in that He can do anything and everything that He does is easy for Him. He does not even need to make any effort whatsoever to accomplish anything, He (swt) only says "Be" and it is. So when we refer to Him as "Allah" we are also referring to Him as the All-Powerful. We also know that Allah (swt) is All Knowing in that everything is in His Knowledge. There is not one iota of knowledge that is outside His Knowledge because He (swt) Knows everything. He (swt) knows the past, present and future. He (swt) Knows what is, what was, what will be and what could have been. He (swt) Knows what is in the deepest ocean, and what is in the farthest galaxy as He (swt) Knows what is in the deepest recesses of our hearts. He (swt) is also the All Seeing and the All Hearing. There is no sight that is hidden from Him. He (swt) Sees everything, even that which is hidden in layers upon layers of darkness. Similarly there is no sound that does not reach Him,

even the faintest whisper reaches Him. These are only a few of His Perfect Names and all of these Names are in the Name “Allah”. This is why it is said that it is the greatest of His Names. It is the Name that best describes Him. When you call on Him by this Name you are in essence calling on Him by all of His Names. This is something that is special only for the name of “Allah”, So whereas the other Names describe only that particular attribute of His, the Name “Allah” describes all of His (swt)’s perfect attributes. It is the most comprehensive and the most complete of His Names and that is why it is the greatest.

The Name “Allah” is said to be derived from the words “*Al*” and “*illah*”. The word “*Al*” is similar to the English word “the” and it is used for identifying the definite article in a sentence. So for example when you say “a book” you could be referring to any book but when you say “The book” there is the specific and definite book that you are referring to. The word *illah* does not simply mean “god” or “object of worship” as it is commonly translated. Rather it means that which the heart of a person is attached to. The *illah* of a person is what fills his thoughts day and night and is the object of his actions. In other words a person’s *illah* is the most important thing in that person’s life. Throughout the centuries, people have taken as their *illah* various idols, celestial bodies, fire, and even other human beings. In reality however an *illah* does not need to be an idol or some other physical object but it can be almost anything. For some people it is their wealth, for others it is their family or tribe and for others it is their status or image in the eyes of the people, and for others it is their desires and lusts. All of these are things that preoccupy a person’s time because their heart is attached to them. Sometimes a person can have more than one *illah* and they all compete for being the purpose behind this person’s actions. But when the word *al* and the word *illah* are combined it forms the Name “Allah”. This Name itself shows us that only Allah (swt) deserves to be *illah* because He (swt) is “*the* *illah*”. He (swt) is the One Who deserves to be the *illah*. For all creation. Firstly because He is our Creator and Sustainer. He brought us into existence. At every moment He maintains our existence. And He is the One Who has given us everything that we have. Every bounty, every happiness, that we have in our lives is only from Him. But an even more important reason why He deserves to be our *illah* is because of His Perfection and Majesty. How could you know of so Pure a Being and not dedicate yourself to Him

However some may still claim that this is difficult to do. Some may say that to make Him as the purpose for all of our actions and the centerpiece of all our thoughts is an ideal that is difficult for us to live up to. They might bring the argument that we as Muslims today are so distracted by the life of this world. They might bring the argument that there are too many distractions in this world which take us away from Him. The response to such an argument is that no one ever said this would be easy. The worldly life is always there in front of our senses and Allah (swt) is hidden from us. Although the signs of Allah (swt) are in the universe all around us, we still have to make a conscious effort to look for those signs and ponder and reflect on them. We still have to make a conscious effort to remember our Lord. Meanwhile the worldly life is simply there right in front of our senses and there will always be something there to capture our attention and distract us away from Him (swt). So it is understandable if it is difficult for us to live up to the meaning of the Basmallah that we are saying. But even though it is difficult we still have to try. Even if we never reach that state where all of our actions are purely for Allah (swt) we still have to try. We have to remember Allah (swt) and all that He (swt) has done for us. We have to remember how every second of our existence in this worldly life is a test from Him (swt). For every second of our life He is the One Who is keeping us alive and sustaining us. Every breath that we take is only from Him. Then we have to remember His Majesty and His Perfection. His Beauty and His Glory. How could you know of such a Being and forget Him? How could you know of such a Being and not yearn to serve Him? That is why we have to find it within ourselves to make the effort to remember Him constantly and make everything that we do only for Him (swt).

As we mentioned the Name "Allah" captures all of His other Perfect Names within it. So when we call on Him (swt) by this Name, we are also calling on the All Powerful, the All Knowing, the Most Merciful, the Most Loving, we are calling on Him (swt) with all of His Perfect Names. We then realize that it is only He Who has these Names of Perfection. This then becomes another reason for us to dedicate ourselves to Him. His Perfection dawns upon us even more when we know these Names of His. His right to be submitted to dawns upon us even more. How can we not be terrified and humbled by the All Powerful? How can we not be overflowing with love and adoration for the Most Loving and the Most Kind? How can we not be awed by the All Knowing ?

We should also realize that is nothing else and no one else can have the name of “Allah” because this Name denotes perfection and the lack of any weakness. Everything else is weak or imperfect in some way and so cannot have this Name. Some of the enemies of Islam have said that it is the name of an idol that the pagan Arabs used to worship, but there is no evidence for this whatsoever. In fact if we study the history of that time period it clearly shows that even when the pagans used this Name they used it to refer only to Allah (swt). Much like other polytheists they believed in Allah (swt), and they knew that the idols that they worshipped were not able to create the heavens and the earth. But they used these idols as intercessors between them and Allah (swt) hoping that they can get closer to Him (swt) through these idols. They had names for their idols such as *Hubal* and *Uzza* but when they mentioned the Name of Allah (swt), they knew it was only the Creator and Sustainer of the universe that they were referring to.

Now that we have a little bit of an understanding of what the Name “Allah” means, we can think about how fortunate we are that we know our Creator and our Sustainer in this way. Every religion has a concept of there being a Supreme Being, One Who has created everything and the One Who is the originator of everything. Even the simplest of minds can fathom that there has to be a source for everything, a source from which the universe originated. Anyone can see that a universe where everything is in some way limited could not have come into being on its own. Another reason why every religion has this idea of a Supreme Being is because Allah (swt) has sent many prophets and messengers. Every nation has had a prophet or messenger that was sent to it. Today there is no nation or people that have not received a messenger who was sent to them from Allah (swt). At some point in their history everyone has received a prophet or messenger. All of these prophets and messengers always preached the very same message. That was to believe in the Oneness of Allah (swt) and as a consequence of that belief to dedicate one’s life in servitude only to Him. So there were still some remnants of the teachings of these prophets among all people, and so they still had some idea of Allah (swt). But the problem was that almost all of the messages became corrupted over time. The people turned away from the teachings of their prophet and they started to worship others besides Allah (swt). Over time the idea that they had of this Supreme Being became corrupted and perverted in almost all religions.

So for example the pagans would set up idols as partners with Allah (swt), they would worship them along with Allah (swt). They believed that these idols also had a share in the control of universe. Similarly the Christians would attribute to Allah (swt) the idea of Him (swt) having a son and that the son having a share in His Divinity. The Jews would also put limitations on Allah (swt) and they would say that He (swt) can make mistakes and that His (swt)'s Power was limited. When we look at these corrupt beliefs that have been propagated by the people over the years, we have to remember how fortunate we are as Muslims in how we believe in Allah (swt). We believe in Allah (swt) to be One and Only, without any partner or equal. No one has a share in the Power or Divinity of Allah (swt). There is nothing that is like Him (swt) whatsoever. He (swt) is the Creator and everything else is the creation. All of creation is imperfect and weak, and Allah (swt) is Perfect and Able. Allah (swt) can do all things and there is nothing that is beyond Him (swt), and everything that He (swt) does is easy for Him (swt). We also say that Allah (swt) has Knowledge of every single thing and that He (swt) has the Perfect Wisdom, thus He (swt) does not make mistakes in anything that He (swt) does. There is no other religion or thought that has such a pure understanding of the Supreme Being and Creator of all things. So we should always be grateful to Allah (swt) for giving us the correct understanding of Him (swt).

In the second part of the Basmallah Allah (swt) begins to describe Himself for us by telling us two of His Names. These Names *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Raheem*. Both are derived from the word *rahma*. Among the meanings of this word are "mercy", "compassion" and "tenderness". But not only does it mean such mercy, but rather it an encompassing and overwrapping mercy. It is derived from the word which means mother's womb. So just think about the mercy that is to be found for the fetus in the womb of its mother. It is protected from all harm. It is provided with everything that it needs. It finds nothing but softness and warmth. It finds nothing but tenderness and love. This is the kind of mercy that these Names denote. We could ask ourselves that of all of His many Names why did He choose to mention these two Names in this ayah that is repeated so many times in the Quran? Why did He (swt) choose to begin His Book by mentioning these two Names of His? What is so important about His Mercy? Is it not also important to mention that He is the All Knowing, the All Seeing, the All Powerful? Why did He choose to mention mercy?

Because more than any other Name, Allah (swt) wants us to know Him for His Mercy. He wants us to know Him as the Being of Mercy. He is Merciful in so many ways and His Mercy is unlike any other. The first aspect of His Mercy that is so special is that it extends to all of the creation. All of the creation is experiencing His Mercy for every second of its existence. The first way in which this is so is that we all owe our existence to Him. We would not even exist at this moment were it not for Him. He is the One Who brought us all into existence. Every human, every animal, every plant, every object, every atom. Every single thing in all creation. How much of a mercy is it just to know of existence? He is not in need of anything, He does not need the creation. Rather He brought everything into existence only to make manifest His Mercy. So just think how every moment of your life, every experience that you ever had, every pleasure that you took is only because of Him. It is all because of Him. Such is the extent of His Mercy.

So the first manifestation of His Mercy is that He is the Creator and the Originator for all that exists. The second manifestation is that He is also the Sustainer, the Provider and the Nurturer. He is not a passive god who simply created the universe and then left everything to be. No rather at every single moment He is involved in the functioning of the universe. He is the One Who is maintaining this universe. He is the One Who is holding the atoms together. He is the One Who is providing the energy for all motion and all action. There is not a leaf that falls except if it be by His Power and Permission. He is also the One Who is providing all of creation with all that they need. We are all in need in so many ways, and He is the One Who provides us with what we need. So for example at this moment He is giving your lungs the air that they need, He is digesting the food and drink in your stomach and creating energy from it for you, He was the One Who gave you that food in the first place. He has given you shelter from the elements. He has given your eyes light with which to see. He has given you your family. Your livelihood. Your friends. Everything that you have, Everything that you use and benefit from. So many are the gifts and bounties that He has given to you. In fact there are so many that even if you tried to enumerate them you would not be able to. Such is how much He has given you and done for you. Not only for you but for all creation. He provides and sustains all creation and this is also from His Mercy.

This Mercy of Allah (swt) extends to every single thing. There is not a single thing except that it is tasting of this Mercy for every single moment of its existence. For example in the Quran Allah (swt) tells us to look at the birds in flight and how they spread their wings. He says that nothing keeps them from falling except He. Similarly it is He that provides the sustenance for every living thing. Even at this moment He is providing for the smallest of ants that walk on the earth and for the fish in deepest of seas. There is nothing in existence except that it needs Him for every moment of its existence. There is not a single thing except that He cares for it.

While the Mercy of Allah (swt) extends to all creation, there is nothing that has received more of His Mercy than us human beings. We are by far the greatest recipients of His Mercy and for that we have to be eternally grateful to Him. To show our gratitude to Him we have to strive to increase in our efforts to please Him. He tells us in the Quran how He has created everything on the earth for us. Not only has He created them for us but He has subjugated them. At every moment they are serving us. They exist only for our benefit. Even the sun and the moon have been created and subjugated into service for us. They are all serving us at every moment. They all exist only for our benefit. This is an honor and privilege that has not been given to any other creature. The subjugation of this universe is part of His Mercy for us for which we have done nothing to deserve. Rather it is only from His Love and Compassion for us.

But is this the extent of His Mercy for us? Is this all that He has given us? No there are other ways in which He has favored us and honored us above the rest of creation. Among these is the mind that He gave us. With this mind that Allah (swt) has given us we can communicate with other human beings, we can learn about the world around us and we can come up with material advancements and technology to benefit our stay on this planet. Simply look at all of the comforts and conveniences that you have because Allah (swt) has given us this mind. From the warm meal that you eat, to the shelter your roof provides, to the transportation your car gives you, to the information you find on the Internet. All of these are accomplishments of the human being but they are from the resources that Allah (swt) gave the human being and most importantly they were devised from the mind that He (swt) Alone gave to the human.

Yet despite all that we have accomplished with our minds and all of the technological advancements that we have made, the greatest blessing of this mind that Allah (swt) has given us is that it enables to realize and know Him (swt). With our minds we can study the universe around us and realize the Existence of Allah (swt) through the signs that are present in the universe. All the other creatures of this planet are already aware of Allah (swt) and they are always in a complete state of submission to Him (swt). But as for humans, Allah (swt) has given us the ability to study the world around us, reflect on it and realize that it could not have come into existence without Him (swt). This reflection and realization is only possible with our minds. So the greatest blessing of our minds is that our minds allow us to know Allah (swt). What greater Mercy can Allah (swt) show to a creation other than allowing that creation to know Him (swt)?

But how many of us in today's world use our minds for this purpose? We have used our minds to learn about everything in this world that will benefit us materially, but how many of us use our minds to think about why we are on this earth? How many of us reflect on what is the purpose of our existence on this planet? If only we did then we would realize that we have been created by Allah (swt) and our purpose in life is Him. This is the reason why we have been given our minds, it so that we can discover Him, be certain of Him, fall in love with Him and then spend our existence journeying to Him.

Despite the fact that there are so many people who refuse to use their minds to think about Allah (swt) and to think about the purpose of their existence, His Mercy still extends to these people as well. These are the ones who do not thank Him for all of the bounties that He has bestowed upon them and some of them even refuse to acknowledge His Existence. But still He gives them of His Mercy. Can you then even begin to realize the extent of His Mercy? Even for these ungrateful people He still continues to provide for them the air that they breathe, the food that they eat, the water that they drink and so many other bounties. He even allows their very bodies to function as He pumps their blood through their veins. If He were to neglect them for even a moment they would be completely destroyed. Yet they allow moments upon moments of their lives to pass by while they are in heedlessness of Him. Can you not see even that one moment in which you chose to neglect Him was a moment in which you desperately needed Him

Can you not see how you are always turning away from Him even though you are in need of Him and He always looks after you even though He does not need you? So despite all the evil and injustice that these people have done to Allah (swt), their Creator and Sustainer, He (swt) still continues to Sustain and Nurture them. He (swt) provides for them everything that they need. Can you then realize how Sublime and Magnificent your Lord is in that He would continue to provide for these people even though they do not even acknowledge Him let alone serve Him? Everything that the disbelievers have is from Allah (swt) and they have done nothing for Him (swt) to deserve it. And yet another mercy that He gives to them is that He gives them time to change their ways. He gives them time to be better. He gives them time to return to Him. Every moment that passes them by is a Mercy for them. A chance for them to return to Him.

The greatest manifestation of His Mercy that He has given us is the chance to know Him. Not only did He create us, not only does He sustain us, not only has He provided for us, but He has also given us the chance to know Him. How is this? It is through the revelation which He sends down. It is through this Quran. In this blessed Book He describes Himself for us. He tells us about Himself so that we can know Him. So that we can love Him. When we realize how Perfect and Pure, how Tremendous and Majestic a Being that He IS. Is this not the greatest of mercy? Just to know of Him? He has also told us in this Book how we can please Him. He has told us what are the acts which are pleasing to Him so that we can strive to do them. He has also told us what are the acts which are displeasing to Him so that we can strive to avoid them. Through our striving for Him we can come closer to Him. And what is sweeter than that? What is more sublime than that? Just to feel the Presence of such a Being as He close to you? Does it not just take away all of your fears? Does it not calm your nerves? Does it not ease your grief to know that there He is there with you to watch over you? To know that whatever difficulty that you go through, even the smallest of pain or distress, to know that He Knows it. And to know that if you have patience for His sake through it then He would reward you for it? He would bring you closer to Himself because of it? Would you then ever grieve? Would you then ever fear? This is why He describes those close to Him as those who have no fear upon them and who do not grieve. They do not feel any pain because they are so close to Him.

Yet another manifestation of His Mercy is this Din of Islam that He has sent to us. This beautiful religion. This beautiful way of life. Here He has shown us how to live. As individuals, as family members, and as a society as a whole. He has sent us guidance for every aspect of our lives. To the point where He has even shown us how to use the restroom. He has shown us how we should eat and drink. He has shown us how we should enter our spouses. He has shown us how we should raise our children. He has shown us how we should look after our parents and our relatives. He has shown us how we should worship Him. How we should behave with the people. How we should conduct our business and do our work. How we should set up our economy. Our government. Everything has been addressed in this beautiful Din that He has sent to us. So that if we follow this guidance we would become closer to Him and our lives would improve. We would live more tranquil lives and we would be near Him. Thus in both ways we can taste of His Mercy.

Now just think for a moment. Why does a Being like Him need to be so merciful? What is in it for Him to be so merciful? Is there any reason for Him to be so merciful? No, He is only this way because He chooses to be. Just think the kind of Being that He IS. What kind of a Being would choose to be this way? Can you even begin to imagine how beautiful and wonderful He IS to choose to be this way even though He has no reason to? He does not need anyone to praise Him, He does not need anyone to love Him. He does not need us at all. And yet despite this He still chooses to be so loving, He still chooses to be so kind. How much then should you love Him? How much then should you turn to Him? If all that we know of Him was His Mercy and Kindness then this in and of itself would be enough of a reason for us to dedicate ourselves to Him.

When we realize how Merciful a Being that He (swt) IS how then should we be? Do you think that He is pleased with us if we do not show mercy to others? The Prophet (saw) said "Allah will not show Mercy to the one who does not show mercy to the people". Allah (swt) Himself describes the Prophet (saw) as one who has been sent as a mercy to all creation. These text clearly show us that Allah (swt) wants us to mirror Him in His attribute of Mercy. There are some attributes of His which we can never compete with. Which we can never have. For example we can never be Glorious or Majestic or Proud or All Powerful or All Knowing. These are attributes of His which we can never reach and which He does not want us to reach.

But when it comes to His Mercy this is an area in which He does want us to emulate Him. Of course we can never be the All Merciful like He IS, but He still wants us to be as merciful as we can. As these text and several others clearly indicate. Just think about it. If He has chosen to be this Being of such Perfect Mercy. Of such Extreme Mercy. How can we think that He does not expect the same from us? How can we expect Him to have mercy on us if we do not have mercy upon His creation? Realize that everyone, even those people who may annoy you or who you may not like. Realize that they also are from His creation. So for His sake why cannot you prevent yourself from becoming angry with them? Why cannot you prevent yourself from hurting them with your tongue or your hands? And if you do hurt them then how could you ever expect Him to show mercy to you? And if He does not show mercy to you then what hope do you have?

So when we realize His Mercy then we should realize that if we want to be among His dedicated slaves, if we want to be among those close to Him, then we also need to inculcate within ourselves the attribute of mercy. Not only should we not harm others, but we should go out of our way to comfort them and make them feel better. We should try and help them through whatever hardships or difficulties that they may be facing. We should offer them counsel and advice. We should do whatever we can to make them more content. And we should not be this way for their sake or ours. We should not be this way expecting any kind of reward from them. Rather all that we should seek is His contentment. We should be merciful with them for Him.

When we realize Him to be the Being of such Mercy then what can we say about this Din, about this way of life that He has sent down? Could we expect it to be anything less than a mercy for all creation? Just as how Allah (swt) said that it is. Does it not mould the personality of those who follow it into the most merciful of beings? Are its laws not those which will bring mercy for all mankind? How then can anyone accuse this religion of terror and violence? How can they accuse it of hatred and oppression? Are they reading the same Quran that we are? Do they know the same Allah (swt) whom we know? How can they make such accusations when the very name of our religion means peace? When the very first attribute that our Creator describes Himself with is Mercy? They only make such claims out of their ignorance or out of their jealousy and hatred for this Din. But we who take the time to study the Book can clearly see the Truth for ourselves.

When speaking about the Mercy of Allah (swt) we also have to comment on the age old question of the Divine and evil. Because there are many who have brought the argument that if God is so Merciful then why does He allow for evil to happen on the earth? Why does He allow for people to be in pain and suffer? There are actually several responses to this contention. First is to realize that it is not our place to question our Master. We have to realize that Allah (swt) is not only our Creator and Sustainer and not only our God and Deity, but He is also our Lord and Master. He created us not only to worship Him, but also to serve Him. Also to dedicate ourselves to Him. Our only concern in life should be how to please Him. We do not need to worry about anything else except this. If we can make this as the sole purpose of our existence then all of our problems will go away. The only problem that we will have is trying to find out what we can do at this moment to please Him. This is all that will matter for us. If we have made this as the only purpose of our being then why should we even be asking such questions? Why should we be questioning our Master? Would He be pleased with our questioning of Him? The second response to this contention is realizing that this life is only a test. Do you think that Allah (swt) created souls like ours, souls who feel so much to live only for a few years and then to be destroyed completely? To not know of any existence anymore. Could this be possible? Could it be that we who know so much, we are who are capable of so much, could it be that all that awaits us is oblivion? Of course not. There is a life after this one. And as Allah (swt) has described it, that is the true life. That is the life in which true pleasure, and true peace, and true contentment is to be found. Whereas this life was created only for test. Allah (swt) did not create this world so that we can be happy in it. Rather He created it so that we can demonstrate ourselves to Him. And one of the ways in which we serve Him is by having patience and steadfastness through the different trials and hardships that we have to go through in life. Allah (swt) says *“Do you think that you will enter Paradise before Allah tests those of you who have strived and (also) tests those who are As- Sabirin (the patient ones, the steadfast.)?”*(3:142). This ayah clearly shows that our entering the Garden is conditional upon our being patient through times of sorrow and hardship, and also on us being steadfast in completing all of the obligations and responsibilities that we have. So the hardships and sorrows that we have to face in this worldly life are a test for us, if we

are patient and steadfast through these trials then we will be rewarded beyond measure in the Hereafter for our patience and steadfastness. In addition to being a source of reward, trials and difficulties in this world can also be a way in which Allah (swt) removes our sins. There is no believer outside of the prophets who is completely without sin. It is part of the nature of the son of Adam that he commits sins and only the prophets have been excluded from this rule. So it is a Mercy from Allah (swt) that He (swt) gives us some trials in this world so that our sins can be removed. Then after being cleansed of our wrong actions Insha Allah we can enter Paradise being purified. Therein we will find true happiness. Therein we will find true peace.

Another benefit of the trials and hardships that we face is that they bring us closer to Him. The one who lives a life of ease. The one who lives a life where all of his needs are taken care of. The one who is surrounded with luxuries and pleasures can easily become arrogant. He can start to think that he is the greatest. He can start to think that nothing matters except serving himself. He can forget his Creator and Sustainer. He can forget that he has a responsibility to worship Him, to serve Him and dedicate himself to Him. But when is made to go through some hardship. When he is made to remember how there is more to life than his desires and his ego. When he finds himself in a situation that is beyond his control. Then he realizes how weak he is. Then he realizes how much he needs Allah (swt). So he turns to Him. He supplicates to Him to remove that difficulty. Thus in that trial there was a hidden blessing.

The third response that we can give to the question of evil is that often times the evil is from our own hands, and thus the evil should be a motivation for us to change our ways. We know that in this world Allah (swt) has given us free will. He has given us the honor and the privilege of choice. This honor has not been given to the rest of creation. The rest of creation is always in a state of submission to Him. But we can choose and there are consequences of our choices. At the end of the day the essence of our choice comes down to do we choose Him or do we choose ourselves. He created us and He sustains us so that we would choose Him. He deserves to be chosen. He deserves to be the object of our dedication. He deserves that we give every moment of our life for Him. But often times we do not. Often we choose ourselves.

What then can we expect for the consequence of such a choice other than evil? When we choose to live for ourselves, when we choose to turn away from Him, what can we expect the consequence of this choice to be other than evil? Allah (swt) Himself tells us in the Quran how corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil that the hands of men have wrought. How then can we be surprised to see so much evil and suffering in the world today when we consider the states that our hearts are in? How many of us remember Allah (swt)? How many of us dedicate our lives to Him like we know we should? Like we have been created to do. The vast majority of us do not. The vast majority of us have turned away from the purpose of our creation. The vast majority of us have turned away from Him. And then in our blatant arrogance we still expect His Mercy. We still question the evil and the suffering that we see. Yes He is a Being of Mercy. But He is also a Being of Glory and Majesty. He does not deserve to be neglected and forgotten. He needs to be submitted to. He needs to be served. So rather than questioning we need to make an effort to change our ways. We need to make an effort to journey back to Him. We need to dedicate our lives to Him as He created us to. If each of us can do this, if each of us can call others to this, then Insha Allah we would find the world to be a better place.

Another response we can give to the contention of evil is to realize how limited in knowledge we as human beings are. We think we know so much when in fact we do not really know. Sometimes we might see something and think it to be evil but in it there could be much good. We really do not know. We really cannot say. Do we know the future? Do we even know what is truly good or evil? Is there anything about a thing through which we can say if it is good or evil? Can we sense the good or evil of a thing like we can sense its color or its texture? How then do we pass judgment on it? On what criteria are we judging it? So there may be something which many of us think is evil but in it is much good, and there may be something which many of us think is good but in it is much evil. We cannot say. We are not ones to judge. The only One Who can. The Only One Whose Knowledge is Perfect is He. So part of our submission to Him is that we must submit to His Judgment. Firstly because as we mentioned previously because this submission is also part of our worship. Secondly because we realize how little we know and we realize how His Knowledge is Perfect.

So we should realize from this ayah how He is a Being of Absolute Mercy. We see from here that for more than any other Name or attribute He wants us to know Him for His Mercy. Do you want to know what the extent of His Mercy is? Look at how He describes Himself here. Not only does He use two Names which both mean mercy but both of these Names mean an emphatic and extreme mercy. They both mean a kind of mercy that is great that it is not possible for anyone in the creation to have such mercy. *Ar-Rahman* means the One Who is Merciful by His Essence. The One Who is eternally Merciful. The One Who is always and forever in a state of Mercy. There is no one else in the creation who can have this Name. Even the pagan Arabs at the time of the Prophet (saw) knew this fact. They used to worship idols but they still know that only Allah (swt) could be Ar-Rahman. Because there is no one is capable of such mercy. This Name gives the meaning that Mercy is part of His Being. It is part of His Essence. To the point where He is never devoid of it. He is never separated from it. So realize that right at this very moment you are tasting of His Mercy. The Mercy that this Name gives. Just by the fact that you are alive. Just by the fact that your heart continues to beat. Just by the fact that your body continues to function. Just by the fact that the earth around you is still habitable. That there is still air to breathe. That it is still neither too hot nor too cold. That there is still gravity which holds your feet to the ground. All of these and more are only from His Mercy to you. This same mercy extends as well to the rest of creation. How then can you ever fall into heedlessness?

The Name Ar-Raheem means the One Who is Merciful by His actions. So the Mercy which comes from this Name Ar-Raheem is in addition to the mercy from His Name Ar-Rahman. Think now, He is Merciful just by His Essence. Just by Who HE IS. But then in addition to that He is also Merciful by His actions. Meaning that He does acts of Mercy. He constantly and repeatedly does acts of mercy. From both these Names you should realize that there is never a moment in which you are out of His Mercy. No rather at every moment you are wrapped in the Mercy that comes from His Essence and at the same time He does acts of mercy upon you. How then can you ever complain for anything that befalls you in life? Can you not realize that at every moment you are in His Mercy? So in whatever difficulty that you find yourself realize that His Mercy is in it. You may not realize it now, but one day soon you will.

Going back now to the Basmallah we see here how the meaning of the ayah is a command. Allah (swt) is telling us to begin every action in His Name. To begin every moment of our lives in His Name. Such that every action, every moment is only dedicated to Him. And He also tells us in the ayah why we need to do this. Why we need to dedicate ourselves to Him. Firstly because He is Allah the Being of Purity and Perfection. The Being of Majesty and Glory. The Being of Tremendousness and Sublimity Who because of this fact deserves that we submit to Him. How can you know that there is a Being as Tremendous as He and not glorify Him because of that Tremendousness. And how can your glorification be anything less than complete submission and servitude? This is what He deserves. Only because of Who He IS. Then from the Names Ar-Rahman and Ar-Raheem we also see how He deserves our dedication because of what He has done for us. Because of the extreme mercy that He has chosen to show us. How can we realize all that He has done for us and not even try to show our gratitude?

So look here how right in the very first ayah itself how Allah (swt) has established Who He IS and Who we are. He has also established in this ayah what our relationship with Him should be. He is the Master while we are the slaves. He is the Perfect and the Pure while we are the weak and the dependent. He is the Creator and we are the created. He is the One Who Provides and we are the provided. He is the One Who shows intense and extreme mercy and we are the recipients of that mercy. What then should be the consequence of our realization of these facts? Of course it should be our complete and utter dedication to Him. This is what He expects from us. This has already been established in this very first ayah. And He also tells us in this ayah how we can have that relationship with Him. It is by mentioning His Name before each of our actions. Thus dedicating each and every one of our actions only for Him. So before we even begin our journey into the Quran, our destination has already been shown to us. And that is Him. He is the goal that we should be seeking as we study this Book. Every ayah that we learn, we should always ask ourselves how we can come closer to Him through that ayah. We must always ask ourselves how that ayah will help us to fulfill our purpose of serving Him. Does it show us a path to follow or a path to avoid? Does it show us an action that we do or an action that we can avoid? These are the questions that we should be asking Insha Allah as we study this Book.

## 2. The *Hamd* is Only for Allah, the Rabb of *al-Alaimin*.

Surah Fatihah is a prayer that we read every day of our lives. If we make the minimum obligatory Salah that we are supposed to do then we would be making this prayer at least seventeen times a day. The fact that Allah (swt) has obligated us to make this prayer at least seventeen times a day should show us how important it is. How important then must it be for you to learn this Surah and always reflect on this Surah since your Lord has commanded you to recite it at least seventeen times a day? This Surah is the gateway to your Lord if only you would realize the meanings that it contains. So Insha Allah we must strive to learn as much of its meanings as we possibly can. As we mentioned at its core and its essence this Surah is a dua. We are asking of Allah (swt). We are asking of Him what we need the most of Him. Not for money or power. Not for sex or food. Not even for a devoted spouse and pious children. Not even refuge from calamities, nor easing of difficulties nor cure from illnesses. Not even entry into the Garden and salvation from the Fire. No, these are not what we ask of Him in this prayer. Because there is something which we need much more than any of these. And that is Him. We need Him. We need to be close to Him. And that is what He teaches us to ask for in this prayer. He teaches us to ask for that station of nearness to Him. Not only does He teach us this prayer but He also shows us in this Surah the etiquette of making dua. The way or the method that we should follow whenever we ask of Him. In the previous ayah Allah (swt) taught the Basmallah. He told us to begin this Surah in His (swt)'s Name. He told us to begin each and every one of our actions in His Name. Thus we are taught to remember Him and dedicate that act to Him. This is something that we should follow even when we make dua. We should first and foremost remember Him when we make dua. We cannot make dua to Him while our hearts are empty of Him. Then we even have to dedicate that dua to Him. We have to ask of Him for Him. So we see from this that even in our dua we should seek to please Him. We cannot ask of Him anything that will anger Him. We cannot ask Him for something forbidden in His Law or something that will harm others. Even in our asking of Him we should seek to draw nearer to Him by only asking for what pleases Him.

In this ayah Allah (swt) teaches us that before we ask anything of Him we first have to praise Him and we have to thank Him for all that He has given us. This is the core and the essence of the word *Hamd*. Allah (swt) says here the *Hamd* is only for Him (swt). The word *Hamd* means “praise” and it also means “thankfulness and appreciation”. Both of these meanings are present in this word. Now when it comes to praise not only does this word mean praise but it means the most perfect and complete praise. Because there are so many ways in which you can praise a person. You can praise them with only a mediocre praise. Meaning that there are some things which you appreciate about them but at the same time you also know that they have weaknesses. This is not the kind of praise that *Hamd* means. You can also praise someone only to please them. But in your heart you really do not have praise for them. Like how the king’s subjects would often praise him. Just to pacify him. Just to make him feel good. Just to get some favor from him. This also is not the kind of praise that *Hamd* means. Rather this word means the sincere praise. The praise that comes from deep in your heart. Now when it comes to thankfulness, this word also means the most sincere and the most complete of appreciation. It is not a mediocre show of gratefulness nor is it a show of thanks tainted with even the slightest bit of insincerity. No, rather it means that you are thanking someone from the very bottom of your heart. You truly do recognize all that they have done for you. You truly do realize how much is the onus upon you to try and repay them. This is the kind of thanks that *Hamd* means.

So in this ayah Allah (swt) commands us to say in our prayer that “The *Hamd* is only for Him”. Let us take a moment to look at the linguistic beauty of this statement. Notice how we are not commanded to say that we give *Hamd* for Allah (swt). In other words the *Hamd* here is not a verb. Rather it is a noun. The significance of this is that the *Hamd* being for Allah (swt) is not dependent on us. Meaning that Allah (swt) will be praised and thanked even if we ourselves do not praise and thank Him. Firstly by everything else in the creation. The angels, the animals, the plants, the trees, the stars, the stones, the mountains, the oceans, the sun and the moon, all of the objects, all of the atoms, all of the matter. They are all praising Him and thanking Him. So even if none of us choose to give Him this right realize that He is already given it to an extent far greater than any of us could possibly ever imagine.

The fact that Allah (swt) uses a noun here also denotes permanence. Because a verb is bound by time whereas a noun is not. So it is true that all of the creation is praising and thanking Him and we also have an onus to praise and thank Him. But the fact that Allah (swt) uses a noun here shows us that He is praised and thanked even if there is no one there to praise and thank Him. Such is how great He is. Such is how Tremendous He is. Such is how much is owed to Him. He is not dependent on anyone. He is utterly free of need. It is almost as if the praise and the thanks is innate to Him. Part of His Nature is that He is the Praiseworthy and He is the One to whom thanks and appreciation need to be shown.

Now of course the next question to ask is why does Allah (swt) deserve the praise and the thanks. First of all He deserves the praise because of His Perfection and Majesty. Because He has all of Perfect Names. How can you not praise Him when you see that He is Perfect in every way? You would praise someone when you see something in that person that is commendable. You would praise a warrior for being brave, a woman for being beautiful, a scholar for being intelligent, a judge for being wise and so forth. But now think about Allah (swt) and think about all of His Perfect Names. He is the All-Powerful in that He can do anything. He is the All-Knowing in that He Knows about every single thing. He is the All-Seeing in that nothing escapes His Vision. He is the All-Hearing in that He hears every single sound. He is also the Most Wise and the Most Kind and He is the Most Merciful and the Most Just. He is also the One Who has no limits or restrictions whatsoever. He is not bound by time nor space. He does not need anything whatsoever. Whereas everything else in the creation in some way is in need. Everything else in the creation in some way is limited. But He. He is the One Who nothing even compares to Him. Who is there in this entire universe that can see everything or hear everything? Is there anyone in this world who knows everything or can do all things? How can you know that such a Being Exists and still live in heedlessness of Him. This is why He deserves all of the praise. This is why He deserves that we glorify Him and extol Him. Even if you realized even a fraction of His Glory and Perfection then you would keep on praising Him. You would not stop. So awed would you by Him. So much would you fall in love with Him. Our problem today is that we are so heedless. That is why His Perfection and His Majesty and His Glory are all veiled from us.

So we praise Allah (swt) because of His Perfection and Majesty. Because in every way He is Superior. In every way He is the Greatest. Far greater than we could possibly ever imagine. Can you even begin to realize the extent of His Perfection and Majesty? Can you imagine a Being Who at every moment sees all visions even in complete and utter darkness? At every moment hears all sounds even the slightest and faintest whisper. For example right at this very moment you cannot hear the sound of your heart beating or your own breathing but He can. Can you imagine the Tremendousness and Awesomeness of such a Being? Can you imagine a Being Who is Perfect in Knowledge? Who knows all that there is to know. Who Knows the past, the present, and the future? His Knowledge is so Perfect that it does not even increase or decrease. Rather since pre-eternity, before time even began, He Knew all that there will be and all that there could have been. Such is the Perfection of His Knowledge. Can you imagine a Being Who is so Powerful that He can accomplish anything by Will Alone? He does not need helpers, He does not need supporters, He does not need anyone or anything at all. Rather in an instant He can create this entire universe and in an instant He can destroy it. Such is His Power. Such is His Ability. How can anything in the creation possibly ever compare to Him? How can anything hold your heart while you know that there is He? This is why He deserves all the perfect praise.

Even if you want to praise the creation you really have to praise Allah (swt). All praise that is given to the creation must actually go to the Creator. For example if you want to praise a warrior for being brave or a woman for being beautiful, you have to ask yourself Who is that created that warrior and that woman? Who is that gave them their bravery, their beauty, their intelligence, their wisdom? So ask yourself now who really deserves the praise? Then realize that any praise that is given to the creation should really be given to Allah (swt). He (swt) is the One Who created that person and He (swt) is the One Who gave that person that ability or attribute about them which we praise. So the next time that you want to praise anyone for anything, remember the One Who gave them everything that they have. Even when Shaitan comes and makes you praise yourself and tries to make you arrogant, you have to remember the One Who gave you everything that you have. So instead of praising yourself you should praise your Creator and your Sustainer and you should dedicate yourself to worshipping and serving Him (swt).

The other meaning that the word *Hamd* gives is gratefulness and appreciation. So when you say that the *Hamd* belongs to Allah (swt), you are also giving thanks and appreciating Him for all that He (swt) has given you. How much is it that you owe to Him? How do you have to thank Him for? He is the One Who created you and He (swt) is the One keeping you alive for every second of your life. Everything that you have in your life is from Him (swt). From the air that you breathe to the food that you eat to the water that you drink to the clothes that you wear to the homes that shelter you to the transportation that carries you. Even your family is something that Allah (swt) has given you. Your parents who looked after you when you were young, and your wives whom you take comfort in and the children whom you delight in are all from Allah (swt). Your hearing, your sight and your mind are all from Him. Every moment of your life is only possible because of Him, how then can you not thank Him. How then can you not show your appreciation?

Gratefulness is from justice. It is part of our nature. If someone holds a door open for you, you would thank them for it. How then can you not thank Allah (swt) when you consider all that He has given you? Our problem is that we have forgotten what He has given us. We have become heedless and unmindful of what He has given us. That is why we allow the moments of our lives to pass us by without remembering Him. Without showing our thanks to Him. As we see from this ayah He is not a Being Who likes to be neglected. He is not a Being Who likes to be forgotten. No rather at every moment He must be remembered. He must be turned to. He must be shown appreciation and thanks. Not because He needs it. Not because He is in any deprived if He is denied it. But rather such is what He deserves. If we take so much from Him and fail to show our appreciation then we would be the most unjust creatures. The most evil.

We can also notice that the Arabic word *lam* that Allah (swt) uses in this ayah is what is known as the “lam of possession and exclusiveness”. This word gives the meaning that both the praise and the thanks are **only** for Allah (swt) and they are for no one else. No one and nothing in this world deserves to be praised and no one and nothing in this world deserves to be thanked except Him. Why? Because everything else pales when compared to Him. Is there anything which has even a fraction of His Perfection and Majesty? Is there anyone who has done even a fraction of what He has done? And even the good and the beauty of this world are only from Him.

So in the first part of this ayah Allah (swt) is telling us to declare that all of the praise and the thanks are only for Him. But is this simply a declaration that He wants us to make with our mouths? What is the reality and the manifestation of this declaration? Is it enough for us to praise Him and thank Him only with our tongues? No of course not. So Tremendous and Magnificent is He and as a consequence so much is the praise that we owe to Him. And similarly so much is what He has given us and as a consequence so much is the thanks that we owe to Him. That it is not enough for us just to thank Him with our tongues. Rather we also have to praise and thank Him with our hearts and our limbs. We have to make manifest our praise of Him through our actions and even through our feelings. We have to do only what He is pleased with us doing. And we have to avoid all that is displeasing to Him. We even have to love and hate only for Him. Meaning that we have to love for Him. So we have to love the Prophet (saw), we have to love his companions and his family, we have to love the believers, we have to love our Salah, we have to love the Quran, we have to love the Divine Law. Our love for all of these emanate from our love for Him and our love for Him is a manifestation of our glorification of Him and our gratitude to Him.

Another aspect of our showing gratitude to Him is that we only use what He has given us in a way that is pleasing to Him. Just imagine if you know that it was Allah (swt) Who gave you your life and your body and your wealth and your talents and your mind and your sight and all the other bounties that you use so much but hardly ever notice. If you know that it was He Who gave you all these then how could you ever use these in a way that is not pleasing to Him? How could you use these to disobey His Law or to hurt others? Is that not the epitome of ingratitude and injustice? How can you take from Him and then use what He has given you against Him? Is that not like the dog who bites the hand of the one who feeds it? So how can you look with lust at a woman who is not your wife? How could you use your hands to strike another human being? How can you use your tongue to insult or backbite or even say anything negative about someone? Anything that might hurt their feelings in any way. How could you do this when you know that it was He Who gave you that tongue? How also could you leave your limbs at rest? How can you not use them to worship Him? How can you not use them to strive in His cause by serving His religion? If you do not then you are being ungrateful to Him for giving these to you.

The Prophet (saw) said in one hadith that “Strange is the affair of the believer. If he finds good in his life then he makes Hamd for his Lord and is thankful for that good and it is good for him, and if he finds hardship then he makes Hamd for his Lord and he is patient with that hardship and it is good for him”. This hadith shows us how our Hamd for Allah (swt) must be perpetual. At every moment we should be thanking Him and praising Him. This is because when it comes to praise He is always deserving of praise. There is never a moment when His Perfection or His Majesty is ever lessened. Even for a tiny bit. Whereas we the creation rise and fall. At times we are strong and at times we are weak. At times we are correct in our judgment and at times we make mistakes. At times we remember and at times we forget. But not so with Him. He is always Perfect and always Sound. He always has and always will be. This is one reason why we should always be making Hamd for Him. But we should also always be making Hamd for Him because we should always be thanking Him for whatever situation that we find ourselves in. For every moment that we find ourselves in. Because He is the Creator of that moment. So not only should we make Hamd for Allah (swt) for the good that we find in our lives but also what seems to be hardships and difficulties. Even though it may seem to us as a difficulty or hardship know that it really is not. Know that if you are sincere and true to Him then He has placed some good for you in that hardship. Perhaps it is a removal of sins, perhaps you can come closer to Him through the patience that you show, perhaps because of that hardship a greater hardship or evil was prevented from you. All of these are a few of the many benefits that come from hardships in this world. So the believer does not complain or question when these befall him in life. Rather he strives to be patient for the sake of his Lord. And he knows that even this act of trying to be patient is an act for which his Lord will reward him. And not only is he patient but as we see from the hadith and this ayah he is even thankful to his Lord for that difficulty. Because he realizes the hidden blessing that is there for him in. This is why the Prophet (saw) said in another hadith that the best dua is Al Hamd is only for Allah (swt). This hadith shows that we should do not need to always ask Allah (swt) for any particular thing. Rather we should simply praise Him and thank Him and make ourselves content with whatever He chooses to give us. We should surrender ourselves completely to Him. We should only seek from every moment His Pleasure.

So we should strive to always make Hamd for Allah (swt). When we are walking, when we are waiting, when we are working. Imam Muslim records from Abu Musa Al-Ashari (ra) that the Prophet (saw) said “*Al-Hamdulillah* fills the scales”. The meaning of this hadith is that if we simply say that the Hamd is only for Allah with sincerity, then our scale of good deeds will be filled with reward only from the utterances of these words and our understanding of their meaning in our hearts. How Merciful is Allah (swt) in that He (swt) has made it so easy for us to earn good deeds for ourselves in the Hereafter? In another hadith the Prophet (saw) said “Allah does not grant a servant a favor for which he says *al-Hamdulillah* except that what offered (of praise and thanks) is better than what he took (of the favor)”. This means that if something good happens in your life and you say *al-Hamdulillah*, then your praising and giving thanks to Allah (swt) is better for you than that favor you received. This is because you will only get the benefit of that favor in this world but your praise of Allah (swt) and your appreciation of the fact that only He gave it to you will be a source of reward for you in the Hereafter. Every believer knows that what is in the Hereafter is much better than what is in the life of this world. Furthermore if Allah (swt) grants us something and we do not thank Him (swt) for that blessing or that favor, then there are at least two dangers. First is that Allah (swt) might take that blessing or favor away from us, and second is that we will be questioned on the Last Day as to why we were ungrateful to Him for that favor that He conferred on us. In order to save ourselves from that we have to try our best to express our gratitude to Him for everything that He (swt) has given us. So just like you are in the habit of saying the Basmallah before any action that you take, you should say *al-Hamdulillah* for any blessing or favor that you receive in this world. Since your whole life and every moment in it is a great blessing from Allah (swt) you should be in the habit of saying *al-Hamdulillah* all of the time. Try to think of all of the good that Allah (swt) has given you and try to constantly praise Him (swt) for it. You will find that it is not hard to find much good in your life if only you would think about. Know that your Iman is the greatest of blessings. Know that He guiding you to this Quran and this tafsir at this moment is the greatest of blessings. Know that your health and your sustenance are among the greatest of blessings. How many people are there in this world who are suffering with illness and pain or who do not even have enough to eat? So think of all this good and thank Him.

So these few words of Hamd for Allah (swt) have great blessing and reward. Just for your recognizing His bounties upon you and thanking Him you receive so much reward. He also loves when you praise Him in recognition of His Perfection and Majesty. Even when you praise the creation in any way you are really praising Him. Because any good that the creation has is a good that came from Him. He is the One Who endowed that creation with that attribute which you praise. Moreover He created that creation and its attributes. So for example you praise the warrior for being brave, or the scholar for being intelligent, or the woman for being beautiful, or the sky for being majestic, but realize that it is He Who created all these and He gave them these attributes which you praise. Similarly when you thank anyone for any good that they may have done for you, you really have to thank Him. Because He is the One Who allowed them to do that good for you. He is the One Who put in their hearts the willingness and the ability to do that good for you. How then can you not thank Him? How then can you not give Hamd for Him?

The Prophet (saw) used to say in his prayers “O Allah I can never praise you as deserve to be praised, but You are as have you praised Yourself”. So just think that if the Prophet (saw) himself could not give Hamd for Allah (swt) as He deserves, then what hope do we have? How could we ever praise and thank Allah (swt) as He deserves to be? We cannot. So Perfect and Pure is He, so Majestic and Glorious is He, so Tremendous and Sublime is He, that even if tried our best to praise Him we would never be able to. Even if we dedicated our lives in slavehood to Him only in an effort to praise Him we would never be able to. Similarly we can never thank Him as He truly deserves to be thanked. So much has He given us, so many are the favors and bounties that He has bestowed upon us, that we can never thank Him as He deserves to be. Not only can we never enumerate the number of favors but we cannot even quantify their magnitude. For example you know that your sight is a great blessing that He has given you, but you can never know how much of a blessing it is. You can never know how great a favor it is. Only if you were ever to lose your vision could you ever begin to comprehend. Such is how much He has given us. He has given us so much when we have not done anything for Him. So even if we tried to we can never show Him the appreciation that He deserves. But does this mean that we should not at least try? No of course not. The onus upon us is that we try.

In the second part of this ayah Allah (swt) describes Himself as *Rabb al-Alamin*. The word *Rabb* cannot be translated into a single English word because it encompasses so much meaning. When it used without the definite article simply as “rabb” it could mean the master or owner of something. However when it used with the definite article as “Ar-Rabb” it could only refer to Allah (swt). One of the meanings it gives when referring to Him is the Creator and the Sustainer. For He is the One Who brought everything into existence and He is the One Who is constantly maintaining the existence of all things. So not only are you alive at this moment because Allah (swt) created you but He (swt) is also the One Who is sustaining you at this very moment. Allah (swt) is giving you the air that you breathe and He (swt) is making your environment suitable for you to live in and He (swt) is the One that is allowing your body to function. He (swt) is the One Who is making the blood flow through your veins at this moment and He (swt) is the One Who is digesting the food in your stomach. So Allah (swt) is the One Who gave you life and He (swt) is the One Who is keeping you alive. This is not only true for you but it is true for all of the creation. He (swt) is the One Who is constantly maintaining all of the creation. The entire universe is more in need of Allah (swt) than an infant is of its mother. This dependence that we all have on Allah (swt) is captured by this Name *Ar-Rabb*. So a few of the meanings that are captured with the Name *Ar-Rabb* are the “Creator”, the “Sustainer” and the “Nurturer”.

Now because we all have such a great dependence on Allah (swt), because we need Him for every moment of our existence, for every breath that we take, what then should be our relationship with Him. Could it be the case that we depend on Him for everything, we take from Him everything, and then we forget Him? We just live our lives as we please without even remembering Him. Almost as if He is our slave who provides for us all that we need but we do not give Him anything at all. Is this the relationship that we need to have with Him? Because not only does *Ar-Rabb* mean the One Who provides for and the One Who looks after but it also gives the meaning of the “Owner” and “Master”. The One to Whom everything belongs and the Authority Who needs to be obeyed. So because Allah (swt) is the Creator and Sustainer of this universe, that is why everything in it belongs to Him (swt) Alone. Should He not be the Owner of what He Alone created from nothing and He Alone continues to maintain and sustain?

And because we all belong to Him we need to obey Him. He is our complete Lord and Master. He owns us completely. So despite what we may have grown up believing our lives are not ours to live as we please. We are not our own masters. We are not in this world to serve ourselves. Rather we are His slaves. We are not only His slaves when we pray to Him, or when we need Him, or in Ramadan, but rather at every moment we are His slaves. At every moment we are in need of Him and so at every moment we owe to Him our obedience. This obedience means that when He sends to us a Message through one of His prophets then we must believe in that Message. We must follow His Law that He has written for us in that Message. This is what obedience means. This is how we can take Him as a Lord and Master. It is by following His Messenger. Because how else can we know what He wants from us? How else can we know what He expects from us? He has not spoken to any of us directly. No rather He only speaks to the prophets and messengers. So we have to follow them, we have to listen to them. Specifically for our day and age it is the Prophet (saw) who we have to listen to. Because he (saw) is the Messenger for our generation. He (saw) is whom Allah (swt) has chosen to speak on His behalf.

Once we realize that He is our Lord and Master then not only do we owe to Him our obedience but we also have to make ourselves content with whatever situation that He places us in. This contentment is also part of our servitude to Him. When we realize that we are His utter slaves. When we realize that our lives are not ours to live as we please. Then we realize that it is not about ourselves anymore. It is not about what pleases us and makes us happy. Rather it is only about Him. It is only about what pleases Him. His Pleasure becomes our only goal in life. Once we realize this fact then we should strive to be pleased with whatever situation that we find ourselves in. Even if it is a moment of pain or difficulty. We realize that He is the Creator of that moment. We realize that He placed us in that moment. So because of our love for Him we are content with that moment. Because we know that it is from Him. This is true not only for the moments in our lives but also for the different situations that we find ourselves. Regardless of if we find ourselves in a situation of good or situation of hardship or anywhere in between, we are content. We are happy with what He has chosen to give us. This is because we realize that all that matters is Him. We do not live for ourselves anymore. Rather we only live for Him.

As part of our slavehood to Him we also learn to make ourselves content with however much of this world that He has chosen to give us. We are not greedy for more and more of this world. We also do not complain or become grieved if we are ever denied this world. We know that everything really belongs to Allah (swt), so with whatever He (swt) has given us we are content. We never question why He has given others more than He (swt) has given us. Because we know that we are only His slaves. We are not entitled to anything. All that He has given us is from His Love and Mercy. Nothing of what we have is from what we have earned. Nothing of what we have is from what we deserve. Rather it is only from His Grace. So we are content with what He has given us, we love Him because of what He has given us. And we also know that He has a reason and a wisdom why He gives to His slaves what He gives. So there may be something that He has chosen not to give us because He Knows that it is harmful for us. He Knows that it will take us away from Him. Why then can you not make yourself content? Do you desire this world or do you desire Him? Know that this world can never even compare.

Another lesson that we can take from the fact that everything belongs to Allah (swt) is that we must never become too attached to the things of this world. Not only does everything here belong to Him but also sometime soon we will have to return everything that we have back to their real Owner. So we must always remember the temporary and fleeting nature of this world. How everything that we have will leave us soon. As the Prophet (saw) said “the most truthful word ever uttered by a poet is when he said ‘Verily everything apart from Allah is falsehood’”. Here the Prophet (saw) is showing us how everything in this universe that does not help us to attain the Pleasure of Allah (swt) is falsehood and must be abandoned. As we remember the fleeting nature of this world we also remember the permanence and the ever-lastingness of the Hereafter. The scholars have said that this will make our hearts leave this world and go to the Hereafter even if our bodies are still in this world. Insha Allah it will help us to realize our true purpose. It is not to gorge ourselves. It is not to keep on consuming. Rather we realize how we really do not own anything. We realize how we are only here for a test. We realize that this test is how well we served Him. How many moments did we dedicate to Him. This is all that matters. This is all that we should be seeking to acquire in this world.

If we study other ayahs of the Quran then we would see that Allah (swt) often refers to Himself with this title of "Rabb". He uses it when He refers to His Mastership and Dominion over this universe. He uses it when He speaks of how He created this universe and how He sustains it. He uses it to describe the relationship that He expects us to have with Him. And He also uses it in the prayers and supplications that He teaches us. So whenever we make dua to Him. Whenever we call out to Him. He would like us to use this title to refer to Him. Why? Because this title more than any other of His other names demonstrates our utter need and dependence on Him. When we call on Him with this title we are acknowledging His Lordship and Sovereignty over us, we are acknowledging our utter slavehood of Him, and we are acknowledging our complete need of Him. How we need Him at every moment. How we would be completely lost without Him. That is why it is the Perfect Name to be used in our dua. Because what is a dua except a sincere and humble request of Him? And when you request of Him you want to convey your need of Him. You want to convey your inability, your weakness, and your dependence upon Him. And at the same time you want to convey His Mastership over you, His complete Ability, and Him being your Caretaker.

Not only does Allah (swt) describe Himself in this ayah as Rabb but He describes Himself as the *Rabb of 'alamin*, As we have hinted the word *'alamin* means "everything in the heavens and the earth". So when we say that Allah (swt) is the Rabb of *'alamin* it means that He (swt) is the only Rabb for all creation. For the entire universe. There is not a single person or a single thing except that He is its One and Only Rabb. And consequently there is not a single thing or a single person except that they are His complete slaves. All the nations, all the peoples, all the worlds. They all belong completely to Him. For He is their Creator and at every moment He sustains their existence. If He were to neglect them for even a moment they would be destroyed. How then can we turn away from Him? How then can we be heedless of Him? We all need Him more than infant needs its mother. And so we should all be dedicated to Him just like that infant is dedicated to its mother. She is its everything. She is its whole world. Such should be our relationship with Allah (swt). We should live only for Him. This is true not only for the believers and the Muslims but for all mankind. For all the creation. Because He (swt) is Rabb for all nations. This is the meaning of *'alamin*. It means all the worlds, all the nations.

So just from our understanding of the title *Rabb of 'alamin* we can see how Islam can never be compatible with a secular world. Because right here Allah (swt) has established how He is the Lord and the Master, the King and the Sovereign over all creation. Whereas secularism denies Him all authority completely. How then can you ever seek to reconcile between the two? How can you call yourself a Muslim, how can you refer to Allah (swt) with this title in your prayer seventeen times a day, and then be content living in a world where the authority is given to other than Him. A world which is ruled by the laws of man. How can this be so? It is sheer hypocrisy. In Islam there is no distinction between secular and sacred. We do not have any such saying as "Render unto to God what is for Him and render unto Caesar what is for Him". We do not acknowledge the authority of any Caesar, any king, any president or any parliament. Did these false gods create this earth for them to have any say in how it should be ruled? What then gives legitimacy for their authority? Who gave them the right to rule and the right to legislate?

So from this ayah alone you can see how we as Muslims can only be content living in an Islamic State. Under a government which only rules according to the Divine Law of Allah (swt). Because in this Din Allah (swt) has sent to us a complete guidance. Not only has He shown us how we should worship Him but He has also shown us the structure of our government and the policies of our economy. Insha Allah we have a Book on our website [quran-tafsir.org](http://quran-tafsir.org) called "The Divine Kingdom" where we explain in some detail the government and the economy that our Rabb expects us to live by. How then can we neglect these and make up our own systems? Do you think that such would be pleasing to Him? Right here in this ayah you can see how He refers to Himself as the Sovereign of all nations. When you are aware of this fact and when you believe in this fact how then can you set up a government where men rule instead of Him? How can you live contently in a country where Sovereignty to rule belongs to other than Him? Right here in the very second ayah of the Quran He is telling you that Only He is the One to be obeyed in all spheres of life. He is telling you that He is the Master and King of all peoples. All Authority has to be Only for Him. I challenge you to find even one scholar who is worth his knowledge that says this ayah does not give the meaning that total obedience in all spheres of life must be only for Allah (swt). Any scholar that does not say that the laws can only come from Allah (swt). All

scholars agree that one of the meanings of Rabb is Sovereign, how then can you not derive the understanding which we have stated here. So how is it today that we see so many Muslim countries, and in these countries Muslims recite this Surah every day in Salah, but not one of these countries rule completely by the Law of Allah (swt)? What we see is that these countries either deny the Law of Allah (swt) completely and implement secular governments or they take a few laws from the Quran and Sunnah but the vast majority of the laws and even the system of government itself is from kufr. Where is the country today that has a righteous Khalifah like existed as the time of Abu Bakr (ra) and Umar (ra)? Where is the country today that Muslims can go to and give the Bayah to the Khalifah to as the Prophet (saw) told all Muslims to do? Where is the country that is inviting all Muslims to come and be its citizens? Where is the country that will stand up against the West and order them to leave the Muslim lands they are now occupying and exploiting? Many Muslims today have forgotten this fundamental fact that total Sovereignty must only be for Allah (swt) and Allah (swt) Alone. He (swt) must be the One to legislate the laws. The only system of government that gives Sovereignty completely to Allah (swt) is the Islamic State. The State based upon the model of government that was established by the Prophet (saw) in Madinah. This was the government that was carried on by the righteous Khulafah after him (saw) like Abu Bakr (ra) and Umar (ra). This system of government did exist in the Ummah till 1924 when it was destroyed by the West. Because up until this point there was a Khalifah who ruled over the Ummah according to the Book of Allah (swt). This man did not bring any laws from his own mind rather he only implemented the Law of Allah (swt). Whenever he brought any law or decree he had to show his evidence from the Quran and Sunnah. This is the Islamic State and such is the only system of government that is acceptable to Allah (swt) because it is the only system that allows Him (swt) to be the Lord, Master and Sovereign. It is the only government which allows Him to be *Rabb of 'alamin*. We as Muslims today have to work in whatever capacity that we can to bring about its restoration Insha Allah. Even if you are not part of a movement that is actively working to restore the Islamic State, at the very least you should carry to other Muslims the idea of the State. You should tell them that we cannot live except under the banner of the Khalifah and that we all have a responsibility to work towards this goal.

Another dimension to the meaning of this word *alamin* is "signs". It gives the meaning that every single thing in the creation is a Sign for its Creator. Everything is a sign for Allah (swt). Anyone who takes only a moment to reflect on the universe can see how this is so. This is because everything that we can sense is limited in so many ways. First everything is limited for the time in which it exists. Anything that you can sense in this universe, there was a time when it did not exist and there will be a time in the future when it will exist anymore. All things in the universe exist only for a certain length of time, so that clearly shows that they are created. Look at the universe around you, can you find even one thing for which this rule does not hold true? Human beings live for a certain number of years, there was a time when we did not exist and there will be a time when our bodies are no more. The same is true for all forms of life such as animals and plants. The same is true for inanimate objects such as rocks and mountains. Where is the scientist that can find a rock that has existed forever or will continue to exist forever? The same is true for the planets and the stars; they only exist for a certain period of time. What is there to the universe beyond these things that we have mentioned? Is not the entire universe simply a collection of stars and planets and whatever is in them? Is there anything here that has existed forever? Of course not, because in the end this entire universe is only a collection of limited things and the sum of all limited things is still limited. There may be many drops of water in the ocean but each drop is still limited, so similarly even though there are many stars and planets in this universe since we can show that some of them are limited we can be sure that they are all limited. So the fact that everything in this universe is limited shows us that there was a Creator Who initiated their creation. There was a First Cause. There was a First Mover. This is completely rational. A limited thing cannot come into existence on its own so a limited universe cannot come into existence on its own as well. The only way that we can explain the existence of a limited universe is to say that it has been created by an Unlimited Creator. A Creator Who does not have any of the limitations of the creation. All things that we can observe in the universe around us are also bound by space. Meaning that they are composed of matter which has a beginning and an end. This is true for every single thing in the universe. Thus it shows that they are limited. Thus it shows that they are finite. Thus it shows that they must have been created.

In addition to being limited for the time in which it exists and the space which it occupies, everything in this universe is also limited in what it can do. This fact also demonstrates how everything in this universe has been created. So for example if you look at yourself you can walk but you cannot fly. The bird can fly but it cannot drive a car. A car can cross land but it cannot cross the ocean. The fish in the ocean cannot live in the land just like the animal on the land cannot live in the ocean. Everything in this universe has some limitation or some weakness to it, thus clearly showing that it is a creation. Can you find one thing in this universe that does not have some weakness or limitation? Even the sun has a limit to how hot it can burn. How many a cold winter day has found the sun shining so brightly in the sky but it was not enough to give warmth for the creatures on that day? The very fact that all of the planets further away from the sun than the earth are too cold to support life shows us that as powerful as the sun is, as great as the amount of energy that it produces is, at the end of the day it is still limited. There is only so much that it can do. Even it has a boundary that it cannot cross. Thus clearly showing us how it and everything else in this universe must have been created.

Yet another way in which everything in the universe is a sign for Allah (swt) is that everything in this universe is being constantly controlled and governed. If you look at the universe around you, you will find that all of the creation is always being subjected to certain laws. The sun always rises in the east. The night always follows the day. The fire always burns the wood. The water always quenches the thirst. Your eyes will not see in the dark no matter how much you want them to. These are laws that have been fixed into on all of creation. Creation must behave in this way and has no choice in the matter. The day can never decide to come in the middle of the night. The wood cannot decide that it does not want to burn. Your body cannot survive without food. No matter how many times you heat the water it will always boil. This behavior is constant. It never changes. It does not come from the matter itself but rather it has been forced upon the matter by an Outside Power. This shows us that there is a Higher Power Who we cannot directly perceive Who is operating this universe. Who else can this Higher Power be but Allah (swt), the Controller Who controls all things? The One True Power behind all action and motion. He is the Reason and the Cause for all that happens.

### 3. The Extremely Merciful, the One Who always shows Mercy.

In this ayah Allah (swt) repeats these two of His (swt)'s Names. Insha Allah we have already given a brief explanation of these Names when we discussed the Basmallah. Recall from there how we said that both of these Names mean an extreme amount of mercy. But now the question needs to be asked why Allah (swt) repeats these two Names of His in this ayah. Why does not Allah (swt) tell us about some of His other Names, why does He repeat these two Names? There are at least three reasons that the scholars have identified. One reason is to once again emphasize His Mercy. To stress His Extreme Mercy. To show us how He is a Being of Mercy. A Being of Love. Because Mercy always comes from Love. You would think what He declared in the first ayah would be enough. Recall how He used two Names to describe how Merciful He is. Recall how both of these Names gave the meaning of an emphatic and extreme mercy. Is this not enough to convey how Merciful He IS? Is this not enough to show how Loving He IS. But no, in this ayah He further emphasizes His Mercy. He further shows us His Love. Because this is how He wants us to know Him. He wants us to know Him as the Being of Mercy and Love. Because only then would we ourselves love Him. Only then would we ourselves yearn for Him. Ultimately the relationship between us and Him should be one of love. All that He does for us is from His Mercy and Love for us. Similarly all that we do for Him should be from our love for Him. We love Him more than any creation can love any other creation. Our love for Him is the strongest and most intense love. That is why we dedicate our lives to Him. That is why we choose to live in slavehood to Him. Desiring nothing from every moment of our lives save His Pleasure. How then can some Christians make the claim that in Islam there is no love? They claim that theirs is the religion of mercy and love while ours is the religion of violence and hatred. How far is this from the Truth? Just look at how Allah (swt) describes Himself in the very first three ayahs of His Book. Just look at how many times the word mercy is repeated. Just look at how emphatic a form in which it appears. It is as if Allah (swt) is saying "that if there is One Name through which you want to know Me then know me through My Mercy".

Once we know that Allah (swt) is the Being of such Mercy then how could we ever give up on that Mercy? How could we ever think that we have committed too many sins and that there is no hope for us? How can we ever assume that we are doomed for the Fire? How can we ever know for certain that He will never accept us? Some people have this thinking. They think that their fate is sealed so they might as well enjoy this world while they have it. They have basically given up on the Mercy of the Most Merciful. They think that they are too impure. They think that they are too evil to ever have a chance to be in His Grace. Such people either give up on Him completely or they go to intercessors and try to reach Him through these. Thinking that through these "middle men" they can have their prayers answered. Through these middle men they can return to Him. How foolish is such thinking? Do they not know that He is the Being of Absolute and Perfect Mercy? Have they not seen these ayahs where He repeats and emphasizes and stresses His Mercy again and again? Know that if you were to come to Him with a mountain full of sins, with sins as vast as the heavens and the earth, know that He would come to you with Mercy and Forgiveness that is even greater. The ocean of His Mercy will completely envelop the ocean of your sins. So no matter what you may have done, do not ever give up on His Mercy. Even if you have committed sins darker than night itself do not ever think that He will never forgive you. If you have such a thinking then you have underestimated Him greatly. In fact the scholars have said that just to think that He will never forgive you and have mercy on you is a greater sin than whatever sin you may have committed. Because then you are denying His Mercy. You are denying an attribute of His that He has described Himself with time and time again.

But even in this there has to be a balance. We cannot focus on some of His Names and deny others. For example we cannot focus on how He is the Most Merciful and forget how He is also *Rabb Al-Alamin*. Yes it is true that He is Most Merciful. But He is also our Lord and Master. So we have to take Him as such. Meaning that we have to make a best effort to serve Him. We have to make a best effort to remain obedient to His Law. We cannot use His Mercy as an excuse to disobey His Law. To live in heedlessness of Him. How can we do this to Him if we truly love Him? He does not deserve to be forgotten. He does not deserve to be disobeyed. Rather He wants us to serve Him. He wants us to remain obedient to His Law. If we love Him we would.

This balance in our Din is very important to maintain. The balance between hope and fear. We should always hope for His Mercy and at the same time we should also fear Him. We have to maintain a balance between these two. If we have too much of either of these then there is an imbalance. As one scholar beautifully put it, the bird can only fly when both its wings are balanced. Similarly we also can only ascend to Him when we are balanced between hope and fear. If we have too much hope then we might fall into heedlessness and sin. We would violate His Law left and right. We would fornicate, take usury, backbite, hurt others, become arrogant, all the while thinking that He will forgive us because He is so Merciful. We would also allow moments to pass by without remembering Him, thinking only about ourselves and our desires in those moments. Is this what He deserves? Is this the reason why He created us? Of course not. So we have to remember that He is *Rabb Al-Alamin*. We have to remember that He is our Lord and Master. We have to remember that He created us to serve Him. We have to remember that we are being tested on how well we remember Him and dedicate ourselves to Him at every moment of our lives. But if we ever slip. If we ever fall into heedlessness. If we ever fall into sin. If we ever make a mistake. Then we can remember that He is the Most Merciful and the Most Forgiving. We should never think that He will never forgive us. We should never think that our sins are too great and that He hates us. We should never underestimate His Mercy and His Forgiveness. Rather we must always strive to maintain this balance.

To maintain this balance is the other reason why Allah (swt) repeats His Names of Mercy in this ayah. Recall from the previous ayah how Allah (swt) told us that He was *Rabb Al-Alamin*. He told us that He was the complete Lord and Master over all that exists. The Complete Authority Who can never be questioned. The One Who can do whatsoever that He pleases. Now imagine if a human king had such power. Most kings and rulers who have any kind of power usually become corrupted by that power. The power leads a king to think that he can do whatever he wants. He can abuse or exploit the people as he wants and no one can question him. He can do whatever his lusts prompt him to without ever being questioned. The more power he has, the more corrupt and evil he becomes. The more the power and authority that he has, the more he thinks about serving himself and the less he think about others. This is the case with most

humans. But is that the case with Allah (swt)? Allah (swt) has more Power and Authority than anyone of us can ever imagine. But would He ever abuse that Power to do injustice to the creation? Would He ever harm any of the creation for no reason? He could if He wanted to. But since Allah (swt) has already told us that He is the Most Merciful we know that He would not do any injustice or any harm to the creation even though He could. If He did not remind us in this ayah how He is the Most Merciful then many of us would become terrified of His Power and what He (swt) can do to us. We would be paralyzed with fear and not be able to do anything. So in this ayah Allah (swt) reminds us that He (swt) is the Most Merciful and despite all of the Power that He (swt) has. Even though He is the All-Powerful He will not use that Power for evil. He will not use that Power for Injustice. Although He could if He wanted to He will not. Such is the Mercy and Love of this Majestic and Sublime Being. So just as He wants us to know Him as our complete Lord and Master, the One to Whom we should dedicate ourselves to, He also wants us to know Him as the completely Merciful. The One Whom we can always return to no matter how many times we slip. Our nature is that we will sin. Our nature is that we will make mistakes. Our nature is that we will forget. But His Nature is that He forgives. His Nature is that He has such Mercy. And He is this way despite His Tremendous Power and Authority. This then is another reason why we have to love Him. How can you not love a Being of such Sublimity and Beauty?

So Merciful is Allah (swt) that even the non Muslims receive His Mercy. One way this is so is that He will never punish a people for no reason. Before He sends His punishment, He always sends a clear Message. In this Message He reminds the people to return to Him and warns them of the consequences if they do not. Only when they turn away from this Message, only when they deny Him even after they are certain of Him and certain of their responsibilities to Him does He punish them. Even for such He still does not punish them immediately. Rather He gives them time to repent and He gives them time to return to Him. The Prophet (saw) has told us "if the disbelievers knew of the Mercy of Allah then even they would not despair of His Garden". Meaning that despite their disbelief, despite their rejection of this Message, they would think that they could return to Him if they tried. If they repented from their ways and made the effort to journey back to Him. So see how He shows mercy even to those who do such injustice to Him.

Yet another reason why Allah (swt) repeats His Name of *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Raheem* is because of what comes in the next ayah. In the next ayah He tells us about the Day of Judgment. That Day in which this entire world will be destroyed and we will all return to Him. That Day when our fate for all of eternity will be determined. He is the Only One Who will be our Judge on that Day. He is the Only One Who can save us. Now is there anyway that you would like to know Him on that Day except as *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Raheem*? If there were only two of His Names that you would want to remember on that Day it would be these two Names. So before telling us about the Last Day, He reminds us that He (swt) is the Most Merciful. Thus we must all have a great hope for the Mercy of He on that Day. We must have a hope that we would be among the saved.

So we should realize from this ayah how our Rabb is a Being of Extreme Mercy. He is Merciful in His Essence and Merciful in His Actions. In everything that He does His Mercy is apparent. He does not do anything except with His Mercy. Even at this very moment know that He has wrapped you in His Mercy. Not just by the fact that He is providing for you and sustaining you. Not just by the fact that He is constantly giving you. But He is also guiding you to Him. And this is among the greatest of His Mercies. By His Grace and His Guidance you have been lead to this tafsir. You are learning His blessed Book, and Insha Allah I pray that you are coming closer to Him because of it. So how much is His Mercy descending upon you? How much of a Mercy is it just to know Him? How much of a Mercy is it just to be near Him? Even if your body is in pain, even if you are uncomfortable, does it not ease your heart just to know that He is near? Just to know that so Beautiful and so Majestic and so Perfect a Being is so close to you. How can anything of this world concern you, how can anything of this world upset you, when you have reached this station of nearness to Him. As we mentioned previously this is in fact the greatest of His Mercies. Himself. This station of nearness to Him. The more that you remember Him. The more that you reflect on His Perfection and Majesty. The more that you convince yourself that He is all that matters. The more that you strive to please Him through your actions and through your behavior with others. The closer to Him that you will become. And there is nothing sweeter than this. There is nothing sweeter than being near to Him. When you are in this station then you are like that fetus in the womb. You are completely wrapped by His Mercy. By Him.

As we also mentioned previously yet another manifestation of His Mercy is this beautiful way of life that He has sent to us. This Din of Islam. If we were to follow this guidance then we would know mercy in so many ways. Not only from being near to Him. Not only from earning His Pleasure and being able to enter His Garden in the Hereafter. But even in this life we would know tranquility and peace. Even in this life we would all live better lives. We would all know justice and fairness. We would all know of prosperity and progress. For example the Islamic economic system was based on the principle that all of the wealth and all of the resources of the earth belonged only to Allah (swt) and that mankind were only the caretakers of this wealth. This foundational thought lead to a system where no one was allowed to abuse wealth and no one was allowed to hoard wealth. You would never be faced with a situation where all of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few and the masses are in poverty. There is also the hadith of the Prophet (saw) where he (saw) said that every son of Adam (as) was entitled to food, shelter and clothing. So every person living in the Islamic State, both Muslim and non-Muslim, was guaranteed food, shelter and clothing from the Islamic State. Allah (swt) also obligated the Muslims to give Zakat and encouraged them to give charity by telling them how it purified their wealth and how it was a source of reward in the Hereafter. What resulted was a country in which poverty was unheard of. There were no children starving from hunger, no elderly shivering out in the cold, and no family without a home. Then there was the Islamic social system where the men and women were properly separated. There was no free mixing between the sexes. All the people, both men and women were required to cover themselves and dress modestly. Foul and obscene images were not marketed out in the open and the body of the woman was respected and protected. As a result of this many social crimes such as rape and incest were unheard of. The people had their hearts attached to Allah (swt) rather than to their desires. The Islamic Judicial system was also one that was based upon justice. It did not discriminate against the people. It did not favor some people above others. How different is this from the world today? How corrupted and how much in darkness is the world today compared to that ideal? But then what do you expect when mankind turns away from a Message that has been sent by their Creator. A Message that He has described as "Mercy for all people"?

In fact if you believe in Him to be a Being of Mercy then you must believe that He has sent guidance for mankind. You must believe that He has sent us a complete guidance. Because how could it be that He has provided us with everything in this world for our physical bodies but neglected our souls? How could it be that He has given us the food to eat and the water to drink and the tools to use and the material resources to consume and yet He has not shown us how to live and how to behave? He has not shown us how we should rule ourselves and how we should distribute the wealth of the land? Could this be from a Being of Mercy? Would a Being of such Absolute and Perfect Mercy neglect this? Would He leave mankind to suffer under the oppression and the injustice of man made laws? To be in poverty and to have their basic needs denied. To be killed and pillaged and exploited. Would a Being of Mercy allow this to happen in the world? Of course not. That is why we say that if you believe Him as a Being of Perfect Mercy then you must believe in the Islamic State. You must believe that He has sent to us a complete guidance.

So once again realize that at every moment you are enveloped in His Mercy. Realize that you are never out of His Mercy. Even the difficulties that you find in life are part of His Mercy for you. Because how can you appreciate the good if you have never tasted evil, how can you appreciate the light if you have never been in darkness? How can you appreciate serenity and peace if you have never known fear and anxiety? So it is true that in this world He does subject the believers to some trials and some hardships. But this is not because He hates them. Rather it is because He loves them. He does not want their hearts to become too attached to this world. He does not want their hearts to be consumed with the demons of arrogance and pride. Because this is just what can happen to a heart if it falls too much in love with this world. This is just what can happen to a heart if it is given too comfortable and soft a life. It only starts to think of itself. It thinks that it is the most important and it is the god who needs to be served. It forgets about others. It forgets about the Divine. Allah (swt) wants to save us from this fate. He wants us to pass the test. That is why He sends us some trials and hardships despite the fact that He is so Merciful a Being. And another manifestation of His Mercy is the Day of Judgment. The Hereafter. The realm in which justice will be done for all. The place where all scores will be settled. This place is what He tells us of in the next ayah.

#### 4. *Malik of the Day of Din.*

We can see that throughout this Surah Allah (swt) is teaching us about Himself. The Quran is nothing but a Book about Allah (swt). The primary goal of this Book is to tell us about our Rabb. It describes Him for us, it tells us what is pleasing to Him and it tells us what is not pleasing to Him. Thus it is a means by which we can draw closer to Him. Do you then realize how precious this Book is? So far Allah (swt) has told us that He (swt) is the Perfect One, the One with all of the Perfect Names. The One Who deserves to be submitted to by all of creation. He has also told us that He is the Most Merciful. The amount of Mercy that He has cannot even be described in words. Then He told us how He is the One deserving of all praise and the One deserving of all thanks and gratitude. There should not be any praise or any gratitude except that it should be for Him. Finally Allah (swt) told us that He (swt) was the Creator and Sustainer, as well as the Lord and Master for every single thing in the universe. So we can see that in the first two ayahs alone Allah (swt) has told us a lot about Himself. In this ayah tells us more. As you read these ayahs, remember that this is Who your Lord is. These descriptions that He is giving should come to define how you perceive Him to be and the relationship that you have with Him.

In this ayah Allah (swt) tells us that He (swt) is the *Malik* of the Day of *Din*. Insha Allah the key to understanding this ayah is in understanding these two words. There are two meanings of the word *Malik* in this ayah. One meaning is “King” and the other meaning is “Owner”. So here Allah (swt) is telling us that He is the King of the Day of *Din* and He is telling us that He is also the Owner of the Day of *Din*. The word *Din* also has multiple meanings. One meaning is “repayment” or “recompense”, and another meaning is “a complete way of life”. This latter definition of the word *Din* is also what Islam is. Islam is a *Din* in the fact that it is a complete way of life. This *Din* of Islam has two components, one is the tenets of faith that must be believed in with conviction and the other is the law that must be followed without question or hesitation. This belief portion of Islam gives us answers our most fundamental questions such as where did we come from, why are we here, where are we going after we die. Allah (swt) has told us that we are from Him and

He (swt) has also told us that one Day soon we will return to Him. He has also told us that we are in this world to know Him and to serve Him. We are here in this world to live our life by His Law and this Law is the second component of Islam. The Law of Allah (swt) is a guide for us to follow for every moment of our lives. From the time we open our eyes in the morning to the time we go to sleep at night, the Law of Allah (swt) addresses each and every single action that we can take. Islam is not simply the “five pillars” as some Muslims believe, but rather every single action that a Muslim can take is addressed in the Quran and Sunnah. The Quran and Sunnah have outlined for us what are the actions that Allah (swt) is pleased with and what are the actions that He (swt) is displeased with. Our purpose in this life is to seek His Pleasure by performing those actions that He (swt) is pleased with and staying away from the actions that He (swt) is displeased with. This then brings us back to the other meaning of the word *Din* that means “recompense” and “repayment”. This is this definition of the word *Din* that Allah (swt) uses in this ayah. He uses it here to refer to a debt that is repaid. Now how exactly is this so? How exactly will that be a day on which debts are repaid? It will be so because on that Day we will be judged on how well we repaid Allah (swt) for all that He gave us. Without a doubt we all owe Him a lot. We owe Him everything. He created us and He sustains for every a moment of our existence. Every moment of our life, every moment without pain is only possible because of Him. How much then do we owe Him? How much then do we have to thank Him? He has already told us in the Quran what He expects from us. He has already told us how we owe Him nothing less than complete dedication and slavehood. Now on the Day of Judgment, the Day on which we return to Him, He is going to judge us on how well we lived up to this purpose. He is going to judge us on whether we believed in His Message and lived according to His Law. He is going to judge us on how well we repaid the debt that we owe to Him. That is the Day of Judgment. The Day of Debt. And He describes Himself in this verse as the complete Owner and King of that Day.

So this ayah serves to remind us that this life is a test. Actually there are not one but two tests that Allah (swt) has given us. The first is the test of belief and the second is the test of action. Allah (swt) created us and He (swt) sustains and nurtures us. But He did not simply leave us in this world to play and amuse ourselves. Rather He sent us messengers and through these

messengers He gave the human being two tests. We were created to see how well we would fare on both these tests. The first test is to see whether we would believe in the Message that He has sent. We already know from the signs in the universe around us that there is a Creator and Controller for this universe. However we do not know what our relationship with that Creator must be. We do not know why He created us and what He expects from us. This is why Allah (swt) has sent us a messenger. Through this Message He defines for us the relationship that we need to have with Him. He tells us what He expects from us. If we are sincere to Him. If we choose Him over ourselves then we would accept this Message. And by accepting this Message we would have passed the first test. We would have manifested our submission through our belief.

Now once we have accepted the Message that He has sent then we have to strive to remain obedient to His Law. The Law that He has outlined and specified in that Message. This is the second test. It is a test to see if we can obey Him or not. A test to see if we can dedicate ourselves to Him or not. In many ways this test is even more challenging than the first. Because this is a test that we have to take every day of our lives. Every moment of our lives. For example every morning you have to make the choice to wake up for Fajr. Every evening you have to make the choice to go to the masjid. Every day of Ramadan you have to make the choice to fast. Every time you see a beautiful woman on the street you have to make the choice to lower your gaze. Every time a sister leaves her home she has to make the choice to put on her hijab. Every time you are in a gathering you have to make the choice not to backbite or speak ill of others. Every time you deal with your parents you have to make the choice to honor them and treat them kindly. Every time an affliction befalls you have to make the choice to bear it patiently for Allah (swt). Every day you have to ask yourself what you have done for Allah (swt)'s Cause on earth. Every moment you have to strive to remember Him and forget the worldly temptations and distractions. At every moment you are being tested. At every moment your deeds are being recorded. Not only are you being tested on the actions of your limbs, but you are also tested on the sayings of your tongue and the states of your heart. Meaning that even the words that you speak can be used against you on that Day. You will even be judged for if you allowed jealousy and hatred to remain in your heart. Such is how comprehensive is the test. Such is how comprehensive is our religion.

So in this ayah Allah (swt) describes Himself (swt) as the King and Owner of that Day. Allah (swt) is the King of that Day because all must listen and obey Him (swt) on that Day. There is no one who can do anything or say anything without His (swt)'s permission. Only that which pleases He will occur on that Day. This is because He is the complete King of that Day. He is also the Master and Owner of that Day. He is the Owner of that Day in that it belongs completely to Him. Only what He wants can happen in it. No one else has any say in the matter. On that Day He can forgive whomsoever He pleases and He can punish whomsoever He pleases. He can do whatsoever He pleases. That is a Day which belongs completely to Him.

Realize now the importance of that Day. Realize that is the Day when your eternity will be decided. Are you going to spend forever in bliss and felicity or are you going to spend it in torment and pain? It will be decided on that Day. The Garden has pleasures in it like you have never experienced in this world. Similarly the Fire has torments like you have experienced in this world. This world was not created as a place of pleasure or pain. Although some of these are to be found they are only a taste. They are only a sampling. The real pleasure and the real pain are only to be found in the Hereafter. Imagine then being in a Garden wherein is fresh air, soft grass, a bright sun, blue sky, the perfect temperature. In this Garden are the sweetest of drinks and the most delicious of foods. In this Garden are all the people whom you love. In this Garden in an instant you can have whatsoever that you desire. In this Garden you can be near to the Divine. Is there anything in this world that could possibly compare to that? On the other hand imagine being immersed in a Fire. A Fire that burns seventy times more fiercely than the fire of this world. It is not only your hand or your leg that is being burned but rather it is your entire body. Your whole body is being burned. And every time your skin burns away it is made to grow back again only so that it can be burned again. At the same time you are also being pricked with knives and being bitten by animals and your internal organs are screaming with pain. At the same time you are also being given the most disgusting of food and drinks. Imagine having to go through this for all eternity. Can you even imagine the concept of eternity? The concept of forever? Can you imagine what it is will be like to be in pain forever or to have pleasure and bliss forever? In this world nothing is forever. In this world everything finishes. Even our very existence.

So we really need to make an effort to try and imagine what forever will be like. This actually would be a productive use of our imagination. So just try and imagine being in pain forever or being in bliss forever. You can never fully grasp the reality of it. But even if you could understand even a portion of it, it should be enough for you to realize that there is nothing that you should crave more than forever in the Garden and nothing you should fear more than forever in the Fire. Insha Allah as you study the rest of the Quran. As you learn more of this Book. This fact will become more apparent to you. Because much does Allah (swt) speak of the Hereafter in His Book, and many are the descriptions which He gives for it. But what He tells us about it in this ayah should be enough for you to realize one important fact. He is the complete Master and King of that Day. That Day in which your eternity in the Hereafter will be decided. So if you want to prepare for that Day. That most important Day of your life, Who should you always be thinking about? Who should you always be trying to please? Know that this Day does not belong to anyone else but Allah (swt) and so only He (swt) can save you on it.

So the first lesson that we can take from this ayah is to see how we must dedicate our lives to Allah (swt) and Allah (swt) Alone. No one else but He (swt) can save us on that Day. No one else but He (swt) can determine our fate for all eternity. So we should not keep our hope in any but He. Do not expect any from the creation to be there for you on that Day. Not a saint or a righteous forefather or a pious child or even an angel. Even the Prophet (saw) himself (saw) will not be able to make intercession for us on that Day except with the permission of Allah (swt). So how then can you dedicate your life to any but He (swt)? How can you keep your hopes in any but He (swt)? How can you seek to please any but He? The Prophet (saw) told us that even if all the creations were to gather together and try to benefit you with anything they will only benefit you with what He has decreed for you and if they were to gather together to harm you with anything they would only harm you with what He has decreed for you. This hadith clearly shows us that even in this world no one has power over you, what then can you say about the next world. What can you say about a Day which He Himself has described that He is the Master and King of? How then can you go and pray to saints? How then can you dedicate your life to your children or your wealth? Do you think that these can do anything for you on that Day?

Another lesson that we can take from this ayah is to see how important it is to believe in the Day of Judgment and in the Hereafter. There are several things that are in the unseen world which Allah (swt) requires us to believe in as part of our Din. Examples of these include the belief in the angels, the belief in the jinn, and the belief in the stories of the previous nations and prophets. All of these are in the unseen and we are required to believe in all of them. However none of these does Allah (swt) choose to mention in this Surah. Rather He chose to mention the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter in this Surah. This Surah that we repeat at least seventeen times a day. Why is this? What is so special about the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter that our Rabb has commanded us to repeat their mention at least seventeen times a day? Why do we always need to remind ourselves of the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter? It is because after our belief in Allah (swt) and after our belief in the Prophet (saw), our belief in the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter is the most important part of our Iman. Because it is such an important part of our faith Allah (swt) mentions it here in Surah Fatihah, a Surah that we repeat at least seventeen times a day. This is why we have to believe in this Day with utmost certainty. Not only do we have to believe in it but we also have to always think about it and we have to always bring it to the forefront of our minds. Before we do any action or say any word we have to think about what will be the ramifications of that action or that word on this great Day. We should always remind ourselves that we will be questioned about even the smallest of actions on that Day. On that Day Allah (swt) will set up the scales for us and these will be the most sensitive of scales. Even the smallest of deeds will tilt these scales. Even the smallest of deeds will make these scales to move. This is what we should always be bringing to our minds. Every day, every moment of our lives. We should just imagine this moment being presented before us and being placed on those scales. Just think the kind of people that we could be if we can have such thinking. Would we be quick to anger, would be quick to commit sins, would we even be quick to despair and be sad, when we know that one Day soon we are going to return to Him. When we know that this very moment is what could be the difference for us on that Day. This very moment could be the difference between the Fire and the Garden. What would be our attitude towards life if we have had such certainty in this Day? If we were always reminding ourselves of it.

We know from other ayahs of the Quran that this is a Day on which one soul cannot do anything for any other soul and this is a Day on which you will see the mother running from her child and the husband running from his wife, such is the terror and the horror of that Day. We know that it is a Day on which we will see even the smallest of good deeds that we did and we will see even the smallest of evil deeds that we did. That is why the Muslim needs to have this Day at the forefront of his or her mind all of the time. Whenever you become lazy and are about to miss an obligation remember this Day, whenever your desires prompt you to commit an action that is forbidden remember this Day. So picture yourself now about to do an action that might be displeasing to Allah (swt). Before you do that action, remember that you will be standing naked in front of Allah (swt) on that Day, how then will you answer for that action when your *Rabb* questions you about it? What excuse will you give? We actually have no excuse whatsoever. We have no excuse if we find ourselves on that Day without have prepared for it.

The belief in the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter is what many people find hard to accept. Most people believe in the Creator for this universe. They cannot explain how a universe that is filled with limited and dependent things can come into existence on its own. They cannot explain how all of this can exist without a Creator. So the vast majority of mankind today does believe in Allah (swt) in one way or another. But what many people refuse to believe in is this Day of Judgment. This Day when we will all return to Allah (swt) and be questioned for every single action that we have ever done. Many people want to follow their desires and do whatever it is that their desires prompt them to do. This is why they refuse to believe in a Day such as this. They think that Allah (swt) just created the universe and left it be. They think that there is no life after this one. So they think that we should enjoy this life while we have it. We have to save ourselves from becoming like such people. We have to always remind ourselves of the certainty of this Day. We have to remind ourselves of the fact that we will very soon standing before Him. We have to convince ourselves of the reality of it. This is not a joke. This is not a fairy tale. This is a reality that each and every one of us is going to have to face. How then can you protect yourself? How then can you save yourself? If you do not at least try and pass these two tests that He has given you? With His Grace and Permission of course.

Now in this ayah Allah (swt) has described Himself as the King and the Owner of the Day of Judgment. But this does not mean that He is not the King and the Owner of others days as well. Indeed He is the King and the Sovereign over every day of our lives. But on that Day His Kingship and His Mastership will be salient. It will be out in the open for all to see. Today there are some people who are unaware of this fact. Today there are some who claim to be kings themselves. They claim to be legislators and lords themselves. They think that they can rule this earth as they please. But of course they are wrong for believing so. Just the fact that Allah (swt) would describe Himself as “King” shows that only He is deserving of this position. In several other ayahs He has described Himself as “King” and “Sovereign”. Even the previous ayah we saw how He described Himself as Rabb and we saw that among the meanings of this word was “Lord” and “Master”. This clearly shows us how only He has the right to rule. Only He has the right to legislate. And anyone who usurps this position from Him, anyone who becomes a legislator on the earth, has committed the gravest of sins and injustices. Because they are taking from Him a right which only belongs to Him. They are claiming sovereignty over this earth when they have absolutely no right to. Did they create this earth? Do they sustain it for them to do on it as they please? Because they live in such heedlessness of Him. Because they have forgotten Him. They think that they can make such claims and get away with it. But on that great Day the veils will be lifted. On that great Day they will see Him as He truly is. They will see Him in all His Majesty and Glory. Then they will know how wrong and foolish they were in denying Him. They will realize that only He is the True King. But do you think that He would easily forgive them on that Day? Do you think that He would easily pardon them for a crime as great as what they have done? This was not a sin that they did because they were weak and they succumbed to their lusts. Rather it was because of their arrogance and their greed. These sins He is not so quick to forgive. That is why we must strive to avoid them. We must strive to save ourselves from becoming kings on earth or becoming associated with those who do. We must not participate in secular political systems. Because if we do that is in essence what we are doing. We are claiming for ourselves the title of Legislator. But as we can see from this ayah and countless others He is the only true Legislator. He is the only True King. So only He deserves to have this position.

Can you still not see how He is the only True King? Let us take a moment to consider now how He is far better than the so called kings and sovereigns of this world. First of all any king or any sovereign in this world has a dominion that is very limited. Their kingdom is limited both by time and by space. The most they can be in power for is until their deaths, and if you think about it that is a very short time. And even then they can only rule over a certain extent of land. Every king of this world has a boundary to his kingdom. A limit beyond which his authority cannot go. But is this the case with Allah (swt)? Will He ever lose Kingdom? Are there any limits to His Kingdom? Of course not. He always was the King and He always will be the King. And there are no boundaries or limits to His Kingdom. It spans across the heavens and the earth. It even stretches into natural world. Even what we call the laws of the nature are really His Laws. All must submit to His Authority. Either willingly or unwillingly. Such is His Majesty. Such is His Glory.

Another way in which His Kingship is superior to the kingship of men is that there is no one who can escape His Authority and His Judgment whereas often times there are many who escape the judgment and authority of humans. Just think about it. Even the most tyrannical of kings, even those who try to keep the strictest of control over their people, there are still people who get away with crimes in their kingdoms. There are still people who escape the authorities, who get around the system. But is there any who can escape from Allah (swt)? Is there any who can avert His Justice? No matter where the people may go they can never escape His Vision and His Knowledge. He Hears and Sees everything. If any were to disobey His Law then on this great day they will be questioned concerning it. They can never escape Him. On this Day He will establish Justice for everyone. Anyone who was wronged in any way will be compensated for it.

Yet another way in which His Kingship is superior is that He does not have to answer to anyone and He does need any helpers or supporters. All the kings and the lords of this world need help. They need their soldiers, their bodyguards, their secret police, their intelligence agencies. They are nothing without these supporters. They also often need to answer to someone else. Their power is often checked by some other power. They are restricted in the laws that they can bring. They are restricted in the decrees that they can pass. Often times they are rendered completely impotent. They cannot even help their own people.

But is this the case with Allah (swt)? Of course not. He is the All Powerful and the All Able. There is nothing that He cannot do. There is no check or limit on His Power whatsoever. He can do whatever He wants to when He wants to and no one can say anything about it. His Power is complete. His Ability is complete. So His Authority is also complete. Is this not how a king should be? How then can we be content with human kings when we can have Him as our King? How do human lords possibly compare to the true Lord and Master for this universe. How can we ever take as a Lord and Master somehow who is weak and limited just like us? Someone who uses the restroom just like us. Someone who bleeds and falls just like us. Someone whom death can overtake at any moment just like us. Is this someone who deserves to be obeyed? Is this someone who deserves authority in the land? Just as Allah (swt) is Perfect as King He is also the true Owner. Not only does the Day of Judgment belong completely to Him but so does everything else. He is the true Owner for all creation because He is their Creator. Can not He be called Owner for that which He originated? For that which He brought to existence? He created every single thing from nothing, and He continues to maintain their existence. Is He not then their rightful Owner? Once we realize that Allah (swt) is the True Owner for all things then how could we ourselves ever claim complete ownership over anything? How could we do with anything whatever we please? We may think that we own the things of this world. We may think that we own the shirt on our backs. But we really do not. In reality He is the True Owner. He is the only True Owner for all those things which we *think* that we own. So we can only do with these things what He is pleased with us doing. We cannot for example mix our money with usury. We cannot use our legs to walk to a bar and we cannot drive our car to a nightclub. We cannot use our eyes to look with lust at women who are not our spouses. We cannot use anything that He has given us in any way that is not pleasing to Him. If we ever did then that would be both ingratitude and injustice. How would you ever feel if you allowed someone to borrow something from you and then they used that in a way that was not pleasing to you? Would you ever be pleased with such? How then can you ever expect the True Owner of this universe to be pleased with His universe is used in a way that is not pleasing to Him? Do you think that those people who do are safe from His Wrath? Do you think that they are safe from His Justice?

Notice also how in the previous ayah Allah (swt) told us about His Mercy. He told us how His Mercy was an overflowing and unending mercy. A Perfect and Complete Mercy. Now we also spoke about the balance between fear and hope. We said how the Name of Rabb of all nations would invoke a sense of fear because He is the complete Lord and Master over all peoples. He is the complete Authority over every single human being. He can do whatever He likes with each and every one of us and there is no one who can have any say in the matter. Meaning that there is no one who can save you from Him. So of course such a Name would invoke a sense of fear. Just imagine if a single Being had such Power over you. That was why He reminded us in the previous ayah of His Mercy. You do not need to fear this Master because He is a Master of Mercy. He is a Master Who will not punish you for no reason. He will not torment you for no reason. He will not do any injustice to you whatsoever. In fact time and time again He will forgive you. Time and time again He will have Mercy on you. Time and time again He will answer your prayers. Time and time again He will help you out of your difficulties. He will look out for you and provide for you in ways that you are not even aware of. Such is His Mercy upon you. So the previous ayah where He described Himself as *Rahman* and *Raheem* could be thought of as an ayah of mercy. Now in order to reestablish the balance you would think that in this ayah He would mention His Punishment or His Wrath. Because what is the extreme of mercy if not punishment? But that is not what He does. He does not mention His Punishment or His Wrath in this ayah. Rather He mentions His Justice. As we mentioned the word *Din* means a debt that is repaid. It is actually a debt that is repaid to the exact amount. Not falling short or exceeding the limits. What then does this show us? How does His Justice balance His Mercy? It shows us that His Punishment is His Justice. It shows us that He never punishes a people for no reason. He also never punishes a people for even an iota for more than what they deserve. Rather people are only punished the exact amount that they deserve. But on the other side, when it comes to His Mercy then He does forgive people and show mercy upon them much more than they deserve. None of us truly deserve the Mercy that He has shown us. He has shown us more Mercy than we could ever hope to repay Him for. And on the Day of Judgment when He grants the believers the Garden it will be far more than they deserve. Such is the Kind of Being that He IS.

Now let us ponder a little more on how exactly the Day of Judgment is a manifestation of His Mercy. Some scholars have even said that if you believe in Him as a Being of Mercy then you must also believe in the Day of Judgment and in the Hereafter. Because just think about it. If there is no Judgment then what is the point of sending down the Law? What is the point of differentiating between good and evil? Between right and wrong. It would all be the same. What is the point of being tested? What is the point of life? That is why we say that if you believe in Him as He truly IS. As a Being of Perfection and Majesty. Then you must also believe in an afterlife. You must also believe that your afterlife will be eternal and that it will be based upon your actions in this life. Because how could a Being Who is so Loving and Merciful create us only to live in this world? This temporary world. This fleeting world. This world filled with pain and discomfort. With suffering and anxiety. How could a Being of such Mercy do this to us? Are we to experience only a few fleeting moments in such a world and then disappear into oblivion. This life is far shorter than you think. Before you know it, before you realize it, it will be over. How could you ever believe a Being of Love and Mercy would allow this? Similarly how could He be Merciful and not establish Justice. His Justice is a manifestation of His Mercy. In the Divine Law that He sent to us He has obligated us to perform certain actions and He has forbidden us from certain actions. Examples of the former are worshipping Him, glorifying Him, thanking Him. Being true to our covenants and promises. Being kind to parents and relatives. Helping others and forgiving them. Being moderate in our consumption. Being modest in our clothing and behavior. Looking after our children well. Spending in charity. Examples of the latter are indecent and lewd behavior such as fornication and free mixing with the opposite gender. Even looking with lust is a sin our Din. Only our spouses are permissible for us. Other forbidden actions are lying, cheating, backbiting, consuming alcohol, gambling, hurting others, even to hurt them with our tongues, to hurt them in any way, even to scare them a little or to mock them is a sin in our Din. Becoming angry or losing hope or being depressed or being stingy are all not pleasing to Him. So through this Law, through this Din, He moulds us into better people. He shows us how we need to be. He makes our society better. Now where is the Justice if He did not reward those who followed His Law and He did not punish those who turned away from it? Where is the Mercy?

So what we should realize from this ayah is that one Day soon we are going to return to Him. One Day soon we are going to be standing in front of Him. One Day soon it is going to be just us and Him. Then He is the One Who is going to decide our eternity. He is the One Who is going to decide if we are going to spend forever in the Fire or forever in the Garden. We should be reminding ourselves of this fact every day of our lives. And He Knows this. He Knows that we are in need of this reminder. That is why every day when we stand before Him in prayer He has commanded us to remind ourselves of this fact. At least seventeen times a day. So if Insha Allah we are constant in our prayer. If we think about what we are reciting in our Salah. Then not only would we be reminded of Him but we would also be reminded of the meeting with Him. Never can we hide from Him. Never can we escape Him. Because one day soon we will be face to face with Him. If we choose to live in heedlessness of Him. If we choose to forget Him. How then can we ever face Him on that day? No such is not the way. That is the way of the fools. The fools are those who choose to turn away from Him. But then on the day on which they return to Him. They will realize how wrong they were. They will realize how foolish they were for turning away from so Majestic and Tremendous a Being. We must save ourselves from becoming like them. We must choose Him. And this really is what it is all about. It is all about Him.

Because if we are truly among those close to Him. Then more than being saved from the Fire, more than being admitted into the Garden, what we truly seek is a place near to Him. What we truly seek is Him. We love Him so much. To the point where all that we crave is Him. All that we crave is to be near Him both in this world and the next. This realization leads us to an even deeper understanding of this ayah. You see on that Day what He is going to reward us with is not only the Garden. What He is going to punish us with is not only the Fire. No, rather if we are among those close to Him. If we are among those who lived for Him. Then what He is going to reward us with on that Day is Himself. And if we turned away from Him. If we choose ourselves over Him. Then what He is going to punish us with is distance from Himself. How can you know of a Being like Him and allow that to happen to yourself. How can you know of a Being like Him and deny yourself a place close to Him. So realize that today you can make the choice. Today you can make the choice to have Him or lose Him. What will you choose?

So it is true that we do desire the Garden. It is true that we do desire to be saved from the Fire. But what we desire more than these is Him. We desire to be near to Him. And to have this station of nearness to Him we do not need to wait until the Hereafter. We can even have it in this world. How is this so you may ask? How can we be close to Him even in this world? It is by remembering Him. It is by striving to please Him. When we bring Him to our minds, when we dedicate that moment of our lives to Him, when we try to please Him, when we are pleased for Him with whatever we find, then we are near to Him. This is so easy. All that you have to do is remember Him and strive to please Him. Who cannot do this?

When you are at this station then nothing of this world can ever bother you. Because you do not care for the world anymore. Rather all that you care for is Him. Even if you face difficulties, even if you have to endure pain, even if things do not work out as you planned, you do not care. Because this world was never what you were seeking. Rather all that you were seeking Him. Even if others were to hurt you, you still do not care. Firstly because you know that on the Day of Judgment He will deal with them for whatever evil that they may have done. He will establish Justice on that Day. But even more importantly you do not care for them. You do not care for whatever wrong that they may do to you. All that you care for is Him. If you can have Him then it does not matter what the world thinks of you. It does not matter what pain you have to endure.

So at every moment you should be seeking Him. And if you are sincere to Him then He will reward you with Himself for that moment. For His Judging you is not only on the Last Day. Rather at every moment He is Judging you. And at every moment He is either rewarding you with nearness to Him or punishing you with distance from Him. Realize then that He is not only Master of the Day of Judgment but He is also the Master of every moment of your life. He is the King of every moment of your life. He is your Everything. He is your Reason for Being. And if you give Him what He asks of you then He will reward you with something far greater that you could possibly ever imagine. He will reward you with Himself. Not all the money in the world can you buy you that place of nearness to Him. And yet if the millionaires and billionaires knew how sweet it was they would gladly give all of their wealth to have it. But you can have it for free. All that you have to do is what He asks of you in the next ayah.

## إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

### 5. You Alone do we enslave ourselves to, and You Alone do we seek help from.

In this ayah we see the tone of the Surah change. Now Allah (swt) is not describing Himself to us anymore. No rather here He is showing us how He would like our relationship with Him to be. He is showing us here what He expects from us. The few words of this ayah are the heart of this Surah. They should also be the heart of our existence. All that we are and all that we hope to be should only be what our Rabb has specified in this ayah. We no longer need to ponder on the meaning of life. We no longer need to wonder what we are doing. We no longer need to be confused for even a moment of our lives. Here our Rabb shows us why He created. Why He continues to sustain us. He shows us how we can pass the test and earn for ourselves a place nearness to Him in the Hereafter. A place nearness to Him even in this world. If we can just do what He asks of us here, then He will grant us this. Because what He judges us on is if we do what He asks of us here.

In this ayah Allah (swt) commands us to make a statement. This statement should define our entire existence. He commands us to say “**You Alone do we enslave ourselves to, and You Alone do we seek help from**”. This is what He wants us to say to Him. This is how He wants us to be. He wants us to declare that it is He Alone Whom we do enslave ourselves to and He Alone Whom we seek help from. This is really what we are saying here. We are saying that we live only for Him. We are saying that we are entering into slavehood for Him. This means at every moment all that we seek is Him. At every moment our only concern is Him. This is the difference between a slave and a worshipper, and even a slave and a servant. Because a slave is always a slave. At every moment he is a slave. And his job is whatever the master asks of him. He cannot pick and choose what tasks he will do. He cannot even come out of his slavehood for even a moment. No, rather at every moment he is a slave. He strives at every moment to please his master and to be pleased with whatever his master gives him. This is what Allah (swt) wants us to realize by making this statement. We do not live for ourselves anymore. Our concern in life cannot be us anymore. Rather it should only be Him.

This slavehood to Allah (swt). This dedication to Him is what is known in Arabic as *ibadah*. This word does not mean worship as it is commonly mistranslated. Rather it means a complete and utter dedication to the Divine. Now what is the practical manifestation of this slavehood? How is it that we dedicate our lives to Him? It is simply by trying to please Him at every moment. So at every moment ask yourself what you can do to please Him in that moment. Of course this will differ at each moment. For example when the time of the prayers come in what is most pleasing to Him is that we make that prayer. In the month of Ramadan what is most pleasing to Him is that we fast. At other times there are other actions that He is pleased with. For each moment the action is different. For each person the action is different. For example for a husband and a father Allah (swt) may be pleased with him going out into the world and seeking of His bounty. To provide for his family. For a wife and a mother Allah (swt) may be pleased with her remaining at home to look after her children and to take care of the household chores. For a youth Allah (swt) may be pleased with him or her learning about the Din and being dutiful to their parents. He is also pleased when we behave well with the people. When we help the people. When we are a source of goodness and comfort for those around us. Countless are the good deeds that we can do at every moment. The only key is that we must do those actions which are pleasing to Him and these must be done only for His sake. We should not be seeking anything else from our deeds except His Pleasure. Allah (swt) also loves it when we call others to Him. When we invite to His Path. This is called dawah and it is one of the greatest forms of ibadah. This was the job of the Prophet (saw) and Allah (swt) has called him (saw) the best of examples for us to follow. We also know that there will be no more prophets and messengers after us. So who is there to call the people to Him? Who is there to remind the people of Him? Is there anything more important in this world than that He be worshipped and glorified and submitted to? How then can we all neglect this most important of obligations? Now the way in which we do dawah can be different for each of us as well. It depends on several factors such as our knowledge, our means, our circumstances. But we all still need to do what we can. Because the Prophet (saw) told us to relate from him (saw) even if it is just one ayah. Meaning that whatever knowledge of this Din we have, we have to carry it to others.

Not only does our *ibadah* to Him include the actions of our limbs and the words of our tongues, but it even includes the states of our hearts. Even our emotions, even our feelings, even the way in which we think should be submitted to Him. Meaning that we have to love for Him and hate for Him. We should inculcate in our hearts those emotions which are pleasing to Him and we should remove from our hearts those which are displeasing to Him. Examples of the former are patience, thankfulness, kindness, courage, forgiveness, honesty, and reliance in Him. Examples of the latter are stinginess, harshness, arrogance, and envy. For His sake at every moment we should strive to remove those traits which are displeasing to Him and we should strive to have those traits which are pleasing to Him. This effort on our part, this struggle within ourselves is also part of our slavehood to Him. It is a means by which we can draw closer to Him. Because only He Knows our hearts. Only He Knows how much we struggle for His sake. So our motivation in this struggle is His Knowledge of our efforts. Is it not enough for you that He Knows all that you go through? Is it not enough that He Knows how much you have suppressed your ego for Him?

Now that we have some idea of what *ibadah* means let us compare it to how the secular society today views the concept of worship. Are *ibadah* and worship the same as many of us today believe? Are they even similar? *Ibadah* as we said means complete slavehood and submission. In Arabic it literally does mean slavehood, that is why the Arabic word for slave is '*abd*'. It also means a camel which has been beaten into submission or a path which has been treaded upon. So it gives meaning of humility, it gives meanings of lowness, it gives meanings of complete and utter submission. It gives meanings of subjugation and abasement. Now just think how different is this to how the secular society today views the concept of worship. Worship for them is just a few rituals, perhaps a few holidays (which are usually just an excuse for get togethers and parties) and perhaps a few morals. So they maybe they go to Church on Sunday, they bring the family together for Christmas and Easter where they drink and they party, and they try to be honest and fair and this is for them is the extent of their worship. They still think that their lives as theirs to live as they please. They rarely if ever think of the Supreme Being. It is all just rituals and culture. How different is this from what we know as *Ibadah*. Allah (swt) tells us that our entire lives must be for Him. Even the feelings that we have in our hearts must be for Him.

Now we should also bear in mind that when we say that we are slaves to Allah (swt), when we say that we seek to enter into complete slavehood to Him, this should not in any way be compared to the slavery that we know among human beings. Slavery to Allah (swt) is not like slavery to any human master. First and foremost because no human is deserving of slavehood whereas He (swt) is deserving. He is more than deserving. It is His right. And if any choose not to give this to Him then they would be committing the worst of injustices. Because He is so Majestic, He is so Tremendous, and also because we owe Him so much. Secondly He is not a cruel master, and a harsh master like most of the masters of this world. No rather He is a Master of Love and Mercy. And so in the slavehood that He demands He has not placed any undue hardship or anything that is beyond our capacity. This is something that He has stated explicitly in the Quran in numerous occasions. So realize that it is only Shaitan who makes it seem like this slavehood is difficult. When in reality it is not. If you truly try your best. If you are sincere to Him then Insha Allah you would find it to be easy. And furthermore in several areas He has given you much freedom to do as you please. For example you can eat the foods you like, only very few foods like pork and carrion has He forbidden for you. These few that are forbidden for you are what are not good for you anyway. But besides these you can eat whatever you want. You can choose for your spouse whoever is pleasing to you. You can choose as your profession what you like. You can buy what you want as long as it is not in excess or something forbidden. So many are the areas which He has left to your choice. To your discretion. To the point where even though you have dedicated your life to Him you still have much choice in what you can do. You still have much say in how you live your life. Ask the people who have chosen this path. Ask the people who have dedicated themselves to Him. Ask them if they are living the life of misery and oppression that we associate with slavery. They will tell you that it is in fact the opposite. They will tell you how when they are with Him is when they are truly free. They no longer have any fear upon them and they no longer grieve. Because all that they care for is Him. So they are content with whatever situation that they find themselves in. They are no longer a slave for this world and its fates. They are no longer a slave for their desires. They are completely free of everything and everyone except Him. Through this freedom they gain contentment and fulfillment.

Now that we know what *Ibadah* is let us look what should motivate us to do it. We know that we have to dedicate our lives to Allah (swt) but let us ask ourselves again why we do it. Of course we are not forced into slavery like the slaves of this world are. Rather we choose to be His slaves. We choose to dedicate ourselves completely to Him. We choose to journey to Him. We choose to dedicate every moment of our existence only for Him. Let us ask ourselves as to what is the motivation for us to do this. The scholars say that there are two simultaneous factors. One is our love for Him and the other is our awe and reverence for Him. So we love Him, we love Him so much and this is the first reason why we give Him everything. Our love for Him is so much that we sacrifice everything for Him. To the point where we care more for pleasing Him than pleasing ourselves. The second factor is our awe and reverence for Him. Our humility before Him. We respect Him so much. We regard Him so much. That we do not want to do anything which may displease Him. So love and reverence. These are the two factors which drive our *Ibadah*. In fact one scholar once said that so much should be our love for Him, so much should be our reverence for Him that we would put our face on the floor in submission to Him time and time again. Yet even if we were offered the world and all that there was in it to prostrate to other than Him we would not do it. We dedicate ourselves to Him completely and never would we dedicate ourselves to other than Him. Never would we give to other than Him even a fraction of what we give to Him. Such is how much love and awe we have for Him. Such is how overflowing is our love and awe.

And when you know Him as the Kind of Being that He IS. When you know Him in all His Majesty and Beauty. When you realize even a fraction of the bounties and favors that He has given you when you have not done anything for Him. How then can you not love Him? How then can you not be drowned in your reverence for Him? Our problem today is that we live in complete heedlessness of Him. We have completely forgotten Him. We do not think about Him. We do not reflect on Him. That is why we lack the motivation to do our *Ibadah*. That is why we often become lazy and complacent in our *Ibadah*. Because this secular society in which we live, this materialistic and consumer culture has veiled Him from us. All that we care for is quenching our desires. All that we care for is getting more and more of the material things. For many of us, even those of us who say that we are Muslims, our love and awe for Him are only empty words.

This is the reason why we were created. This is the reason why we exist. It is only so that we can make *ibadah* to Him. And there is really no greater purpose to life than this. If you have achieved this sublime station then you have achieved the very pinnacle of human existence. We as mankind were not created for anything more than this. We were created only so that we could discover Him, know Him, love Him and dedicate ourselves to Him. He is the Real and the True. He is the Majestic and the Glorious. He is the Sublime and the Tremendous. How then could you ever hope to find fulfillment and completion in anything other than Him?

But how few people today realize this fact? How many are the people who dedicate their lives to other than Him? How many are the people who spend every moment seeking other than Him? Even those of us who call ourselves Muslim. Our moments are with other than Him. We seek honor and purpose from other than Him. We think that if we can climb the corporate ladder or if we can make a three figure salary or if we can get a masters degree or if we can buy large houses or expensive cars or if we can make our children into doctors or lawyers we think that this is how we will find fulfillment. We think that these chattels are the goals that we should be seeking. We allow this world, this temporary and fleeting world to be the very reason for our existence instead of Him. So an effort must be made on our part to educate the people. To remind them of Him. To remind them that He is the Reason for their Existence. To remind them how nothing else should matter except Him. We all need to fill our hearts with Him instead of with anything else other than Him. Because if we do not do dawah to the people. If we do not call them to Him then we can be certain that the devils will. How much is secularism being promoted today? How much are the personal freedoms and individualism being promoted? People are being taught that they need to live for themselves. They are being taught that they need to glorify themselves and serve themselves. In reality this is the very antithesis of *ibadah* and yet this is what is being taught and promoted in this secular world. But then what do you expect when the Law of the land is a law other than His. What do you expect when men take for themselves the position of legislator? The hearts of the people are so distant from Him. They see the world and not Him. That is why they seek glory and purpose from this world. They have forgotten that the true glory in life and the true purpose for life comes only from being dedicated to Him.

If you choose other than Him. If you choose other than slavehood to Him. Then your heart will never be satisfied. There will always be an open wound in your heart. Because it was created for Him. So how could expect it to find peace except in Him? If you choose other than Him then you will always be in misery. You will always be in yearning. Because you are feeding it other than what would satiate it. The Sufis of old. Those who truly knew Him. They spent their entire lives seeking only Him. They did not have any other purpose for their existence than Him. They would come together and meet only to remember Him. They sought to have their hearts expanded with His Presence. They sought only nearness to Him. Intimacy with Him. They did not see people anymore. They did not see forms anymore. Rather they only saw Him.

How many are the people in the world today who are like this? Not only is it very few but thought by the people to be fools. If you seek only Allah (swt). If you live only for Him. Then you are thought to be foolish. Or else you are thought to be crazy. But who are the real fools? Who are those who have truly been deluded? Those who attach their hearts to other than Him. If you choose other than Him then it is not only one master that you will have but many. You will be a slave to many different masters and they will all pull you in many different directions. For example if your only concern in life is your children then you will become a slave for them. But then in order to please them and in order to provide for them you will also become a slave for money. Now in order to get money you will also become a slave for your work and your boss and the stock market. See then how many masters are controlling you and having their way with you because you chose to turn away from your True Master.

Whereas if you would have chose Him then all of your problems would have been solved. Your only concern would be His Pleasure. Nothing else matters. If you know that you have pleased Him then you can be certain that He will take care of your family. He will take care of them even when you are not around for them. Why would He not do so when He loves you? Remember that He is the Reason behind everything that happens in this world. There is not a leaf that falls except if it be by His Will, by His Permission and by His Power. If you make Him as your only goal in life then as He has promised you will have no fear upon you and you will not grieve. Because you that He will be there for you. You trust in Him and rely in Him.

How beautiful then is this concept of ibadah? How beautiful is it to have a purpose for every moment of your life? How beautiful is it to never have even a moment of your life to be wasted? When you dedicate yourself to Allah (swt) then through every moment of your life you can come closer to Him. Through every moment you can earn another good deed for your scale on the Day of Judgment. Because anything and everything that you do can be considered as part of your ibadah. Not only your prayer, your charity, and your fasting. But even the mundane tasks that you do over the course of your day. For example your working or your cooking or your looking after your children or your eating. Even your using the restroom and your time of intimacy with your spouse. Even this can be considered as part of your slavehood to Him. Because you spend that time with her to satisfy your urges in a permissible way and to avoid the forbidden and to increase the love between you both and perhaps to bring forth a pious child who will worship Allah (swt) and serve His Din. All this you do for Him. If you have such an intention then you Insha Allah you will be rewarded even for those moments of pleasure you had with her. Similarly for any other seemingly mundane or worldly task that you do, if you did that act so that you can survive in this world in order to continue to worship Him and call others to Him then that act is also ibadah. Any act whatsoever that you do can be considered as ibadah. The only exception of course is that you cannot do anything that is forbidden. Because your intention behind every moment is to draw closer to Him and how can you do this if you are displeasing Him.

Even your interactions and dealings with the people becomes part of your ibadah. You do not deal with them only for their sake or only for yours. Rather you deal with them for His sake. You will deal with them as part of your slavehood to Him. When this is the case then the ego is removed from the equation. Then you will be kind and respectful to them no matter who they are. Even if they are mean to you, you will be tolerant and patient with them. If they criticize you, you will not lash back at them or fester hatred for them. Because you realize that it is not about you or them. Rather it is only about Him. So to please Him you will always behave with them in the best of ways. You will strive not to hurt them in any way. You will strive not to be unjust with them in any way. Just imagine how the world would be if we all behaved in this way? Would anyone insult each other? Would anyone cheat each other? Would anyone backbite against each other?

Now from what we have spoken here about Ibadah it may seem as if this is very high station to reach. To remember Allah (swt) at every moment. To dedicate every single one of our actions to Him. Not all of us may be capable of such a feat. Not all of us may be capable of such a sacrifice. For many of us we are weak. We often forget. We often become heedless and negligent. We may even fall into sin. If such should happen then should we despair? Should we give up? Should we think that we can never make ibadah to Allah (swt)? Should we ever think that we can never be what He expects to be? No of course not. Because remember from the previous ayah the Kind of Being that He IS. He is the Being of extreme Mercy and Love. The Being of Forgiveness and Compassion. When we know these attributes of His then we can keep the hope that we can always return to Him no matter how many times we may slip. We should never think that we are out of His Grace. We should never think that He will never forgive us. No rather we must always hope for His Mercy. But at the same time we must also try our best. Recall previously how we spoke about the balance between fear and hope. We should always hope for His Mercy when we think of the sins that we have committed in the past. But at the same time we cannot use His Mercy as an excuse to sin again in the future. So even though Ibadah is a very high station to reach you still have to try your best to get there. Just do as much as you can. If you cannot remember Him for every moment of your day then at least try to remember Him for as many moments as you can. If you cannot dedicate every action to Him then try to dedicate as much as you can. If you cannot try your absolute best then try as much as you can. Be honest with yourself. Always remember that He Knows the inner recesses of your heart. He Knows exactly how much you strived for Him or did not strive for Him. He Knows how much you gave Him. In the end remember that it not about the goal but it is about the journey. What He will reward you for is your intention and your efforts. The results are not in your hands, they are in His. At the end of the day He is the One Who guides to Him. But what is upon us is that we seek that guidance from Him. So do not worry too much about how many sins you have committed in the past. Realize that you have a Rabb Who is more Forgiving and Merciful than you could possibly ever imagine. Do not worry also about how long is the road ahead of you. If you can just take the first step, only out of your love for Him, then just think how pleased He will be with you.

Now let us ponder for a moment on the language of this ayah. Notice how Allah (swt) does not tell us to say “We enslave ourselves to you” rather He tells us to say “To You Alone We enslave ourselves”. You might think that these both are the same but actually there is a reason to why Allah (swt) said it this way. Firstly it is to emphasize that the ibadah is only for Him. If we would have made this statement in the first way then it is possible that the ibadah could be for Allah (swt) and also for someone else or something else. But the way it is in the ayah it can only be for Him. Our lives, our deaths, our prayers, and our sacrifices are only for Him. We do not care for anyone else. We do not attach our hearts to anyone else. Only Him. Only Him!!

Another reason why we make this statement in such a way is to mention Him before we mention ourselves. To show that He is more important than us. To show that He deserves the remembrance and the spotlight before we do. How can we possibly compare to Him? Life is nothing but coming to this realization. To realize that He is more worthy than we are. To realize that He should be the Source of our dedication Our own ego and our self is the biggest veil between us and Him. When we always put Him before ourselves like He has taught us to do in this verse that is when the veils will be lifted. That is when we will see Him in all His Glory.

Notice also in the ayah how He does not command us to say “To You I enslave myself to” rather He commands us to say “To You we enslave ourselves to”. In other words He tells us to make this dua in the collective form and not in the individual form. What is the significance of this? Why has He done this? After all we know that on the Day of Judgment we will all be judged individually. Each of us will have to stand in judgment before Him alone. No one soul can benefit another soul in any way. No one soul can do anything at all for another soul. Every person will only be judged for what that person did. So I cannot take the good that others have done and I cannot unload my sins upon them. I myself will have to present my own deeds before my Rabb. Why then does He tell us here not only to make this prayer for ourselves but also for others? There are several reasons. First He wants to show us that in this world we should not be individualistic. We should not be concerned only with ourselves. We are always connected with those around us. Our family, our community, our nation, and mankind as a whole. We can never abandon them. We can never think only of ourselves. We are a part of them and they a part of us.

This is what Allah (swt) wants us to realize. He wants us to be close to those around us. He wants us to care for those around us. He wants us to look after those around us. Their pain should be our pain. Their joy should be our joy. The strongest of bonds of course should be for our family. First for our immediate family and then for our extended family. Several are the ayahs in the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet (saw) which stress taking care of the family. After our family those closest to us should be the believers. Those who believe in Allah (swt) and in the Prophet (saw). Even among the believers there are levels. The closer they are to Allah (swt) the closer they should be to us. Because we love Him we should love those close to Him. And the closer they are to Him the more that we should love them. The closer they are to Him the more we should seek to be with them. The Prophet (saw) said that a man is on the religion of his companion. So we should look to who we take as our companions. But in general the whole Muslim Ummah should be close to us. Because Allah (swt) has also said that our nation is one brotherhood. The Prophet (saw) has described our nation as one body. In that if one part is aching then all of the other parts suffer as well. So we as Muslims should feel connected to other Muslims all around the world with a special bond. Even if they do not reciprocate this love to us we should still have it for them. Because we seek to come close to them not their sake but for His. We love them for His sake and we maintain this brotherhood and this closeness with them for His sake. Even if they many not seem to be the most pious. Even if there are some issues on which we disagree with them. We should still love them. We should still want the best for them. We should still make this prayer on their behalf as well. We should see past our differences and cooperate with them on what is good. We should work with them in our efforts of dawah. We should realize how much we have in common. We are all calling to Allah (swt).

Now what about non Muslims. Are they included in this prayer as well? When it comes to non Muslims we should realize that they fall into two categories. Those who have properly received the Message and who have turned away from it and those who have not properly received the Message. With the former of these groups we cannot have any love but for the latter we should. The former are those who have rejected our Rabb. They have turned away from Him. How then can we love them? How can we care for them? When they do injustice to our beloved.

But as for those who have not received the Message properly. Those who have not been shown the proofs and evidences for this Message. We should not consider them as evil like the former group. Rather we should consider them as lost souls. We love them as our brethren in mankind. We should wish the best for them. We should wish that Allah (swt) guides them to Him and allows them to be part of our nation. There is nothing better that we could hope for them than this. But at the same time we cannot make this specific dua that Allah (swt) is teaching us in Surah Fatihah on their behalf. Why? Because part of this dua is our declaring to Him that we enslave ourselves only to Him. Now of course for the non Muslims this is not true. They have not yet submitted to Him. They have not yet enslaved themselves to Him. So of course this prayer cannot be made on their behalf. They do not meet the conditions of the one making this prayer. But at the same time we can and we should make a general prayer for their guidance. We should try our best to carry this Message to them and hope that Allah (swt) guides them.

So see here from this prayer alone the kind of human being that Islam creates. A human who is not individualistic. A human who is the very antithesis of it. We are shown here that we should care for others as much as we care for ourselves. The Prophet (saw) said that he is not one of us who goes to sleep soundly at night while his neighbor is hungry. He (saw) also said that we should love for our brother what we love for ourselves. How different is this teaching from the secular society of the world today? This society which so heavily promotes individualism. Which do you think is the right way? Which do you think is the better way? Imagine the kind of world it would be if everyone thought in this way. If everyone thought of others as much as they thought of themselves. For most of us we are by our nature selfish. By our nature we only worry about ourselves. Islam came to change this thinking. It came to teach us to give as much we take. It came to teach us to sacrifice for others. And it gave us the greatest of incentives for doing this. Him. When we live for Him. When all that we care for is Him. Then we can conquer this base nature of ourselves. We can learn to give. We can learn to share. We can learn to forgive. The root of most evil is the self. Shaitan makes us to think only of ourselves. Only about our desires and our needs. Allah (swt) shows us that this is not the way. Just by using the plural "we" instead of "I" in this prayer that we recite everyday He shows us how important others are.

Another reason why Allah (swt) tells us to make this prayer in the plural is to make us realize how much He is deserving of our ibadah. He is so Glorious and so Tremendous and He has done so much for us that the slavehood of a single person is not nearly enough. It is not even close to what He deserves. Only the collective slavehood of a group, of a large group can even come close to what He deserves. It is not enough that only I do Ibadah to Him and only you do Ibadah, but we all need to do Ibadah for Him. Not only all Muslims but all mankind. Such is what He deserves. Such is how Tremendous HE IS. Such is how much we all owe to Him. Such is also how weak and insignificant we are. So do not think too highly of your ibadah, do not think too highly of anything that you do. He will always be deserving of far more than you could ever give. So always give Him your best but never think you have given Him enough.

This also shows us the importance of dawah. The importance of calling others to Him. Because not only are you making a pledge in this ayah that you would enslave yourself to Him, but you are also making this pledge on behalf of others. Thus you are also giving a promise to Allah (swt) that others will be making this pledge. That others will make Ibadah to Him. If that is not the case then it is up to you to make certain that it is. It is up to you to call the people to Him. Both Muslims and non Muslims. As we both know even most Muslims today are very far from this station of Ibadah. Even most Muslims today do not give to Him this complete dedication and slavehood that He deserves. Rather they think that this Din is only a few rituals and few morals. They think that if they fast in Ramadan, go for Hajj once in a lifetime, and perform Jummah on Friday then their Islam is complete. They do not know how Allah (swt) records each and every one of their actions. They do not know how they will be questioned about everything that they do. So we need to correct them. We need to show them what Ibadah truly means. Even if it takes time, even if it is difficult, even if they may censure or become upset with us, we still have to try. This effort on our part is part of our slavehood to Him. Our patience and tolerance with whatever they may say is also part of our slavehood to Him. Think about the Prophet (saw). Think about all that he (saw) had to go through. He (saw) was the best slave of Allah (swt) and his life was a life of dawah. He (saw) dedicated his life to calling the people to the Divine. Because he (saw) knew that there was nothing more pleasing to Him. And the goal of slavehood should be His Pleasure.

The commitment to make ibadah to Allah (swt) is only the first part of this ayah. In the second part He commands us to seek help only from Him. He commands us to ask only from Him. Now the two questions that can be asked in relation to this command is why do we need to seek His help and in what do we need to seek His help? In relation to the first question we need to seek His help because we are absolutely powerless and weak. We are weaker than we could possibly ever imagine. In our arrogance and our ignorance we may convince ourselves that we have some power. We may convince ourselves that we can be independent of Him. That we do not need Him for every moment of our lives. But of course this is only an illusion. An illusion of Shaitan. He tries to make us heedless of our Rabb. He tries to make us forget Him. He tries to make us think that we do not need Him. That we do not need to seek His help at every minute. So we should strive against this deception. We should strive to remind ourselves of how much we need our Rabb. And the best example for us of course is the Prophet (saw). He (saw) used to ask help from Allah (swt) for everything. For the big things like asking victory for his army against a force that was thrice their size and the small things like even tying his shoelaces. He (saw) also used to ask Allah (swt) to always send down His Mercy upon him and not to leave him to rely on himself for even the blinking of an eye. Such was how much he (saw) realized his weakness. Such was how much he realized his dependence on his Rabb.

Another reason why we should seek help from Allah (swt), another reason why we should ask of Him, is because just our act of doing so is pleasing to Him. Just our asking of Him is an act of worship to Him. The Prophet (saw) told us that dua is Ibadah. Meaning an act of slavehood that we can do for Him, a way in which we can draw closer to Him, is just by asking of Him. Unlike most people He loves when we ask of Him. And He is angry when we do not ask. Because He is a Being Who loves to give, and to give each of us what we ask for is very easy for Him. It does not require any effort from Him whatsoever. So He loves it when we can conquer our egos and ask of Him. He loves it when we can admit our weakness and ask of Him. He loves it when we acknowledge His Power and His Bounty and ask of Him. So the more that we ask of Him the more that we remember Him. The more that we ask of Him the more that we can glorify Him. The more that we can ask of Him the more that we can love Him.

Now it is also important to realize that even though we ask of Allah (swt). Even though He loves when we ask of Him. This does not mean that we should not make an effort on our part. This does not mean that we should expect Him to do everything for us. He will help us, He will support us, He will answer our prayer, as long as we also do our part. Even if what we are doing is the smallest of acts. He will still give as long as we do it. Look in the Quran at the example of Musa (as). He (as) made to dua to Allah (swt) to help him and his people escape from the army of Firaun. And how did Allah (swt) answer his prayer? How did He (swt) help him? It was by literally parting the waters of the ocean. For miles and miles the massive waters of the ocean were split in two so that Musa (as) and his people could escape. But before Allah (swt) did this, He first asked Musa (as) to strike the water with his staff. Only after that did He (swt) part the waters of the ocean. It shows us that we always need to do our part. We always need to make an effort. Only then will Allah (swt) send His help. Even the linguistic definition of the word to ask for help that Allah (swt) uses here gives the meaning of help that is sought after an effort has been made. There are several words in Arabic that give the meaning of asking for help. But the specific word that Allah (swt) uses here means to seek help after an effort is made on our part. It is as if you have travelled a portion of the journey and now you need Him to take you the rest of the way. Even if all that you have taken is just take the first step, you still need to take it. Once you take it then He will carry you for the rest of the way. He will help you and complete your task. What He wants to see from you is that you make the effort. Because this life is a test. And what would be the point of the test if we did not do anything on our part. If we did not make any effort.

So we have to act in whatever capacity that we can. When we ourselves have tried our best. When we ourselves have done all that we can. Then we can ask Allah (swt) for help. Just look at the example of the Prophet (saw) before the battle of Badr. He (saw) did all that he could to prepare his army for battle. He (saw) took all the steps that he could to try and attain victory for the Muslims. Then after he (saw) had done all that he could. After he (saw) had made his best effort then he raised his hands and made a fervent and powerful dua to Allah (swt). He begged and pleaded of his Rabb all that he could to grant him and his army victory. Because he knew that all he could do was make the effort. In the end the Help and Victory is only from Allah (swt).

This is a lesson that many of us today need to learn. Because we as Muslims today seem to fall into two extremes in our understanding of dua. In our understanding of seeking help from Allah (swt). There are some of us who rarely make dua to Allah (swt). We think that we are enough for ourselves. We think that we do not need to rely on Him. We think that we do not need to call out to Him. We become heedless of Him. We become negligent of Him. We only see this world. We only see ourselves. But we do not see Him. So the only time we seek His help, the only time we call out to Him, is when we need Him. When we are faced with a problem that we cannot possibly solve or when a great calamity afflicts us. Other times we forget Him. We just worry about our concerns and our pleasures. Thinking that we live for ourselves.

The other extreme are those who do make dua to Allah (swt) but they do not take the means themselves. Meaning that when they are faced with a problem or when they have a need they will make dua but they will not take any action on their part whatsoever. They expect Him to do everything. They think that they do not need to do anything except make dua. This thinking as well is not correct. Because the word that Allah (swt) uses here for seeking help means to seek help after an effort is made. So for example if you need money to feed yourself and your family you should make dua to Allah (swt) to provide for you. You should realize that He is the Provider. But is this all that you have to do? Can you just sit the entire day at home or in the masjid making dua? No of course not. After you ask Allah (swt) for help you also must try. You have to take the means to get a job or to get an education. You have to do your part. Only then will Allah (swt) provide for you. And then when the sustenance does come, when the food does come, do not ever think that it was because of your efforts. No, it was only from Allah (swt). He provided for you after you asked Him and you made the effort. Similarly in our efforts to reestablish the Islamic State. We each have to make an effort on our part. We cannot only make dua to Allah (swt) and do nothing ourselves to reach that goal. Such was not the way of the Prophet (saw). He (saw) took the practical steps required to establish Islam in the land. He (saw) did not just sit in the masjid and make dua. Of course he (saw) asked his Rabb for help but at the same time he also tried his best. So too must we. We each have to do what we can. We each have to remind the Muslims that we know about what Islam is and how we need to live under it.

Now that we know why we need to seek help from Allah (swt). Now that we know that we should try our best while seeking His help. Now let us think about in what we need to seek His help in. What exactly do we need His help in doing? Should we only be asking His help when we are in trouble? Or only when we are faced with a task that is too difficult for us to handle on our own? Should it be that we only call out to Him when we need Him? This is what many people do. They only make dua to Allah (swt), they only call out to Him when they need Him. Should this be our attitude as well? No rather we should follow the excellent example of the Prophet (saw), we should always be making dua to Him. We should always be asking His help.

Specifically in this ayah we see that He wants us to ask His help in making Ibadah to Him. Because we already stated that our goal was to make Ibadah to Him. Our goal was to dedicate ourselves to Him. Such that we strive to remember Him at every moment. We strive to do every action only for Him. There should be nothing more to our life than this. This effort to please Him and draw nearer to Him. Once we realize this then it becomes clear what we need to seek His help in doing. We need His help in serving Him. We need His help in trying to please Him. So dependent are we on Him. So weak are we. That we need His help even to serve Him.

Just think about it. If you have committed yourself to serving a Master. If you love your Master. If all that you want to do is please your Master. Then what would you desire more from that Master other than Him guiding you to Him. What would you desire more than that Master showing you what is pleasing to Him and allowing you do to it? What would you desire more than Him allowing you to be close to Him? So see how our seeking help from Allah (swt) is a manifestation of our love for Him. Our very asking of Him is a manifestation of our Ibadah to Him. Even in asking Him to help us make Ibadah to Him we are making Ibadah to Him. In the very same ayah where we made this pledge we are doing what we said we would do. How beautiful is that? How simple is that? How wonderful is it to know that even in your seeking to come close to Him you can come close to Him? How can you not love Him when He has given you so many ways to come closer to Him? For those who truly desire Him, He Knows how much they love Him and He loves them even more than that. And as a consequence He grants them a station of nearness to Him that you could never understand unless you yourself reached it.

Now another meaning that the second part of this ayah gives is that in addition to asking of Him we are also relying on Him. We are also putting our trust in Him and depending on Him. So in the ayah we are telling Him that to Him Alone we have dedicated ourselves to Him and upon Him Alone do we rely. Meaning that at every moment we trust in Him to take care of us. At every moment we are content with what He has chosen to give us. No matter what state we might be in we are always pleased with what He has chosen to give us. This is the station of a true believer. The true believer never worries about his circumstances, rather he only worries about his actions. Because he knows that his circumstances are not under his control, rather they are only from his Rabb. All that he can control, all that he has power over are his actions. So the only worry that he has at every moment is if he is pleasing his Rabb or not in that moment. If he knows that he has pleased Him, if he knows that he has given Him the dedication and slavehood that He deserves, then he is content. I love you so much my Rabb. All that I want at every moment is you.

This is the station that we have to reach. Where we are always relying on Him and we are always begging of Him and we are always dedicated to Him. Through all of these we seek to draw closer to Him. Through all of these we seek to make manifest our love for Him. How beautiful is this? How wonderful is this? How many are the paths that He has given us to travel to Him? Many scholars have called this ayah the heart of Surah Fatihah. It can even be considered the heart of the Quran. Because it teaches us the most important of lessons. It teaches us how nothing matters except Allah (swt). In the end He is all that matters. He is all that we should be concerned for. Our life should be nothing but dedicating ourselves to Him and relying on Him and calling upon Him. At every moment we should strive to please Him and we should be pleased with whatever He gives us. We do not need to be sad. We do not need to worry. And we do not need to be afraid. Because we know that we can always have Him if we are true to Him. Our relationship with Him is something that no one can ever take ever from us. No matter what may happen to us we can always have Him. And we also know that whatever may befall us in life is only what He has written for us. What He has ordained for us. What He has created and sent to us. So we are patient with it for His sake. We make ourselves content with it for His sake. All that we care for is Him. May He give us the enabling grace to reach this station!

## 6. Guide us to and along the constant path.

Now that we know our goal. Now that we know why we have been created. Now that we know why we exist. What then should be the next step? How then can we progress in our journey to Him? Now we know that we have to serve Him, now we know that we have to rely on Him, now we know that we have to call out to Him. Now we know the path. But what should we seek next from Him? This is what He shows us here. He shows us here how we can remain constant on the path. How we can remain dedicated to Him. Because we as human beings are weak. Even if we are on the path for a particular moment, we can easily stray. Meaning that at one moment of our life we can be attached to Allah (swt) and striving to please Him but at the very next moment we can start to think of our own desires. We can start to forget Him. Within a second the priority in our lives could become ourselves instead of Him. This is what we have to watch out for. This is what we have to ask Him to save us from. And He shows us here how we can do that.

Recall how we said previously that this Surah is a dua. It is a supplication that we are making to our Rabb. In this ayah He tells us what it is that we need to ask of Him. He tells us what it is that we need to yearn for. We have to beg of Him **to guide us to and along the constant path**. Now Insha Allah the first step to understanding this prayer is knowing what He means by “the constant path”. What is the reality of this path? How do we know it? How can we find it? Of course first of all we should realize that it is not a literal path. It is not a physical road that exists anywhere on the earth. Rather the “path” here means the life of slavehood and dedication to Allah (swt). That is the path which He speaks of here. This should show us once again how there are some ayahs for which the literal meaning cannot be taken. Rather we have to take the understood meaning or the metaphorical meaning. The general rule is that we always take literal meaning, the most apparent meaning. But when the apparent meaning does not make sense rationally or when it contradicts with other text only then can we take the metaphorical meaning. There have been some who have always taken the literal and there have been some who give their own meaning even when the literal is obvious. Both these extremes are wrong.

So the path which we are asking Him to guide us to is the path which leads to Him. As long as we remember Him, as long as we love Him, as long as we trust in Him and as long as we strive to please Him then we are on this path. But when we forget Him, when we become heedless of Him, when we become afraid and feel alone, when we worry about the future or lament about the past, when we do the actions which are not pleasing to Him, when we even act for ourselves instead of Him, that is when we stray from the path. So we are asking Him to guide us to and along this path. We are asking Him to show us how to please Him, how to come nearer to Him. We love Him more than anything else. All that we desire to be near to Him. So we ask us to take us to Him. To show us the path that leads to Him. To be on this path is the goal we seek.

Insha Allah now that we have some understanding of what the path is, let us know now what is the reality of Him guiding us to this path. What is the reality of Him guiding us to pleasing Him. The reality of Him guiding us to Him. One way in which He guides us is that He gives us the knowledge of what is pleasing to Him. Because how can we know how to please Him from our own minds? We love Him. We want to please Him. We want to live for Him. But we do not know how. We do not know what is pleasing to Him. He has not given each of us a Book or a Law, He has not sent down to each of us revelation. None of us have seen the angel. So how do we know how to please Him? How can we know what is the correct way of life to live in which we would be pleasing Him? How can we ever know? It is by looking to the sources of Light that He has given us. The Quran and the Sunnah. In these revealed texts He tells us what He expects from us. He tells us what we need to do. So for example He tells us in the Quran that we need to pray to Him and glorify Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting and during portions of the night. He tells us that we need to give a portion of our wealth to the poor and to our family who may be in need. He tells us that we need to respect our parents and be kind with them. He tells us to be good to all of our family members, to all the people. We should forgive them their faults and we should always respect them and be kind with them. He tells us to fast and to make pilgrimage. He tells us to avoid usury, and fornication, and gambling, and lying, and cheating. He tells us to fulfill our trusts and promises. He tells us to be kind even to the animals and He tells us not to be wasteful and extravagant. These are a few of the acts that we can do which are pleasing to Him.

But how can we ever know about these acts unless He tells us? Remember that our goal in doing them is not simply to be good people but it is pleasing Him. How can we know what is pleasing to Him unless He tells us? So the first part of our prayer is asking Him to give us the knowledge of what is pleasing Him. We are asking Him to give us the knowledge of His Divine Law. This is a request that we make of Him every day. Seventeen times a day we ask Him to give us knowledge of the Din. To increase us in our knowledge of Islam. We ask this of Him again and again. Yet how many of us actually take the means to learn the Din. As we mentioned previously when we make the effort then He will give. But are we making the effort? Most of us think that learning the Din is only for the scholars. Most of us have something “better” to do in our time than study Islam. Even though we are asking Him seventeen times a day to give us this knowledge, we do not take any means to get it. Is this anything short of hypocrisy? May He forgive us!

The second aspect of His guiding us is His giving us the means to do what pleases Him. So first we ask Him to show us what is pleasing to Him. Then we ask Him to allow us to do it. Because even this ability comes from Him. We would not be able to do anything. We would not be able to make even a single prostration unless He first gives us the enabling grace. What is the reality of this enabling grace? First it is our belief in Him. Although we are the ones who make the choice to believe, it is He Who guides us to that belief and He gives us conviction in that belief. For example many of us come to believe by looking at His wonderful Signs that are all around us in the universe. But who it is who showed us those signs? Who gave us the facilities to observe those signs? Who gave us a heart which is receptive to those signs? Who gave us the free time and the free mind in which we could stop and ponder on those signs? Of course these are all from Him. After we believe He gives us conviction and firmness in that belief. He strengthens and solidifies that belief. One of the main motivations for us to increase in our slavehood to Him is our conviction in Him. When we are sure that He is there, when we are sure that He is so close to us, then Insha Allah this will motivate us to do more and more good for Him. But if we have doubts. If we forget Him. If we think that all there is to life is this material world. That is when we give ourselves the permission to sin. So part of His guiding us is His giving us the conviction and the certainty in Him. This conviction should translate into an increase in servitude.

So another way in which He guides us is that He strengthens our Iman. He strengthens the certainty and the conviction that we have in Him and in the Message that He has sent. By allowing us to see His Signs. By allowing us to comprehend the proofs and evidences. And by removing from our hearts all the confusions and the doubts. There are many ways in which Shaitan attacks us. Not only does he encourage us to do sins, but he also puts in our hearts strange idea and philosophies. Through these he makes to question. He makes us to doubt. He makes us to forget that we need to submit to Allah (swt) even with our minds. There are some details about Allah (swt). About His Essence. About some of His attributes and actions that we can never fully understand. How can minds as limited and weak as ours fully comprehend a Being as Tremendous as He? If we forget this fact, if we allow ourselves to become arrogant, then these doubts can creep into our hearts. So part of Allah (swt)'s guiding us is His saving us from such doubts. It is His giving us the correct and balanced understanding of Him.

Now in order for us to do good, in order for us to dedicate ourselves to Him, is it enough for us only to believe in Him? Even Shaitan believes in Him but is he a good slave? So the belief and the conviction is only the first step. Then we must have the love for Him. We must have the willingness to do what is pleasing to Him. This love and this willingness also comes from Him. He is the One Who puts the love for Him into our hearts. He is the One Who reveals Himself into our hearts so that we may know Him and so that we may love Him. So even this is a way in which He guides us. He grants us the love and the yearning for Him. And this translates into our willpower and steadfastness to be upon the path. The more that we love Him the stronger will be our desire to be His path. If our love does not translate into action. If it does not translate into a willingness to strive for Him then it is not a true love. It is only a shell. It is only a façade. How can you love Him and not strive to please Him especially when you know that such is what He expects from you? So we have to make an effort to love Him more and more. And at the same time we have make this prayer. We have to ask Him to increase this love in our hearts. We have to strive for Him and we ask Him to allow us to strive for Him. We try and He allows. We seek and He gives. We walk towards Him and He comes towards us. It is truly a beautiful relationship. One that you can never fully appreciate, one that you can never know, unless you also walked this path.

Now yet another manifestation of His guiding us is His allowing us to know what is pleasing to Him at every moment. It is one matter to know His Law, and it is another matter to know how to apply His Law for a given situation. If you truly love Him then you will want to know how to please Him at every moment. At every moment you desire that He is looking down upon you and He is pleased with you. The last thing that you want is to do something which you *think* is pleasing to Him when in fact it is not. For example the Prophet (saw) once told us the story of a man who was devoted to worship. He spent all of his days and nights praying to Allah (swt). But one day his mother called him. Now instead of responding to his mother he decided to continue praying. In making this choice he was actually displeasing Allah (swt) even though his intention all along was to please Him. Because the prayer that he was making was not an obligatory one but a voluntary one. So we want to be saved from ever becoming like him. We want to be saved from walking a wrong path while thinking that we are journeying towards Him. We want to be saved from having our works rejected. We want to be saved from ever being in His displeasure. It is not enough that we ourselves think that we are doing good. Rather what is of utmost importance is that our works are accepted by Him. That is why we pray that He guides us to what is pleasing to Him. For every moment of our lives. All that we want from every moment is Him.

But just as before, as we pray to Him we ourselves should also make the effort. We should make the effort to try and get what we are asking of Him. We must always be checking ourselves. We must always make certain that what we are doing is pleasing to Him. Remember that Shaitan is always trying to mislead us. Often times he convinces that what we are doing is good. He convinces that we are pleasing Allah (swt). But if we just take a moment and step back. If we just take a moment and evaluate our actions. Then we will see that we are not pleasing Him. We will see that what we are doing might even be most displeasing to Him. For example look at all the Muslims who have made innovations in their worship. Some of them turn off the lights and keep mentioning the Name of Allah (swt) until they claim that they reach an ecstatic state. Some of them even claim that they can become one with Allah (swt)! Others among them dance around wildly. Others among them tell the people to go and make dua to the saints in the graves. All of these are innovations. They were never practiced by the Prophet (saw).

Similar are those Muslims today who involve themselves in the political processes of kuffr governments. Many of them might even think that they are doing good. They think that they are serving our Ummah. They think that they can help bring laws that will benefit the Ummah in this secular world. But when they do this they forget that Allah (swt) is the only Legislator. They forget that He is the only Sovereign. They forget how displeasing it is to Him for anyone to take this position for themselves. How displeasing it is to Him for anyone to rule His earth by their own desires. In several places in the Quran He has referred to this as Shirk. The most displeasing of acts to Him. So no matter what our intention may be, do you think that He will be pleased with us if we try to be sovereigns? Even if we were to help the entire Ummah, does it justify a crime such as this? Would you sell idols so that with that money you could feed the poor? Of course not. Because the evil of what you are doing far outweighs the good. Even if you sell alcohol or pork it would still not be acceptable. In general the scholars say that avoiding the evil takes greater precedence over doing the good. So how then can we ever justify Shirk? How can we ever justify ruling by other than what Allah (swt) has revealed? Many are the Muslims today who have fallen into this trap. Many are the Muslims who do Shirk while they think that they are doing good for the Ummah. So when we recite Surah Fatihah we should pray for their guidance as well as for ours. We should pray that Allah (swt) makes them to open their eyes. To see the error of their ways. And at the same time as we pray we also should make the effort. We should try and show them how what they are doing is not pleasing to Allah (swt). We should try and show them how the evil of what they do outweighs the good. This also is part of our dawah. This also is part of our slavehood to Allah (swt). This also is a way in which we can draw closer to Him.

These are all ways in which Allah (swt) guides us. First He allows us to see His Signs, then once we have chosen to believe, He gives us conviction and firmness in our belief. Then He gives us the love for Him. He gives us the fear and awe of Him. These become the motivation for us to strive in our slavehood of Him. For us to excel in our slavehood of Him. Then He gives us the knowledge of His Law. So that we can know how to serve Him. Then He gives us the ability to apply that law for every moment of our lives. So that at every moment we could please Him. So that at every moment we can journey closer to Him.

Now in this ayah we are asking Allah (swt) to guide us. Does this mean that we do not have any free will? Does this mean that we cannot choose whether to believe or not? There are some who have made this claim. There are some who have said that we are only like feathers in the wind. Meaning that our actions, even our intentions, come from Allah (swt). It as if we selves do not exist. Such is the claim that they make. Is there any worth to such a claim? Of course not, because several are the ayahs in which Allah (swt) has told us that we do indeed have free will. Even the very existence of the Hereafter, the very existence of the Garden and the Fire shows that we do indeed have free will. Because what would the point of Allah (swt) testing us if we did not have a choice? What are we being tested on then?

Now that we have established that we do indeed have free will, where then does the Guidance from Allah (swt) come into the picture? Why do we need Him to guide us if it is we who make the choice? We have already answered this question on the previous page. We need Him for everything except our making the choice. First we need Him to allow us to make the choice. For example by showing us His Signs. By His giving us the free time and the opportunity to think about Him. Then once we have made the choice to believe in Him and in the Message that He has sent, we need Him to give us certainty and conviction in that belief. We need Him to protect us from the demons of desires and doubts. We need Him to show us how to please Him. Not only by giving us knowledge of His Din, but also at every moment of our life by putting the thought in our mind of what is most pleasing to Him. We need Him to save us from innovations and justifications. For all this and more we need Him. This is the manifestation of His guidance.

So we see from this ayah the correct understanding to the topic of guidance and free will. We see how we must take a balanced approach. It is not right to say that we have no choice whatsoever and at the same time it is also not right to say that we do not need the guidance from Allah (swt). We have to make choice to believe and at the same time we should ask Him to guide us. We have to strive to do good and at the same time we have to ask Him to give us the enabling grace. Just like in everything else He will give us if we ask of Him. As He has told us, He will come towards us at speed if we choose to walk towards Him. We must take the first step. We must make the choice to turn towards Him. Then He will do the rest.

There are two extremes that we have to avoid. We cannot become lazy and negligent and allow ourselves to sin while making the excuse that we are waiting for Allah (swt) to guide us. At the same time we cannot think that we are independent of Him. We cannot think that we are enough for ourselves. Because such would lead to arrogance which is of the greatest of sins. So we should strive to walk the middle path. We should realize our need of Allah (swt) and we should try our best to serve Him. Both of these are ways in which journey to Him. When we humble ourselves before Him, when call out to Him, when we realize how much we need Him, we draw closer to Him. And at the same time when we strive and struggle and sacrifice for Him, we also draw closer to Him. And this is really all that there is to life. It is but the journey to Him.

Now let us consider for a moment the way in which He describes the path. We have translated it here as "The Constant Path". However this translation does not do justice to the meaning in the original Arabic. In the Arabic Allah (swt) calls it *As-Siratul Mustaqeem*. First notice how the word *Siratul* has the definite article. This shows us how it is not just any path that our Rabb is referring to here but it is a very specific path. It is a known path. A trodden path. So we should see from this how there can be only one Islam. This Din cannot be changed. It does not need to go through a reformation. It does not need an evolution. No rather what is pleasing to Allah (swt) as we can see from here is that it be implemented in the same way as it was implemented in the time of the Prophet (saw). That is the one and only Islam. There is no different Islam needed for the modern world or the secular world as some have claimed.

As we as an Ummah find ourselves today without a Khilafah. As we an Ummah today find ourselves having to live in a secular world. A world which will not allow for many of the laws in Allah (swt)'s Din to be implemented. A world in which we have to make several sacrifices and compromises in our Din. There are some who have made the claim that Islam needs to be changed in order to be made compatible with such a world. They propose an Islam in which many of the laws have been stripped away. They say that we do not need the Khalifah, we do not need Islam to be implemented on a political level. They say that we do not need Jihad. They say that we do not need the criminal punishments. Even though there are clear ayahs of the Quran and authentic hadith of the Prophet (saw) which speak of these, they still see we do not need them.

Do you think that Allah (swt) would be pleased with such a reformation of His Din, especially when He says right here in the first chapter of His Book that there can be only one implementation of His Din? So we should see from here that the path is one. There can be no innovations or reformations to it. Just like we do not need to invent new ways of worship which the Prophet (saw) never did, we also do not need to reform or improve upon our Din in any way. Rather we should strive to follow the way of the Prophet (saw) and the early generations. Both in the spiritual and political aspects of our Din. Such is how we can please Allah (swt). Such is how we can draw closer to Him. If we can do this then we do not need anything or anyone else.

Now there are several words in Arabic for "path", these include *tariq*, *sabeel*, and even *Sunnah*. But instead of all those why does Allah (swt) choose here to use the word *Sirat*? What is special about this word? What is different about this word? One way is that *Sirat* is used for a path that is straight. A path that does not have any crookedness or deviations in it. Does this also not describe Islam perfectly? This is a path that leads to Allah (swt) and it leads straight to Him. If you truly follow the teachings of this Din sincerely and to the best of your ability then you will be taken to Him. You will never become lost or lead astray. The problem with many of us today is that of we do not follow Islam correctly. There are gaps and weaknesses in our understanding of the Din. And there are innovations and inadequacies in our practice of the Din. That is why many of us do not reach our goal. We do not reach Him. Even though we may claim that we walk the path. We may not be journeying closer to Him because we may not be walking the right path. However if we do find the correct path, through this prayer and through submission to what is in the revealed text, then Insha Allah it will lead us to Him. For this is a path that is straight.

Another way in which Islam is a straight path is that everything in this Din is pure and good. There are no laws which are evil. There are no laws which are unjust or unfair. No rather everything what Allah (swt) has told us to do is what will benefit us in this world and in the next. How will the laws of this Din benefit us? First and foremost by allowing us to know Him. By allowing us to be near to Him. Because there is nothing better for us in this world than remembering Him and being near to Him. Not all the riches and not all the power can possibly compare. For He is greater and more sublime and more tremendous than anything.

So when we pray we can remember Him and be near to Him. When we fast we can remember Him and be near to Him. When we give in charity we can remember Him and be near to Him. When we do dawah and call others to Him we can remember Him and be near to Him. When we do any act of slavehood which we dedicate to Him we can remember Him and be near to Him. This is the first way in which this is a path of straightness. A path of justice. A path of light. But when we follow the injunctions of the Shariah, when we dedicate our lives to Allah (swt), then we will have purpose in our lives. We will have meaning to our lives. We will know tranquility and peace. And this is another way in which this is a straight path. It shows us the correct way to live. Just look at any aspect of the Din and you will see how this is so. For example how much better off would we all be if we rid ourselves of the evils that Allah (swt) has forbidden. How much better off would the world be without usury, how much better off would the world be without fornication and sex outside marriage, how much better off would the world if all women dressed modestly and all men lowered their gaze, how much better off would the world without drugs and alcohol, how much better off would the world be if everyone gave in charity and did not hoard all the wealth for themselves. I would remind you once again at this point to look for a book called "The Divine Kingdom" which is also available on my website [quran-tafsir.org](http://quran-tafsir.org) in which I try and list all the ways in which the world would be better if we all followed this Din.

The word *Sirat* also means a path that is wide. A path that has room for many people to walk upon it. This shows us how ours is a Din which all of mankind can walk together on. We say that we want world peace. We say that we want an end to violence and conflict. We say that we want an end to suffering and deprivation among mankind. But this will not be possible unless Islam becomes dominant in the world. Because our nature is that we are selfish. Our nature is that we only look out for ourselves. There are very few among us who can rise above this base nature. So there will always be competition, there will always be greed, there will always be hoarding. And as long as we as human beings remained divided there will always be conflict and suffering. Because those with power will always take from those who do not have power. Those who are different will always fight each other. Today we remained divided across nations and across class. Only Islam can destroy these boundaries. Only Islam can unite mankind.

This is a Din that has been sent for all mankind. To bring peace and prosperity to all mankind. To bring justice and equity to all mankind. Now we are not saying here that we want to convert everyone by force. Even if Islam once again has political authority in the land, this is something that we can never do. Allah (swt) has forbidden it. But once the Khilafah is restored then we can invite the people to this path. We want them to walk on this path alongside us. We want them to be guided to their Rabb just like we have been. We want them to know the serenity and the bliss of being near to Him. We want them to be saved from the Fire and to enter the Garden. None of us today has the means to reach all mankind. To reach every non Muslim on this planet. Even if we were to work together as groups or organizations we still would not be able to do it. We do not have the means or the resources. Rather for the dawah to reach all mankind we need the Islamic State. We need the vehicle to carry this Message to mankind. Because only the State has the means to reach all the people. Only the State can remove all the temptations and distractions which take the people away from Him.

So we see from this ayah how Islam is a wide path. Meaning that it was meant for everyone to walk upon it. Every single man, woman and child. And one important step in trying to achieve this goal is the restoration of the Khilafah. Because this is the only way in which we can get this Message to all mankind. You cannot use the argument that in today's world we have improved means of communication like the Internet so we can use this to get the Message to them. I do not think that this is possible. Even if you have the best of websites. Your site would only reach a small fraction of the population. And from among them those who actually take the time to read your content would be fewer still. And even if you can convince them of the Truth of this Message from only your website, this secular and materialistic world is not one that is conducive to make them want to accept the Message. You see people are not only influenced by thoughts and ideas, but they are more so influenced by their environment. So even if you can show someone how Islam is the Truth, if he lives in an environment where consumerism, liberalism, hedonism and individualism are promoted then he will probably not accept the Message. These demons will always pull the people away from Allah (swt), away from the Din, if they are prevalent in the culture and in the society.

Almost all nations today have closed their borders. They do not want others to come in and be a part of their community. Even a country like the United States which at one time did encourage immigration, today does not anymore. It is not easy for someone to get a visa or to become a citizen. The same can be said for almost all Western nations. For almost all the countries in the world. Why is this? It is because the nation state concept upon which the current world order has been founded is one that breeds individualism and selfishness. Each nation only worries about itself and its people. The needs of others are secondary at best. And each nation is not willing to let outsiders join into it. It sees them as different. It sees them as aliens. How different is this from Islam? We see from this ayah how ours is a wide path. So we want all mankind to walk it with us. We are yearning for this. In fact the very reason why we as a Muslim nation exist is so that we can call others to this path. So that we can call to Allah (swt). We call old and young, man and woman, black and white. Allah (swt) has taught us that we are all the children of Adam, we are all brothers and sisters, we are all equal before Allah (swt).

Another lesson that we can take from this path being wide is that this Din encourages unity even among its own followers. Several are the ayahs in the Quran where Allah (swt) has commanded us to be united as a nation and several more are the ayahs where He has warned us against splitting into sects and factions. If we are all walking on this path together, then should we not be united? How can it be that we are walking the path together if we are not united in our thoughts and in our methodology? Yes it is true that in some minor issues of fiqh, there can be differences among us. Even the Sahabah disagreed on some minor issues of fiqh. But we all believe that the purpose of our life should be the Pleasure of Allah (swt). We all believe that we must follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw). We all read the same Quran. We all pray the same prayers. We all believe in the Day of Judgment and in the Fire and in the Garden. We all know that is the true life and this life is only a test. We all know that we should forgive each other, and love each other and see past our differences and that even this is part of our slavehood. So you see that what unites us is far more than what makes us different. For this reason we have to see past our differences and try to be united. We can do it if we trust in Allah (swt) and we try our best. We are a nation walking together in our journey to Him.

Now some people may bring the argument that if Islam tells all people to walk on the same path, then it is a Din which forces everyone to be the same. In other words you cannot be an individual. You cannot be different. You cannot be yourself. Rather you have to conform to a specific mindset and a specific behavior. Is this true? Is this a weakness of making us all have to walk the same path? Of course not. It is actually a strength. It is actually something wonderful about our Din. Why do people disagree with each other? Why do people fall into conflicts with each other? Why do arguments and fights start? It is because we all like to care for ourselves and we like to blame others. We all want to do things the way that we want to. We are so full of ourselves. This Din came to change this thinking. It came to show us that it is not about us anymore. Rather it is about Him. Life should only be about pleasing Him. If we have pleased Him then we should be content. And part of pleasing Him is trying to make others happy. Part of pleasing Him is behaving with everyone in kindness and respect. We accept their criticism, we forgive their mistakes, we listen to them, we support them, we encourage them, we adopt their opinion (as long as it is not displeasing to Allah (swt)). These are ways in which conflicts are reduced. These are ways in which the love and the mercy between us is increased. We are no longer separate, but we are one. Walking together on the same path towards a common goal.

And do not ever think that this Din will make you into a robot. Do not ever think that you will be a carbon copy of all other Muslims. Although we are united in our belief, and united in our purpose, this Din still allows for you to be individual. As we mentioned there are many areas which Allah (swt) has left open for you. For you to choose. For example you can choose your profession in your life, you can choose your spouse, you can choose your foods and drinks, you can choose your clothes, you can choose your car, your house. And even when it comes to Din, there are several paths that Allah (swt) has given us through which we can journey to Him. For example if you want you can excel in acts of worship. You can pray more and fast more. Or else you can excel in gaining knowledge and teaching to others. You can learn more about this Din and convey it to others. Or else you can excel in dawah. You can call more and more people (both Muslims and non Muslims) to Allah (swt). Or else you can excel in services. You can always try to help and support people in whatever way you can.

This is the reality of the path on which we have been commanded to walk. This is the reality of the path that leads to Him. But He did not leave it at that. Rather in this ayah He describes for us this path. He calls it a path of *Mustaqeem*. Once again there is no single word in a weak language like English to capture the meaning of this beautiful Arabic word. The two words which give some of its meanings are “ascendancy” and “constancy”. We say ascendancy because this is a path which is always taking us upwards. It is always taking us closer to Him. It is always making us into better people. Many scholars have called the Prophet (saw) the perfect human being. Because he (saw) travelled further in this path than we ever could. He (saw) reached higher than we ever could. He (saw) was the most selfless of all human beings. He truly dedicated every single one of his moments only to Allah (swt). At every moment all that concerned him was the Pleasure of his Rabb. He (saw) did not desire anything except else this. If we were to walk this path, if we were to be constant on this path, then Insha Allah we also could reach this sublime station. That is why it is a path of ascendancy. Through it we can rise above our base nature. Our base nature is that we are selfish, egotistical, niggardly, cowardly and arrogant. We do not like to wait, we want everything right away. We are quick to anger and quick to blame and we do not forgive easily. If some hardship comes we complain and lament and if some good comes we are proud and think it is from ourselves. Such is our nature. Allah (swt) describes as this way in several ayahs. And He sent us this Din to show us how we can rise above this base nature. How we can be more like the Prophet (saw). Just think if you could truly live for Allah (swt) instead of for yourself. What a lofty and sublime position would that be? If at every moment you are striving to please Him. Striving to do good. You never hurt others. You never speak ill of others. Rather you are always kind and gentle. You are always forgiving and merciful. You go out of your way to help others. You respect them. You honor them. You want what is best for them and that is that they be guided to Allah (swt). You always support your family. You do not hold any grudges. You forgive them the wrong that they may have done to you. You always try to make them happy with your deeds and your words. You are not greedy for this world, rather you love to share and to give. You are content with what Allah (swt) has given you. You do not complain. You are not jealous. You are not wasteful or stingy.

Just imagine what a lofty station this is. Is it not far higher than where both you and I are today? This was the station of the Prophet (saw), and this is where this path can take us if we are steadfast upon it. If we truly live for Allah (swt) instead of ourselves. If we truly dedicate our lives to Him. It is a long and difficult road, as most paths which lead uphill are. But once you reach your destination, once you see the person whom you have become, once you see how sweet it is to be near to Him, then Insha Allah (swt) you will see how it was well worth the effort.

This path is also one of constancy. Why do we say this you ask? Just imagine if you are climbing a steep hill which keeps going upward. Imagine if it is very steep. Almost vertical. If you stop climbing, if you stop journeying, then what is going to happen to you? Of course you are going to start to fall. You are going to backslide. That is why we have to be constant upon this path. We have to be always making the effort to walk it. Because if ever become negligent, if ever we become heedless, if we ever fail in our striving to please Him, then we would fall. We would fail to be on the path. So walking this path requires vigilance from us. We always need to make certain that we are pleasing Him. We always need to make certain that our actions are in conformity with His Law and following the way of His Messenger. We always need to take ourselves to account. As Umar (ra) used to say "Judge yourself before you are judged".

This constancy, this dedication to the path, is what is truly difficult. Because anyone can come at any time and walk the path for a moment, a day, a month or even a year. A spiritual high may come upon you and you may find yourself doing some good. You may even have sincerely dedicated yourself to Him for that time. But the real question to be asked is can you maintain this station, this level? Some people turn to Allah (swt) when times are hard, when they need His help, but then they forget Him when their prayers have been answered. Others may become distant from Him when some calamity happens in their life. They may question why He is sending that upon them when they have been true to Him. If they do this, if they question Him, in such a way, if they leave Him because of some circumstance then they are showing how they never truly dedicated to Him in the first place. Because if you truly lived for Him then He is all that you would care for. You would love Him and seek Him regardless of if times are good and bad. This is the path that we want to walk. We ask Him here to show us and put us upon this path.

Because notice in the ayah how we are not simply asking Him to show us the path, rather we are asking Him to guide us along it as well. As we mentioned previously not only are we asking Him for knowledge of the Din, but we are also asking for the willingness and the determination to do act upon that knowledge. Because often times you may know what your Rabb expects from you but you may still choose not do it. Most of the Muslims today who take interest, or commit fornication, or miss their prayers, most of them know that what they are doing is wrong. They know that it is not pleasing to their Rabb. Yet they still do it. They do it because they do not have that willingness to submit to Him. They are lacking in their love for Him and their awe of Him. So just as we ask Him to show us the path, we ask Him to keep us on that path by increasing us in our love for Him and our reverence for Him. We will see later on Insha Allah that there are two kinds of people who went astray. There are two kinds of people who earned His Anger. The first group are those who did not seek the knowledge from Him. Those who acted without knowledge. Those who tried to worship Him without knowledge. And the second group are those who had the knowledge but who did not act upon it. Those who were shown the path but who chose not follow it. We want to be saved from becoming like either of these groups. That is why we ask Him to show us the path and to keep us on it. We need Him to do both of these for us, and so both of these are captured in this dua that we make.

So in this ayah Allah (swt) teaches us what is the greatest thing that we could ask of Him. What is the greatest thing that we could seek of Him. It is not wealth, it is not health, it is not children, it is not status and position, it is not even a good life in this world. No there is something far greater than all of these and that is Him. He is the Tremendous and the Pure. He is the Majestic and the Sublime. There is nothing that can compare to Him in any way whatsoever. If you can be near to Him, if you can know the path that leads to Him, then you already have something better than this world and all that there is in it. People seek to enjoy themselves in this world. People seek pleasures and joys in this world. But they only do so because they are heedless of Him. They do not realize the kind of Being that He is. If they knew Him then all that they would desire is Him. But the vast majority of people do not know of Him. Rather they only know this world. But as for you, He has given you the opportunity to know Him.

He has guided you the path which leads to him. Can you even begin to realize then how fortunate you are? How blessed you are? You have been shown the true reality of human existence. You have been given a knowledge which the vast majority of mankind has been denied. You have been given the opportunity to know Him and to be near to Him. Can you then even begin to realize how grateful you have to be to Him? He has shown you the path. The path that leads to Him. The first step in your showing gratitude to Him is to realize how this is a path that is unlike all others. A special path. A distinct path. If you do not realize this then you can never appreciate how much He has favored you. If you think Islam to be a religion just like other religions, or if you think that there is some better way of life for you out there, if you think that there is a better path for you to walk on then you are being ungrateful to Him for His great bounty upon you. The Prophet (saw) told us that there is one Straight Path that leads to Allah (swt). The path which we have spoken of here. The path of submission and slavehood following the Divine Law. Following the way of the Prophet (saw). And then he (saw) also said that there are several other paths. And upon each of these paths there is a devil which calls to it. These devils call the people to stray from the one true path. They call the people to their path.

We as Muslims need to be careful today. If we were to stray from the Straight Path. If we were to hearken to the calls of these devils, then we would be showing utter ingratitude to our Rabb for His showing us and guiding us to the Straight Path. He has given us the chance to be near to Him and we have turned away from that chance. We have chosen instead to be distant from Him. Do you think that He would be pleased with us if we make such a choice? Are you certain that He would save you from the Fire and grant you the Garden if you make such a choice? Today many are the demons calling to secularism, calling to materialism, calling to consumerism, calling to hedonism, calling to a way of life other than Islam. So we always need to remind ourselves, and we especially need to remind our youth, that our way of life is different from theirs. We live for a different purpose. We seek a different goal. We walk a different path. And never should we be allowed to be misguided or lead astray from our path. Because if we do the consequences are far direr than we could ever imagine. Both in this world and the next.

## صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

### **7. The Path of those whom You have favored greatly not (the path of) those who have Wrath upon or the (the path of those) who are lost.**

This is the last ayah of this beautiful Surah. Here our Rabb continues to describe the path upon which we must walk. The path that leads to Him. He describes it for us so much out of His Love for us. So that we may find it. He wants us to find it. He wants to walk upon it. He wants us to discover Him and be near to Him. He wants us to be saved from the Fire and to enter the Garden. He wants us to have the peace and solace of being near to Him in this life. Such is how much He loves us all. How then can you not also love Him? How then can you not also yearn for Him as He yearns for you? How then can you not strive to follow the guidance which He gives you? How could know that there is a Being like He and still not seek Him?

In this ayah Allah (swt) describes for us the people who walk this path. Now at first glance it may seem to you that this ayah has three different descriptions of three different peoples, but if you look closely you would see that it is speaking about only one group of people. There is one group of people about whom Allah (swt) speaks here but He gives us three descriptions of them. They are the ones whom Allah (swt) has favored greatly and they are not the ones who have Wrath upon them nor are they those who are lost. Now before we look at each of these descriptions let us think for a moment as to why Allah (swt) has described the path for us by describing those who walk it. Would it not be better if He described the path itself? Why does He need to describe those who walk upon it? Because our nature as human beings is that we need role models. We need people whom we can look up to and emulate. We need those whom we can copy in our thinking and in our behavior. If we are not given good role models, then we will take evil ones. In the end we will always end up emulating someone. So should we not be like the best? Like those who were closest to Allah (swt). As we see from here this is a trodden path, meaning that there were those who walked upon it before us. There were those who have already reached the destination that we are seeking. If we would only follow their way how could we also not reach it? It is so simple. Just learn about them and try to be like them.

The first description that Allah (swt) gives us of those who have walked the path before us is that they are those whom He has showered His favors and bounties upon. So these were a people who were blessed by Him. These were a people who given much by Him. Now of course the question to ask is what did He give them? How did He favor them? Was it by giving them wealth and children? Was it by giving them power and prestige? Was it by giving them comforts and luxuries? Can these be considered the bounties of this world? Should these be what we are seeking? Large mansions. Huge bank accounts. Designer clothes. Expensive cars. Three figure salaries. Gold and silver. Lots of children. These are what people consider today to be the treasures to be sought after. But is this how Allah (swt) favored that special group whom He speaks of here. By giving them these chattels? Of course not. His favor upon them is His guiding them. Specifically the guidance which we spoke about in the previous ayah. He allowed them to see His Signs. Then once they chose to believe, He gave them certainty and conviction in that belief. He saved them from doubts and misgivings. Then He gave them knowledge of His Din. Knowledge of His Divine Law. Knowledge of what was pleasing to Him. Then He gave them the enabling grace to act upon that knowledge. He put in their hearts the love for Him and the desire to submit to Him. He puts in their hearts the fear of Him and the reverence for Him. These feelings that manifest in their hearts are from Him. The conviction in their hearts is from Him.

And this is the greatest of bounties. This is the greatest gift that Allah (swt) could ever confer upon anyone. Because just to be near to Him is sweeter than anything of this world. How could anything of this world ever possibly compare to Him? How could you desire this world when you can have Him? Realize now that if He has blessed you with a love for Him and a love for His Din then He has given you better than what He has given the vast majority of mankind. The extent of this bounty is something that we could never realize even if we tried to. Perhaps on the Day of Judgment we will realize. Insha Allah when we enter the Garden and we see how wonderful it is and we are saved from the Fire and we see how terrible it. Insha Allah when we behold Him, when it finally dawns upon us just how Tremendous and Glorious a Being He IS, only then would we even begin to realize the extent of this bounty. So do not extend your eyes to what others have been given. Realize that you have already been given the greatest of good.

Another lesson that we can take from this description is to see how Allah (swt) is the True Source of all the good that we do. As we mentioned we would not even be able to make a single prostration unless He gave us the enabling grace. We would not be able to do any good without Him. So although we do have free will we should never become arrogant because we are believers and because of the good works that we do. We should never think greatly of ourselves if we do some good. We should never think that we are better than others. Rather we should always remember that we are nothing without Him. All that we are is because of what He has given us. Even our pious works, even our good deeds, the only one thing of true worth that we have in this world, are only because of Him. How then can we think highly of ourselves just because of the good that we do? Why do we have to think that we are the greatest only because we pray the five daily prayers or only because we keep a beard or wear the hijab? Even if we learn knowledge of the Din and teach it to others, how could we be proud because of it? Can we not see that it is not from ourselves rather it is only from Him? He favored us. He guided us. He blessed us. He bestowed on us much good. That is the only reason why we are believers. That is the only reason why we do the deeds that He is pleased with. It is all because of Him.

This arrogance and smugness when it comes to religiosity is a huge problem, especially in our time. Today there are so many people who have forgotten Allah (swt). Today there are so many people who have immersed themselves in the world. Today there are so many Muslims who violate the Divine Law left and right, there are so many Muslims who deal in interest and who commit fornication and who do not even make the five daily prayers. That those of us who avoid these major sins, those of us who do the most basic of requirements, we suddenly think that we are the most pious of the pious. We suddenly think that we are the best of the best. We forget that even these few good works that we do is only because He allowed us to do. We forget that if He had not guided us then we would be worse than these people whom we look down upon. What is even worse is that because of this arrogance we allow ourselves to become lazy. We allow ourselves to sin and to miss some of our obligations. We make the excuse that we are already doing so much good. We are already more righteous than most of the Muslims whom we know. So what is the big deal if I just do this minor sin? I deserve it because of how pious I am.

This is the thinking that Insha Allah we can be saved from if we contemplate deeply on this ayah. We need to realize that the good that we do is only because of what He has given us. It is because of His favoring us and bestowing on us. So rather than becoming arrogant, rather than becoming lazy and negligent, we should strive even more to serve Him. We should strive even more to make manifest our dedication of Him. In order to show our gratitude for all that He has given us. As we mentioned this guidance is the greatest of bounties. And the only way in which we can even begin to show our appreciation is by striving to please Him. By striving to remain obedient to His Law. By striving to remember Him more. By striving to dedicate more and more of the moments of our lives to Him. This is the only way in which we can thank Him.

We can also notice from this ayah that the verb for “favored” is in the past tense. So we are asking Allah (swt) to show us the path of those whom He has favored in the past, not the path of those whom He is favoring right now. What is the significance of telling us to look to the past? Would it not be easier for us to take as examples the people of our time? We can see them directly, we can interact with them, why then can they not be our primary role models? Why do we have to look to those who have passed away? There are several reasons. Firstly because the people of the past are those whom we can be certain have reached their destination. Not only have they walked the path but they have made it across the entirety of their journey. They were able to live that life of slavehood and dedication to Allah (swt) for all their lives. They were not lead astray, they were not deviated. Can we make this same guarantee for the people today? Even the most pious and devout of His slaves on the earth today, even those who love Him more than anything and who yearn for Him more than anything. Even they might be lead astray, even they might give in to their temptations. Even they might succumb to the doubts. So if we were to follow them, if we were to make them into our role models, how can we be sure that we would not be misguided ourselves? Remind yourself now that this is not a joke, this is not a light matter, this Din is your life. Your relationship with Allah (swt) is your life. It is your entire life in this world and it is your eternal life in the next. How then can you follow anyone except those whom you are certain will lead you to the right way? If you follow the people of our time, you follow them at your own risk, but if you follow those who already walked the path then you can be certain.

Another lesson that we can take from Allah (swt) telling us to follow the generations of the past is to see how in general they were far closer to Allah (swt) than we are. Realize that we are living today in a time of darkness. Even though we may be advanced materially and technologically, the hearts of the people today are very distant from the Divine. Today for the first time ever atheism and antagonism are becoming common beliefs. In some Western countries up to 40% of the population identify themselves as atheist. This is something that has never been heard of in the history of mankind. So we should realize how dark a time it is that we live in terms of how far the people are from Allah (swt). And of course we as human beings are influenced by our environments. Even those of us who say that we are believers. Even those of us who may have that conviction and certainty. How strong can it be in a world where there are so many disbelievers, in a world where there are so many who are heedless of Him? So if we want to search for role models, if we want to search for those whom we can look up to, those whom we can follow in the path, then can we hope to find such people in such a world? And even if we find them can we be certain that they will remain on the path. That is why Allah (swt) tells us to look to the past. To a time before the people became spoiled with the comfortable living. To a time when the people lived for the next life and not for this one. Just look at the life of the Prophet (saw). Just look at the life of the previous prophets and messengers. Just look at the life of the companions of the Prophet (saw). Just look at all that they went through. Can you imagine any of us having to suffer for Allah (swt) and His Din even a fraction of what they went through? Look for example at what Khabbab ibn Arrat (ra) went through. Look at the extent to which he (ra) was tortured because he (ra) belonged to the movement of the Prophet (saw). They would place his bare skin on burning coal. Can any of us in our time today, can even the strongest and most resolute of dawah carriers today, withstand such torture? We think not. Look at the great scholars of our past. Look at Imam Shafi (ra) and Imam Bukhari (ra). Look at how much they sacrificed to gain knowledge and look at how much knowledge they imparted for the Ummah. Are there any scholars today who have given a fraction of what they have given? So there is simply no comparison. They were at a level far higher than we could ever hope of reaching. That is why theirs is the path that we must follow if we want to reach that sublime station of nearness.

So what we should realize first and foremost about the path is that it is only Allah (swt) Who can put us on it. Because we can see from here that those who walk it are those whom He has favored. If He had not blessed them, if He had not given them out of His Love and Mercy, then they would not be able to walk the path. How much then do we have to turn to Him? How much then do we have to beg of Him to bless us with His guidance and bless us with the enabling grace to walk this path? Very few are the people today who turn to Him. And even among those who do, very few are those who ask for guidance. Most of us only ask for something of this world. This shows how for most of us our hearts are still attached to this world instead of Him. We desire this world more than we desire Him. This is something that we have to change. We have to strive to reflect upon His Majesty and His Beauty. We have to strive to love Him more and more. Once we have that love for Him in our hearts. Once we realize how He is the One Whom we should be seeking, then by His Permission we would be more willing to make this prayer. We would be more willing to ask to be among those whom He has blessed. Not with wealth and power, but rather with knowledge of His Din and nearness to Him. The Prophet (saw) would teach his companions to make the following prayer "O Allah, I ask you to help me to remember you, and to be grateful to you, and to excel in my slavehood to you". If Allah (swt) grants us these three then Insha Allah we will be among those whom He has blessed. We will be among those who walk this path. Because such is the reality of walking this path. It is naught but remembering Him, being grateful to Him, loving Him and striving to please Him. Through everything that we do. We ourselves should strive to reach this station and at the same time we must also ask of Him. Because as we see from here we can never get there on our own. No matter how much we may try. We need Him. We need Him more than we could ever realize. So we should constantly be turning to Him. Constantly be asking of Him. We are all in desperate need of this guidance from Him. Every day we face new situations. Every moment we need to know how to please Him, and we need to have the strength and willpower to please Him. That is why He has obligated us to make this prayer at least seventeen times a day. Over and over again we ask Him to guide us and we ask Him to be among the people whom He has blessed. Realizing that it is only He Who can give us this Bounty. We need Him more than we need the air that we breathe.

So we ask Allah (swt) to be from among those whom He has blessed. For we know that those whom He has blessed are those who can walk the path which leads to Him. But is this all that we ask of Him? No, as we see from the ayah we also ask Him to be saved from becoming like two groups. There are two groups of people who we do not want to become. There are two groups whose paths we do not want to walk. Insha Allah let us try to find now who are these. Because if we can know them then we can know how to avoid their path.

The first group is described as those who have Wrath upon them. Those who have Anger upon them. Whose Anger do they have upon them? Of course it is Anger from Allah (swt). But Allah (swt) does not describe them as those who have His Anger upon them, rather He just described them as those who have Anger upon them. Why is this? One reason is because the Anger of Allah (swt) is so terrible a thing, so frightening a thing, so tremendous a thing, that we should shun to even mention it. If you truly knew what it meant you would probably faint, you would probably die, only from fear. Just imagine what it means for a Being like Him to have Wrath. Can you even imagine how terrible it would be for you if a Being like Him is Angry at you? Imagine what He could do to you? Imagine all of the ways in which He could torment and punish you. Another reason why Allah (swt) describes them this way is to show us how it is not only His Anger Whom they have but it is anger from all the rest of creation. Recall how we said that all of the rest of creation are also His slaves. They are also dedicated completely to Him. With the exception of humans and jinn everything else is in a complete state of slavehood to Him. All of the creation including the rocks, the trees, the animals, and of course the angels. They are all in a complete state of worship and servitude to Him. Because they have dedicated themselves completely to Allah (swt) they love whom He loves and they hate whom He hates. So these people have not only the Wrath of the Divine upon them, but they have the wrath of all creation. Everyone hates them. Everyone despises them. Yet another reason why Allah (swt) describes them as having Wrath upon them is because He (swt) does not want to be associated with them. So despised are they to Him they He does not even want to say that they have His Anger upon them. Rather He just says that they have Anger upon them. Such is the extent to which they have displeased Him. Such is the evil that they have done.

Now of course the next question to ask is what have these people done that has earned the Anger of such a Being. What have they done to earn the Anger of so Loving, and Merciful, and Forgiving and Clement a Being. Allah (swt) is not One to anger easily. Rather He is One Who forgives, and pardons, and overlooks again and again. We also know that anger is a trait that is most displeasing to Him. On several occasions the Prophet (saw) would advise people not to become angry. Anger is actually a trait of Shaitan and we should try our best to rid ourselves of it. If ever we do become angry, it should be for the sake of Allah (swt). It should never be for our sake. When others do wrong to us then we should try to forgive them. When something that does not go our way then we should learn to accept it. This also is part of our slavehood to Him. Part of our slavehood to Him is our patience through the difficult times and our controlling our anger for Him. We cannot even begin to realize how much patience He has had with us. How much He has overlooked our sins and shortcomings. There is no one who can forgive sins like ours except Him. He forgives our sins again and again. Because He is a Being of Forgiveness and Mercy. So what could these people have done to earn the Wrath of such a Being? Was it simply a sin here and there? No because we know that He forgives sins if we seek repentance from Him. As long as we sincerely return to Him, no matter how many times we may commit that sin, then we know that He (swt) will pardon us. So the problem with these people was not just that they sinned. Rather their problem was that they were happy with their sins. They were happy with their disobedience and their transgression of the Divine Law. They did not even make the effort to reform themselves. They did not even make the effort to be better people. They did not even want to return to Him. Rather they thought that they were enough for themselves. The priority in their lives became serving themselves and submitting to their desires, rather than serving Him and submitting to His Law. So sin for them became the norm. They did it again and again and they did not think much of it. The evil of what they were doing, the extent to which they were displeasing Him did not even dawn upon them. They only cared about themselves. They had forgotten Him completely. So they legalized usury, they legalized fornication, they legalized alcohol, they legalized homosexuality. Soon these were not even thought of as evils, rather they were accepted as the norm. In fact to speak against was thought of as evil and intolerant.

These are the people who have the Wrath of Allah (swt) upon them. They do not just do evil but they are content with the evil that they do. They are satisfied with the evil that they do. They have no regret or remorse for their evil. It does not even bother them how much they are displeasing Allah (swt). This is how arrogant they are. This is how full of themselves they are. All that they care for is serving themselves. In one hadith the Prophet (saw) told us how many of the Jews were the best example of such people. Because they were a people who had the Book but they refused to follow it. They had the knowledge but they refused to live by it. They had the systems and the government but they refused to implement them. Rather they made their own laws. They became legislators on earth. They made permissible what Allah (swt) had forbade and they forbade what He had made permissible. They had forgotten Allah (swt) completely. They lived only for themselves. Now based upon this hadith we cannot think that this ayah is only speaking about these Jews. Rather it is speaking about anyone who has this attitude. This attitude of arrogance. This attitude of thinking oneself above having to submit to the Divine. He is a Being of Glory and Majesty. He is a Being of Pride and Greatness. So He does not like those who compete with Him in these. He does not like those who think that they are above having to submit to Him. The sinner at least recognizes his sin. The sinner at least feels remorse for his sin. Because of his weakness he fell and now he is so sad. He wishes he did not commit that sin. He wishes he did not displease his Rabb. But these people are far worse. For they have no regret. They are happy with the evil that they do. They almost think that they are entitled to it. This is what we have to save ourselves from. We have to kill the ego within ourselves. We have to always remind ourselves that life is about pleasing Him and not pleasing ourselves. It is not about being happy with how we want to be, but it is about being happy with how we are. We are happy for His sake. So regardless of if we are rich or poor, healthy or sick, busy or free, energetic or tired, we are happy with what He has chosen for us. At the same time we strive to remember Him. We strive to please Him. We strive to do good in this world and good to others in order that we may please Him. He is all that we care about. He is all that matters. This is the thinking that we have to inculcate within ourselves if we want to be saved from becoming among those who have His Wrath upon them. For His Wrath is only pain and misery both in this life and the next.

The second group whom we ask Allah (swt) to save us from becoming like are the lost. Those who have gone astray. Those who have missed the way. Those who do not even know of the path. The difference between this group and the previous one is that the previous one had the knowledge but they refused to follow it. But this group does not even have the knowledge. They do not even know the way. They did not even know how to please Allah (swt). Many of them do not even know that to please Him should be the purpose of their existence. Rather they foolishly think that they are created to live for themselves. They think that the only reason why they are placed upon this earth is so that they could enjoy themselves and die. Their only purpose is to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain. They do not know of Him, and they certainly do not know of the path that leads to Him. So they are lost and astray. The few among them who do try to worship Him do so in a way that is not pleasing to Him. They innovate new rituals and practices that He had never sanctioned. Many of them torment themselves. They torture themselves. Thinking that through this they could come closer to Him. But because they are not following the way of His messengers and prophets. Because they are not journeying to Him on the correct path, can we be sure that will reach their destination. Can we be sure despite all that they put themselves through? So there are two manifestations of these people who are lost. The first are those people who have no religion in their lives at all. They have completely forgotten Allah (swt). They live only for this world. Their only concern is this world. They are completely heedless of Allah (swt). They are completely ignorant of the true purpose of their existence. Sadly this is how the vast majority of the people in the world are. Just as Allah (swt) describes they are completely lost. They wander aimlessly without meaning or reason. Life for them is just getting that high or that fix. It is watching that football game or going to club. The noblest goal that any among them have is to provide for their family and give their kids a good education. This is all that they can think of. This is the scope of their vision. The second group who are lost are those who seek to worship Allah (swt) in a way that He has not sanctioned. So they believe in Him, they want to come closer to Him, but they are not following a correct path. Now unlike those who have Allah (swt)'s Anger, those who are lost may not be evil. They may not be unjust. But they are still not in a state where they are pleasing to Him. And what is there to life other than His Pleasure?

In the same hadith the Prophet (saw) said that many of the Christians were the perfect example this group who are lost. Now once again this does not mean that only the Christians are the lost. Rather it means that they are the best example of the people who are lost. Because they were a people who did not even have knowledge. Whereas the Jews had knowledge but refused to follow it, the Christians did not even have knowledge. They completely rejected all of the revelation that Allah (swt) had sent to them. Paul told the people that they did not need to follow the Law anymore. He said that it was all about love. The path to God is one of love. All that you need to do is love. You do not need to do anything else. This was what the people were taught and this is how they were lead astray. They could not even see the path anymore. They did not know how to please Him. Soon the books were neglected, soon the books were lost. And people just did whatever they felt like. Then the people fell into two extremes. The two groups within the lost whom we spoke of before. The first group completely forgot about Allah (swt). They lived only for themselves and their desires. They adopted secularism where they completed divorced religion from life. Life was just their lusts and their greed. The second group went into the other extreme where they took themselves to monasticism. They shunned all the pleasures of the world. They did not even get married or have any tasty food. They did not even sleep soft beds. They became completely detached from the people. From reality. They only worried about themselves. Their whole life was worship and renunciation. And of course since such a lifestyle went against their nature, went against how Allah (swt) created them, they were not able to maintain it. Many of them indulged in what they knew was forbidden. Some priests would molest choir boys, some monks would have affairs with prostitutes, some nuns would become pregnant and bury their infants. They denied themselves what was very much a part of their nature. So many of them had to leave that path. Many of them betrayed their path and could not stay true to it. These are the two groups of the lost. Both of them reacted to each other. Each one went further into their extreme because of the other. Now once again it is important to note that it is not only these Christians who can be considered among the lost. Rather anyone who fits this description. This description of being among the heedless. The description of being deprived of knowledge and guidance. The description of following desires or innovations.

In another hadith the Prophet (saw) told us that we would follow the nations who came before us. So much so that even if they went into the hole of the lizard, which of course means pain and death, we would do the same. We would follow them to our destruction both in this life and the next. When the Sahabah asked him (saw) if he (saw) was speaking of the Jews and Christians then he (saw) said "Who else". And do we not see this happening in the Ummah today? Do we not see the prophecy coming true? How many Muslims today are like the Jews in that they have the knowledge but they do not follow it? Especially among the scholars. Especially among the learned. Many of the scholars in the Ummah today know about our obligation to live under Khilafah but they do not speak of it. They know that we have to rule by Allah (swt)'s Law but they do not call the people to it. In fact many of them call for the opposite. Many of them call for democracy, call for making ourselves sovereigns upon the earth. Others among them support the kings and dictators who oppress the people and rule them by kufr. They even make them dua for them. And even those of us who are not scholars. Even those of us who have only some knowledge of the Din. How often do we follow the knowledge that we have? We all know that we have to pray five times a day, but how many of us make these prayers. We all know that dawah and calling to Allah (swt) is an obligation but how many of us fulfill it? Most of our sisters know that they have to cover themselves but how many of them do it? Who are they fooling? Do they think that Allah (swt) is pleased with such disobedience, or do they think themselves above having to submit to Him? Do they think that they are something better than being an utter and abject slave of His? Similarly how many Muslims today are like the lost. In that many of them have no knowledge of the Din whatsoever. They do not even know how to pray properly. They do not even know how to give Zakat properly. They do not even know the most basic tenets of the Aqeedah. They do not even know the most basic meanings of the Quran. They do not know and they do not want to know. Rather they live only for this world. Their only concern is satisfying themselves with this world. On the other hand how many Muslims today practice innovations and heresies that were never practiced by the Prophet (saw)? How many try to worship Allah (swt) and draw closer to Him in a way that is not pleasing to Him? Even though He has given them a clear path which leads to Him, they neglect it and follow other paths.

So are we then not following the Jews and the Christians just like the Prophet (saw) warned us that we would? In how many ways have we become like them. This only goes to show us how desperately we are in need of this prayer. How desperately we are in need of Allah (swt) reminding us of the Straight Path and bringing us back to it. That is why Surah Fatihah must have a very important place in our lives. That is why whenever we recite it in the Salah or we hear it being recited on our behalf we need to have presence of heart. We need to be aware of what we are saying and we need to say it with the utmost of earnestness. Because just think what would be our fate if we also fall into this trap? Just think what would be our fate if we also became among those who have Wrath from Allah (swt) descend upon us or who go astray and become lost? Could there possibly be a fate worse than that? Only by calling out to Him, only by asking Him, only by His Love and Mercy and Bounty can we be saved.

What we have given here cannot really be called a tafsir of Surah Fatihah. Because it does not even scratch the surface of meanings contained in this Surah, let alone give any kind of detailed explanation of it. This is just a sip. This is just a taste. We invite you to complete the journey. To take the next steps. To learn more about this Surah and the rest of the Quran. Our books on the website will only get you started on the journey. But you have a long way to travel, there is so much for you to learn. And yet even from what little of this Surah that we have seen, we can see how much meanings it contains. We can see how it establishes our relationship with Allah (swt), how it establishes our very existence. Just from learning this Surah we know why we are here on this earth and what we need to do. We know who our Rabb is and we know what He expects us to be. We know what we should be seeking from life. We know what it is that we must yearn for. All from this short Surah. All from these few words. But the most important benefit of this Surah is that it reminds us of Him. In every ayah He is mentioned in one way or another. So in so many ways we can know Him. In so many ways we can draw closer to Him. This then should be the primary purpose of our reciting this Surah, this should be the primary purpose of our Salah. It should remind us of Him and it should bring us closer to Him.