



Surah al-Fatiha's Benefits and Virtues: The Greatest Surah in the Qur'an

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Introduction

The Prophet ﷺ was sitting with the archangel Jibril when it happened. A sound—clear and loud and yet inexplicable—roared down from above. The Prophet ﷺ looked around, but his angelic companion simply lifted his head and announced: “A gate has just opened in heaven. It has never been opened before.”

No sooner had Jibril uttered these words to the Prophet ﷺ than a figure appeared in their presence. Jibril said, regarding the visitor: “This is an angel who has just come down to earth. He has never come down before.” The angel, this first-time visitor newly descended through a newly-opened gate in the heavens, greeted the two blessed beings before him—one human, one angel.

“Rejoice with two lights given to you,” he said, addressing the Prophet ﷺ. “They were not given to any prophet before you: the opening (*fātiḥa*) of the Book [i.e., the Qur'an], and the closing [verses] of Surah al-Baqara. Never will you recite a word from them without being granted your supplications (*du'a*).”

As with all matters of the unseen, this moment cannot be truly captured by language, transcending our physical and experiential understanding. Yet, what we are able to grasp is the momentous honor that was bestowed upon Allah's Beloved ﷺ—and, in turn, his followers—by the exclusive and unprecedented opening of a gate to one of the seven heavens,¹ through which the elevated virtues (*faḍā'il*) of the Qur'anic passages specified by the angel—the opening of the Book and the concluding verses of Surah al-Baqara—were declared. “The opening of the Book,” of course, refers to none other than Surah al-Fatiha—the one *surah* (chapter) whose verses we recite in every *rak'a* of every prayer.

Surah al-Fatiha and Surah al-Baqara are, of course, among many other *surahs* of the Qur'an that possess exceptional virtues. In fact, the virtues of each of the *surahs* and *ayahs* (verses) of the Qur'an is one of the most uplifting and motivational branches of the Sciences of the Qur'an (*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*). Many Muslims know about the *ayahs* that should be recited for spiritual healing (*ruqya*), or the *surah* that will serve as a protection in the grave, or those that offer shade on

¹ See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 806 for the narration of this incident.

the Day of Resurrection.² However, these examples are but a drop in the vast sea of the Qur'an's inexhaustible virtues.

The benefits of studying the virtues of the Qur'an are many. The more one studies particular *surahs* and *ayahs*, the more one fosters a profound bond with them, and in turn with Allah ﷻ. The process of building this connection naturally introduces discipline and consistency into the life of a believer. Regular recitation strengthens one's spiritual connection, building a habit of seeking solace, guidance, and companionship through the Qur'an. Making a habit of reciting and consulting the Qur'an naturally facilitates its memorization, making it easier to commit additional verses to memory over time. Eventually, this consistency transforms the Qur'an into a trusted companion—one that provides emotional comfort during times of difficulty and reinforces the essential teachings, concepts, and laws which inform a believer's understanding of faith and their responsibilities. The Qur'an thus becomes a means of earning reward in both this life and the Hereafter.

Beyond these general benefits, the companion of the Qur'an also enjoys the reward, blessings, and protections furnished by specific *surahs* and *ayahs*, such as protection in this life (e.g., Ayat al-Kursi), in the grave (e.g., Surah al-Mulk), or on the Day of Judgment (e.g., Surah al-Baqara). Surah al-Kawthar (Qur'an 108) reminds believers of Allah's abundant gifts, while verses like Ayat al-Kursi emphasize His constant protection. Recognizing these divine favors fosters gratitude within the heart of the believer, deepening their appreciation for Allah's guidance and provisions. In turn, with this gratitude comes increased *tawakkul* (reliance upon Allah) that believers are encouraged to combine with proactive measures for protection and success. For instance, the recitation of Surah al-Falaq (Qur'an 113) and Surah al-Nas (Qur'an 114) exemplifies this principle by serving as spiritual remedies for protection against harm, while reinforcing the importance of trusting in Allah's ultimate control and mercy.

² This ties into the broader discussion on whether some Qur'anic verses have greater merit than others, a topic explored in depth in Yousef Wahb's article, "Are Some Qur'anic Verses More Meritorious than Others?" (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, June 7, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/are-some-quranic-verses-more-virtuous-than-others-reconciling-diverse-scholarly-views>). Wahb addresses the conceptual understanding of the superiority of certain verses, adding to our comprehension of how specific *ayahs* carry distinct theological and spiritual weight.

Furthermore, while the Qur'an is in Arabic, we hope the reward and benefits of these chapters and verses extend equally to those who sincerely strive to read them via transliteration (not to be confused with translation). This applies as well to the believing woman who, even during her menses, recites the Qur'an from memory or an electronic device, underscoring the universal call to connect to the Book of Allah throughout the year.³

What follows is the first of a series of papers exploring the virtues of various chapters and verses of the Qur'an, offering a commentary that intertwines their theological and spiritual dimensions, with the aim of anchoring these divine passages in our hearts and implementing them in our lives. This series covers many authenticated narrations about different *surahs* and *ayahs*, extracted from a compilation I authored in English and Arabic, titled *Special Virtues of the Qur'an's Chapters and Verses (al-Jāmi' al-mukhtaṣar li-faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar)*.⁴ A virtue, in this case, refers to a special trait of the *surah* or *ayah* mentioned in an

³ In the various jurisprudential schools of thought in Sunni Islam, there are differing opinions about whether or not it is permissible for a woman on her menses to recite the Qur'an. It is permissible for a menstruating woman to recite the Qur'an according to the Maliki and Zāhirī schools, and it is a view narrated from al-Shafi'i, and one narration from Imam Ahmad. It was also the opinion asserted by al-Tabari, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and others. Even among the schools that prohibit it, such as in the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools, an exception is made for chapters and verses that are intended to be protective in nature, like *du'a*, such as for Ayat al-Kursi, the last two verses of al-Baqara, and the last three chapters of the Qur'an. See: *al-Mawsū'a al-fiqhiyya*, 45 vols (Dār al-Ṣafwa, 1993), 18:321–22.

⁴ The new compilation, titled in English *Special Virtues of the Qur'an's Chapters and Verses*, is published on sunnah.com/virtues (accessed September 10, 2024). In compiling the virtues of certain verses and chapters of the Qur'an, I have adhered to a methodology that primarily relies on rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and fairly authentic (*ḥasan*) prophetic reports. The authentication of these reports is based on the evaluations of leading hadith scholars such as the compilers themselves, Imam al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Nasa'i, among others. When citing narrations from collections that are not inherently *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan*, the verdicts of diverse hadith scholars were relied upon depending on the narration, such as al-Albani, Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūt, and Ahmad Shakir, who have rigorously authenticated individual hadiths. Additionally, I have consulted and cross-referenced works dedicated to the topic of *faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (virtues of the verses and chapters) to ensure comprehensive coverage. Among the dozens of key works referenced are: Muḥammad b. Rizq b. Tarhūnī, *Mawsū'at faḍā'il suwar wa āyāt al-Qur'ān* (Encyclopedia of the virtues of the chapters and verses of the Qur'an) (Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 2006); Fakhr al-Dīn b. al-Zubayr b. 'Alī al-Muḥasī, *al-Durar min ṣaḥīḥ faḍā'il al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Ministry of Information and Culture, 2004); and Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Saqqāf, *al-Kitāb al-jāmi' li-faḍā'il suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: al-Aḥādīth allatī waradat fī faḍā'il al-suwar wa-l-āyāt* (Aal al-Bayt Royal Foundation for Islamic Thought, 2007).

In cases where hadith authenticity has been disputed, I have personally conducted *isnād* analysis, with the support and review of scholars and researchers. This has allowed me to clarify the status of some narrations that may have been the subject of debate, particularly those that could be classified as *ḥasan li-ghayrih* (strengthened by other reports). While the overwhelming majority of narrations included in this work are directly attributed to the Prophet ﷺ (*marfū'*), I have also included a small number of reports from the companions (*mawqūf*). These reports are deemed reliable and beneficial, especially in the context of their understanding of Qur'anic virtues.

authentic report, such as a special reward or protection for the one who recites a particular *surah* or *ayah*, or something that was recited at a particular frequency by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ or was beloved to him. We begin this series with the momentous Surah al-Fatiha, a light in which we should rejoice.

Surah al-Fatiha

The sailor oftentimes needs a simple but clear source of guidance, a piercing light that shines as far as necessary to reach the safe shores of salvation. While the rest of the Qur'an certainly helps the lost seeker of truth, the opening chapter, Surah al-Fatiha, suffices as the ultimate compass of salvation, helping its travelers attain the pleasure of Allah, moral guidance in this life, and a blissful eternal destination.

Surah al-Fatiha is the greatest *surah* in the Qur'an, the foundation of Islam, the summary of truth, a healing for illnesses, a comfort for worries, a protection, and a fortress. Al-Fatiha, an unrivaled divine revelation to the final nation, is recited at least seventeen times a day by Muslims praying their five obligatory prayers, a consistent conversation with the Creator, and a prescription for the hearts of creation.

Names of Surah al-Fatiha

Al-Fatiha has many names reflecting its virtues and themes. Al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) mentions twelve in his *tafsir*, listed below with the integrated views of al-Tabari (d. 310/923):⁵

- 1. Al-Salah (The Prayer):** As mentioned in the hadith, “I have divided the prayer (*salah* [*ṣalāh*]) between Myself and My servant.”⁶
- 2. Al-Hamd (The Praise):** Because it includes the praise (*ḥamd*) of Allah.
- 3. Fatihat al-Kitab (The Opening of the Book):** It is the opening (*fāṭihā*) of the Qur'an and ritual prayers. Al-Tabari adds that it serves as an introduction to what

⁵ See: Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1964), 109–11; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 2001), 107–9.

⁶ See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 395a.

follows in the Qur'an, in both writing and recitation, thus acting as a prelude to the subsequent *surahs*.

4. Umm al-Kitab (Essence of the Book): There is some disagreement, but most scholars accept this name, as it encapsulates the core meanings of the Qur'an. Companion Anas b. Malik (d. 93/713, rA) and successor (*tabi'i*) Ibn Sirin (d. 110/729), however, believe this name refers (exclusively) to the Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz (Preserved Tablet), based on the verse: "It is in Umm al-Kitab."⁷

5. Umm al-Qur'an (Essence of the Qur'an): This name is also associated with some scholarly debate, but most accept it due to clear evidence, such as the narration from al-Tirmidhi,⁸ as well as others where the Prophet ﷺ said: "Alḥamdulillahi Rabb al- 'ālamīn is Umm al-Qur'an, Umm al-Kitab, and the seven oft-repeated verses."⁹ Al-Tabari explains that al-Fatiha is called Umm al-Qur'an because it precedes all other *surahs* in both recitation and writing. He further elaborates that the Arabs would call anything that encompasses or leads other things "umm," literally meaning "mother," especially when it is comprehensive or serves as an introduction to what follows.¹⁰

6. Al-Mathani [mathānī] (The Oft-Repeated) or Al-Sab' al-Mathani (the Oft-Repeated Seven [Verses]): It is recited in every unit of prayer.

7. Al-Qur'an al- 'Azim ['aẓīm] (The Great Qur'an): It contains the essence of all Qur'anic knowledge.

8. Al-Ruqya (The Healing [Recitation]): Proven by a narration, which will be expanded upon later in this paper, where the Prophet ﷺ asked how a man knew that al-Fatiha could be used for *ruqya* (healing).¹¹

9. Al-Shifa' [shifā'] (The Cure): This is proven by the same narration as for the name al-Ruqya.

⁷ See Qur'an 43:4.

⁸ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3125.

⁹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1457, and a similar variation is found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4704.

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 107–8.

¹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5007.

10. Al-Asas [asās] (The Foundation): Refers to its centrality in faith.

11. Al-Wafiya [wāfiya] (The Complete One): According to exegete and hadith master Sufyan b. 'Uyayna (d. 198/813), it must be recited in full, unlike other chapters which can be split in prayer.

12. Al-Kafiya [kāfiya] (The Sufficient): Yahya b. Abi Kathir said it suffices in place of other *surahs*, but no other *surah* suffices in place of al-Fatiha.

In summary, the multiple names attributed to Surah al-Fatiha each highlight a distinct facet of its profound significance. They speak to its role as the essence and opening of the Qur'an, the indispensable foundation of ritual prayer, and a wellspring of guidance, praise, healing, and comprehension. Al-Fatiha's names reflect its position as a spiritual prelude, teacher, and companion, directing believers to the core of the faith, encapsulating the Qur'an's comprehensive message, and offering solace and remedy for both heart and body. Thus, this single *surah* stands at the heart of Islamic devotion and understanding, a unique chapter of revelation that guides, nurtures, and protects the faithful in every aspect of their religious life.

Virtues of Surah al-Fatiha

Having become acquainted with some of the core meanings of Surah al-Fatiha above, this section will now present four main virtues of the *surah*, each established in authentic reports, alongside commentary and analysis to further elucidate their significance. First, Surah al-Fatiha is affirmed as the greatest *surah* of the Qur'an, surpassing all others in its spiritual depth and theological clarity. Second, its revelation was unprecedented, bestowed as a divine gift exclusively upon the *ummah* of the Prophet ﷺ, elevating its status far beyond what any previous community had received. Third, no ritual prayer (*salah*) is considered valid without its recitation,¹² making it an indispensable component of daily

¹² There is a well-known juristic difference among the schools of Islamic law regarding the obligation of the congregant (*al-ma'mūm*) to recite Surah al-Fatiha in a congregational prayer when the imam recites aloud. The Hanafis, Malikis, and Hanbalis—along with the early view of Imam al-Shafi'i—hold that the congregant is not required to recite al-Fatiha in audible prayers. This is also the opinion of the majority of the early generations (*al-salaf*). They cite as evidence the Qur'anic verse: “When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it attentively and be silent, so that you may be shown mercy” (Qur'an 7:204), about which Imam Ahmad said, “People unanimously

worship and the spiritual rhythm of the believer's life. Finally, Surah al-Fatiha functions as a cure and treatment for illnesses, both physical and spiritual, embodying the Qur'an's holistic nature and reinforcing the believer's reliance on Allah's mercy and guidance. Each of these four virtues will be explored in detail, drawing upon authentic texts and scholarly interpretations.

The greatest *surah*

The companion Abu Sa'id Rāfi' b. al-Mu'allā (d. 2/624, rA) reported, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Shall I teach you the greatest *surah* in the Qur'an before you leave the mosque?' Then, he ﷺ took me by the hand, and when we were about to step out, I reminded him of his promise to teach me the greatest *surah* in the Qur'an. He ﷺ said, 'It is *Alhamdulillah Rabb al-`ālamīn* [i.e., Surah al-Fatiha] which is al-Sab' al-Mathani [i.e., the seven oft-repeated *ayahs*] and the Great Qur'an which is given to me.'" ¹³

Eminent hadith scholar Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani (d. 852/1449) said: "There is a difference of scholarly opinion concerning the reason why it was called *mathānī*. It was said that it is because it is repeated (*tuthannā*) in every *rak'a*; or because Allah جل جلاله is praised (*yuthnā*) in them; or because it was given exclusively to this *ummah* and was not sent down to those who came before it." ¹⁴

agree that this verse refers to prayer." They also cite the hadith of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (rA), in which the Prophet ﷺ said: "When you pray, straighten your rows. Then let one of you lead the prayer. When he pronounces the *takbīr*, pronounce the *takbīr* after him; and when he recites, remain silent." (Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and others).

As for the silent prayers or units (*rak'a*) of prayer, there is a difference of opinion regarding the congregant. It is obligatory for the congregant to recite Surah al-Fatiha in silent (non-audible) prayers, and this is the position of the Shafi'i school, the chosen view of Ibn al-`Arabi (from among the Malikis), and it is also held by Ibn Hazm, al-San'ani, al-Shawkānī, and many contemporary scholars. They cite as evidence the aforementioned narration, "There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book." The Prophet ﷺ here negates the validity of the prayer for anyone who fails to recite Surah al-Fatiha, without restricting any particular circumstance of the one praying. The Arabic relative pronoun *man* ("whoever") connotes a general meaning, applying to anyone—whether a congregant, an imam, or someone praying alone—who does not recite al-Fatiha. They also argue that the Prophet's ﷺ command to recite Surah al-Fatiha is general in all prayers and under all circumstances, except in prayers where the imam's recitation is audible and the congregants are obligated to remain silent. Therefore, for silent prayers, this general directive remains in effect. See: *al-Mawsū'a al-fiqhiyya*, 45 vols (Dār al-Ṣafwa, 1993), 25:288.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4474.

¹⁴ Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani, *Fath al-Bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb et al., 1st ed., 13 vols. (al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1960), 761.

As for why al-Fatiha is the greatest *surah* in the Qur'an, one may better understand its great status by studying its virtues, interpretation (*tafsir*), and reflections (*tadabbur*). One example of understanding its status is to observe the opening *ayahs* of the *surah* and their impact on the believers' hearts and everyday lives.

In its opening verses, Surah al-Fatiha includes an expression of ultimate praise (*alhamdulillah*), serving as a reminder that the believer who desires nearness to Allah and the path of guidance must establish gratitude in his heart and on his tongue. *Alhamdulillah* was the first expression of Adam (as),¹⁵ and it was a command to Noah (as) when he was saved ("Say *alhamdulillah* who saved us").¹⁶ It is a sacred expression that has reverberated through the ages, articulated by prophets and messengers across the expanse of time and circumstance,¹⁷ embodying the eternal truth of Allah's greatness. And as the gates of Paradise open to welcome the souls of the believers, it is *alhamdulillah* that resounds in elation, a celestial expression of gratitude towards the One who kept His promise, ushering them into a realm of everlasting bliss ("Praise be to the One who fulfilled His promise to us").¹⁸

The opening of al-Fatiha unveils a profound truth linked to its great virtues: that the universe in its entirety, spanning the majestic realms of angels, the world of jinn, and other myriad forms of creation, is intrinsically aligned in praise of Allah. This objective truth transcends the seen and unseen, declaring that every corner of existence owes its reverence to Allah. Yet, it is the beings endowed with the gift of free will—humans and jinn—who are called to consciously embrace this truth, to submit to Allah with a heart full of devotion and a soul exemplifying true gratitude.

This act of willing submission is not just an acknowledgment of truth but a journey towards the ultimate pleasure of the Creator. Similarly, Jabir b. 'Abd Allah (d.

¹⁵ This refers to when Adam (as) sneezed, as reported in the hadith *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3367. Graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic); see footnote 4 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

¹⁶ Qur'an 23:28.

¹⁷ Such as with Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) (as), who said "All praise is for Allah who has blessed me with Ishmael (Isma'il) and Isaac (Ishaq) in my old age..." (Qur'an 14:39), as well as Prophets David (Dawud) and Solomon (Sulayman) in Qur'an 27:15.

¹⁸ Qur'an 39:74. Two other expressions of praise are mentioned in the Qur'an for the people of Paradise: Qur'an 35:34 and Qur'an 7:43. The words "*alhamdulillah (al-ḥamdu li-Allāh)*" in that form are found twenty-one times in the Qur'an.

74/697, rA) reports that the Prophet ﷺ said: “The best supplication is to declare all praise is due to Allah.”¹⁹ On another occasion, he ﷺ said, “The words loved most by Allah are, ‘*Subhān Allah wa bi-ḥamdih* (Glory be to Allah and praise is due to Him).’”²⁰ Likewise, *alḥamdulillah* is part of various supplications throughout the day, from the time of waking up to the moments before sleeping.²¹

An unprecedented revelation

It was narrated that Ubayy b. Ka‘b (d. 30/649, rA) said, “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Allah جلّ جلاله did not reveal in the Torah (Tawra) or the Gospels (Injil) anything like The Essence of the Qur’an [i.e., al-Fatiha], which [consists of] the seven oft-recited [verses], and [Allah said] it is divided between Myself and My slave will have what he asked for.’”²²

By highlighting Surah al-Fatiha’s superiority over any passage in any previous revelation, this hadith situates it at the theological heart of the Islamic canon. This hadith indicates that Allah the Exalted—the One whose revelations reached countless human beings before us—honored the final Messenger and final *ummah* with a revelation never given to a previous nation. Furthermore, the Prophet’s ﷺ statement points us toward the *surah*’s role as a divine key, uniquely positioned at the opening of the Qur’an and presiding over every act of ritual prayer. It unlocks the acceptance of prayer (“and my slave will have what he/she asked for”).²³

¹⁹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3383. Graded *ḥasan* (fairly authentic); see footnote 4 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2731b.

²¹ Such as: “Praise be to Allah who sufficed me and gave me shelter; praise be to Allah who fed me and gave me drink; praise be to Allah who favored me generously. Oh Allah, I ask You by Your ‘*izzah* [might or honor] to save me from the Hellfire.” Recorded by al-Bayhaqī, al-Ḥākim, and others. Also classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* in al-Albānī’s *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa*, no. 3444.

²² *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3125; graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic); see footnote 4 regarding the methodology employed to grade hadiths in this paper.

²³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 395.

Going back to the opening story of this paper,²⁴ the angel's reference to the passages as "two lights" (*nūrān*) must be understood in the context of the Qur'an's use of "light" as a metaphor for divine guidance, illumination, and clarity. As Allah asks us, "Can those who had been dead, to whom We gave life and a light with which they can walk among people, be compared to those in complete darkness from which they can never emerge?"²⁵ Here, "light" indicates the divine guidance that transforms a spiritually dormant soul into one illuminated by faith. Surah al-Fatiha, as the introduction to the Qur'an, encapsulates this very transformation: it begins by praising the Lord of all worlds, establishes His attributes, and culminates in a direct, urgent plea for guidance (*hidāya*) to the straight path. In so doing, it lays the foundations of the believer's worldview, linking the authority of Allah to the believer's daily quest for moral and spiritual direction.

The Qur'an in general is described as a clear light,²⁶ and an escape from darkness into light,²⁷ and it is the speech (*kalām*) of Allah al-Nūr (The Light): "Allah is the Light (*Nūr*) of the heavens and the earth..."²⁸ Such imagery is invoked in our nightly supplicatory prayer (*du'a*) in the night prayer (*tahajjud*): "O Allah to You is praise, You are the Light of the heavens and the earth..."²⁹

Surah al-Fatiha, the pinnacle of the plea to which believers collectively respond with "*āmīn*," is the prayer for continuous guidance along the straight path, a path illuminated by the singular light of the divine in a world of many darknesses. This request articulates the believer's fundamental theological and spiritual dependence on Allah, acknowledging the necessity of His aid and pleasure for navigating the complexities of faith and practice. Correspondingly, the concluding verses of Sūrat

²⁴ 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas (rA) reported that while the angel Jibril was sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he heard a sound above him. He lifted his head, and said, "This is a gate which has been opened in heaven today. It was never opened before." Then an angel descended through it, he [Jibril] said, "This is an angel who has come down to earth. He never came down before." He [the angel] sent greetings and said, "Rejoice with two lights given to you. Such lights were not given to any prophet before you. These [lights] are: Fatihat al-Kitab [Surah al-Fatiha], and the concluding verses of Surah al-Baqara. You will never recite a word from them without being granted [your supplicatory prayer (*du'a*)]."
Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 806.

²⁵ Qur'an 6:122.

²⁶ Qur'an 4:174.

²⁷ Qur'an 14:1.

²⁸ Qur'an 24:35.

²⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7499.

al-Baqara serve as a comprehensive *du'a* for forgiveness, protection from human frailty and error, and unwavering reliance on the Almighty.

The conclusion of the hadith indicates the “acceptance” of supplications without specification. The most common scholarly interpretation is that this refers in particular to the acceptance of the *du'a* expressed in those Qur'anic passages, such as for guidance, security, and forgiveness.³⁰ Yet it could also encompass the fulfillment of one's wider needs, both in this life and the hereafter.³¹ In either case, this divine promise of acceptance from Allah points to the power of revelation itself, as the spoken words of the Creator become a conduit for mercy (*rahma*), blessings (*baraka*), guidance, and an accepted response.

As the opening chapter of the Qur'an, the seven oft-repeated verses, Surah al-Fatiha is the perfect embodiment of guidance and a microcosm of the Sharia's entire framework. It encompasses the core elements of belief (*'aqida*), worship (*'ibada*), ethical laws (*aḥkām*), acknowledgment of the unseen (*ghayb*), and reliance upon Allah alone. The *surah* is described as Umm al-Qur'an (the Essence of the Qur'an) precisely because it gathers into a few lines the grand themes that the rest of the Book unfolds in detail. Its verses orient the believer toward gratitude and reverence for, and absolute dependence on, Allah's mercy and direction—the foundational dispositions expressed in all the other obligations and teachings of Islam.

No *salah* (prayer) is valid without Surah al-Fatiha

Because of its unique standing, no ritual prayer (*salah*) is valid without the recitation of al-Fatiha. The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said, “The prayer is not valid for the one who does not recite the Fatiha (lit. opening chapter) of the Book.”³²

The greatest ritual worship Muslims engage in is *salah* (prayer), a foundational pillar amongst the five pillars of Islam. It is the first of deeds the believer will be questioned about on the Day of Resurrection, underscoring its monumental

³⁰ 'Alī b. Sulṭān al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ*, 9 vols. (Dār al-Fikr, 2002), 4:1464.

³¹ Al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ*, 4:1464.

³² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 394.

importance in the journey of a believer.³³ It forms a divine link between the creation and the Creator. That this one *surah* is mandated for every prayer speaks volumes of its indispensable role in nurturing the believer's growth, fortifying their conviction, and anchoring them firmly on the path of truth and guidance.

Al-Fatiha is not only a chapter to be recited on the tongue; it is the first part of the Qur'an every new Muslim learns, and it is impossible to practice Islam properly, once a person has embraced it, without al-Fatiha. To embrace al-Fatiha is to embrace Islam; it is to stand before Allah with a heart full of devotion, a mind attuned to His wisdom, and a soul yearning for His closeness. It is the echo of every prayer, and the foundation of every plea for steadfast guidance.

The elevated role of al-Fatiha in prayer is further clarified through a non-Qur'anic divine revelation expressed in the Prophet's words (*ḥadīth qudsī*) reported by Abu Hurayra (d. 59/679, rA), wherein Allah responds to each verse of the *surah* as the servant recites it. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

Allah the Exalted said: "I have divided the prayer into two halves between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks. When the servant says: 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds,' Allah the Most High says: 'My servant has praised Me.'

And when he [the servant] says: 'The Most Compassionate, the Merciful,' Allah the Most High says: 'My servant has lauded Me.'

And when he [the servant] says: 'Master of the Day of Judgment,' He remarks: 'My servant has glorified Me.' And sometimes He would say: 'My servant entrusted [his affairs] to Me.'

And when he [the worshiper] says: 'You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help,' He [Allah] says: 'This is between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks for.' Then, when he [the worshiper] says: 'Guide us along the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not those You are displeased with or those who are astray,' He

³³ As in the hadith, "The first action for which a servant [of Allah] will be held accountable on the Day of Resurrection will be his prayers..." *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 413, graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) by al-Albani.

[Allah] says: ‘This is for My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks for.’³⁴

This divine commentary transforms prayer into a dynamic exchange rather than a one-sided recitation. Each utterance of al-Fatiha is simultaneously a proclamation of belief, a request for guidance, and an intimate conversation with the Creator. Al-Fatiha thus aligns worship, praise, and supplication into a single devotional act, one that is constantly validated and answered by Allah Himself.

Scholars like Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) illuminate this dynamic. He notes that the believer who recites al-Fatiha combines sincere praise and glorification of Allah with humble petition for guidance. The *surah* seamlessly shifts from praising the Divine to humbly seeking His aid, culminating in the request for the most precious of blessings: correct guidance in life's moral and spiritual journey.³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) identifies in al-Fatiha what he deems the greatest and most beneficial of supplications:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

It is You we worship and You we ask for help (*iyyāka na ‘bud wa iyyāka nasta ‘īn*).³⁶

There's something profoundly moving about the realization that *ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (Guide us along the straight path) are the words of Allah, and yet He places them on our tongues to enunciate the most important supplication, that of continuous guidance along the straight path. Rather than leaving believers to articulate their own pleas for guidance, Allah graciously provides the exact words that, when recited sincerely, serve as a direct conduit for divine light. Indeed, the process of recitation itself becomes an instrument of guidance (*hidāya*) and healing (*shifā’*), drawing humanity from layers of spiritual darkness into the embrace of divine enlightenment.

³⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 395.

³⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 3rd ed., ed. Muḥammad al-Mu‘taṣim Billāh al-Baghdādī, 2 vols. (Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Arabi, 1996), 1:31.

³⁶ Qur'an 1:5; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 1:78.

The Qur'an itself begins with *du'a* in al-Fatiha and reminds us to keep asking of Allah, to demonstrate our need for Him, to truly rely upon Him, and to direct our entire hearts' worship toward Him. The Qur'an, although primarily a recitation, also begins and ends with *du'a* (in its final two chapters),³⁷ as though reminding the believers not to neglect the essence of worship. Moreover, al-Fatiha holds a singular status as the only *surah* required in every unit of prayer (*rak'a*), transforming each instance of *salah* into a direct encounter with Allah through supplication. Its recitation concludes with the communal utterance of "*āmīn*," a moment in which earthly worshippers align their voices with the angels. As the Prophet ﷺ said, "When the imam says *āmīn*, then say *āmīn* as the angels do. Whoever's *āmīn* coincides with that of the angels will have his past sins forgiven."

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This unique status, marked by both obligatory presence and a climactic "*āmīn*," sets al-Fatiha apart from all other *surahs*. It becomes the rhythmic heartbeat of Muslim devotional life, ensuring that no believer drifts far from the very source of divine guidance and forgiveness.

A cure for illnesses

Companion Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (d. 74/693, rA) said: "We were once on a journey and we made camp. A servant girl came and said, 'The leader of the tribe has been stung, and our men are away. Is there any among you who can perform *ruqya* (healing)?' A man stood up to go with her, someone we did not previously suspect of knowing any *ruqya*, and he recited over him, whereupon the leader recovered. He [the leader] then ordered that he be given thirty sheep (as a gift), and he gave us milk to drink.

When the man returned, we said to him, 'Did you really know how to perform *ruqya*, or did you do this on a whim?' He replied, 'No, I only recited Umm al-Kitab.' We said, 'Do not do anything [with the reward] until we reach—or ask—the Prophet ﷺ.' When we arrived in Medina, we mentioned this to the

³⁷ This refers to the *du'a* found in Surah al-Falaq (Qur'an 113) and Surah al-Nas (Qur'an 114).

³⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6039; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 410a; *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, no. 927.

Prophet ﷺ, and he said, ‘And how did he know it was a healing? Distribute [the sheep] and allot a share for me as well.’”³⁹

Although the companions used it for a physical healing in the aforementioned incident, Surah al-Fatiha is undoubtedly a spiritual healing and a psychological remedy. Ibn al-Qayyim writes:

With regard to it referring to well-being for hearts [spiritual well-being], it is absolutely effective. The cause of hearts becoming sick and ailing is based on two things: corruption of knowledge and corruption of intention. From these two result two lethal illnesses, namely misguidance and anger. Misguidance results from corruption of knowledge (or lack of sound knowledge), and anger results from corruption of intention (or lack of sound intention). These two diseases are the main causes for the undermining of all spiritual well-being. Guidance to the straight path guarantees healing from the sickness of misguidance, hence asking for this guidance is the most important and most obligatory supplication that each person must offer every day and night, in every prayer, because it is so essential and because the person's need for the guidance that is sought is so great; nothing else can take the place of this request.⁴⁰

As for the man who was stung by a scorpion and healed by Allah through the recitation of al-Fatiha as a *ruqya*, Ibn al-Qayyim highlights an important point: “[The healing] was effective despite the fact that al-Fatiha was recited over someone who was not the best candidate for this treatment—either because this tribe was not Muslim, or because they were stingy and mean—so what if the person had been a good candidate for that?”⁴¹

Then he said: “I used to suffer from severe pains, to the extent that I could hardly move, during *tawāf* and at other times. I began to recite al-Fatiha into my hands and wipe them over the site of the pain, and it was as if the pain was a small stone that dropped off. I tried that many times. And I used to take a cup of Zamzam

³⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5007.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 1:52–53.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 1:55.

water and recite al-Fatiha over it several times and then drink it, and I found a great deal of benefit and strength in that, that I never got from any other medicine.”⁴²

Conclusion

Ultimately, Surah al-Fatiha is a guide to all that is good, and it answers some of humanity's most primordial questions: Who is our Creator? How do we worship Him? How should we call upon Him?

Ibn al-Qayyim summarizes Surah al-Fatiha when he writes: “The Opening of the Book, the Essence of the Qur'an, the seven oft-recited verses, the complete healing, the beneficial remedy, the perfect *ruqya*, the key to independence of means and success, the preserver of strength, that wards off worry, distress, fear and grief, is for the one who appreciates its value and gives it its due, and tries to apply it in the proper manner to treat his sickness, and knows how to seek healing and treat sickness with it.”⁴³

Certain seasons and moments of the year are endowed with extraordinary virtue and the promise of magnified rewards, such as the great month of Ramadan, the sacred month of Muharram, the profound Night of Qadr, the blessed first ten days of Dhu'l-Hijja, the motivational last ten nights of Ramadan, the contemplative Day of 'Arafa, the significant Day of 'Ashura', and so forth. Similarly, amongst the chapters of the Qur'an, Surah al-Fatiha has been bestowed with immense honor by the Lord of the Worlds. Those who study its meanings, reflect upon its recitation, and recite with heartfelt sincerity, will experience a sweetness of faith with each recitation.

While not exhaustive, the reports surveyed in this piece serve as an introduction for those yearning to deepen their engagement with the Qur'an, to internalize it, to benefit from it, and to seek the magnificent reward, protection, and blessings associated with specific verses and chapters. Ultimately, whatever capacity one finds to bond with the Qur'an, let that connection be nurtured consistently, for it

⁴² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 1:58.

⁴³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-ma'ād fī hady khayr al-'ibād*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūt and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā'ūt, 4 vols. (Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1998), 4:318.

will serve as a timeless guidance in this life and “as an intercessor on the Day of Judgment for its companion.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 804.