

Surah Fatiha – Points to Ponder

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InshAllah we are going to talk about few things, not a Tafseer but just few points of reflection from Surah Fatiha, which actually covers some of the most fundamental aspects of our deen, actually if we consider Surah Fatiha that we recite in every Salaah, a summary of all of Islam. So if somebody understands Surah Fatiha properly then they also have the ability to explain Islam to somebody else comprehensively because it contains pretty much everything you need to know to give someone a full picture of what Islam really represents.

We are going to divide study of Fatiha into into three parts. First three ayaats, middle ayaats and then the last three ayaats. Not a very detailed tafseer but a very simple discussion.

To make the matter brief we are not going to go into Bismillah.... Some mufasiroon consider it to be the first verse of Fatiha others say no its not.

At the very least we have to translate Alhamdu lillah as praise and gratitude belongs to Allah. The word hamd includes two things praise & gratitude; you cannot translate it as 'Praise belongs to Allah' or just 'Thanks belongs to Allah'. Now Arabic has a word for either of them, you could say Madh or Sana for praise and you could say Shukr for Thanks. So Alhamdu lillah includes Madh, Sana & also Shukhr, it includes all of these things in one word.

First we need to understand the difference between praising Allah & thanking Allah. Before we talk about Allah let's talk about generally these two terms. Someone you praise isn't necessarily someone you thank and someone you thank isn't necessarily someone you praise, these are mutually exclusive things.

In other words for example if you see a really nice car in the parking lot you are not going to thank the car but you might praise the car that it's a nice car you don't go over and pat the car on the hood & say thank you so much.

On other hand take a religious situation, its obligatory on all believers and this is not something new in our messenger's revelation its been there from the very beginning of all the messengers that we have to be grateful to our parents now Ibraheem (AS) also has to be grateful to his parents so he is grateful to Aazur but does he praise his father? What the father does is it worthy of praise or criticism? What the father does should be criticized so he is grateful to him but he is not praising him. So you can praise someone without thanking them or you could thank someone without praising them.

Now in regards to Allah we say Alhamdu, we don't say almadhu wal shukrillah we don't separate the two words we put them under one word, which is hamd. This has very profound implications, it means everything that Allah does we thank Him for and at the same time we praise Him for. This changes our attitude towards Allah very drastically from people of other faith. You may know Christians and other people of other faiths in your circles, you may even know some Muslims who don't know the deen very well and sometimes they say things about Allah that are far from appropriate.

Have you ever heard things like if God is so great, how come there is so much war, how come so much hunger, famine, disease, chaos in the world, where is God when all of this is going on? I was on a flight back from Las-Vegas; there was a Quran conference, I swear :) and next to me was an old Jewish couple, they are holocaust survivors. He sees me reading Quran and the old man says to me why don't you read this to me, recite it to me. It's a really long flight so we are talking halfway through yeah we believe in God too we also have faith and half an hour into conversation yeah I don't really believe in God so I'm like what? You started half an hour ago saying you have faith too, he said where was God when the holocaust happened? In other words they are kind of in a conflict on other hand how can we believe if this & this happened.

Our first response whether we understand it or not, is that we praise Allah for everything he does and we thank Allah for everything he does. We may not understand the larger plan or wisdom in it but we need to have this attitude. Many a times you may have heard this parable that parent is giving medicine to a child. The medicine tastes bad to a child but the mother is still going to give it and when the child understand better the child will praise as well as thank but at that moment child is complaining cause he doesn't understand what else is going on. There are two worlds at work, the seen & the unseen and we see one world and start complaining and because Allah sees both of them and His plan is in conjunction with both of them whatever He does, we thank Him for and praise Him for.

Another wonderful thing about beginning of Fatiha, the hadith tells us that Allah has 99 names, but we don't say Alhamdu lil *Malik*, Alhamdu lil *Khalik*, Alhamdu ur *Raheem*, Alhamdu lil *Hakeem*, praise & gratitude belongs to the Wise, the Knowledgeable, the Powerful, the Creator we don't use any of those names. In Fatiha we specifically use Allah and there is profound benefit in that. The benefit is if we thank and praise Allah only for being khalik then the only thing you are appreciating is that he created, if you thank/praise Him only for being Wise then the only thing you are appreciating is that he is Wise or if you only do it for His Mercy then that is the only thing you are being thankful for. Alhamdu lillah covers all.

The other thing that is really interesting and unique about language of the Ayaa, the way it's structured, what is the difference between saying 'Praise belongs to Allah' vs 'We praise or we are grateful to Allah'. The difference between these is very profound, when we say 'We praise Allah' we have not always been around or will not always be around but the praise of Allah has always been around and will always be around. When I say 'We praise Allah or I praise Allah' I didn't talk about the rock, tree, sky, earth & everything else that praises Allah. I only talked about myself but when we say 'Praise/Gratitude belongs to Allah' it means for all times, all places, all instances of that praise belong to Allah whether we count it or not, whether we do hamd or not, its independent of us. This is Allah's introduction to Himself in the Fatiha and the very next thing Allah uses is Rab. This is heart of the matter. Rab in English translation is commonly translated as Lord. The classical Arabic meaning include a few things, the one who owns, the one has complete control & authority over something, in charge of complete taking care of something, the one who gives gifts and most importantly the

master. The word Lord is not used as much in common English language, the closest word in English to Rab is master because Rab was used for the owner of a slave. What do we call someone who owns a slave? Master. So in Arabic a slave is called 'abd' and Master is called 'rab'. If Allah is telling us he is Rab then what does it make us immediately? It makes us a slave. So first Allah introduces us how we should be grateful to Him and how praise worthy He is. Now you should know that there is a relationship between you and Him, he takes the role of Master, we take the role of slave. Couple of important pointers that no Muslim should ever forget, there is a difference between someone who worships and someone who is a slave. The difference between a slave & worshipper: We were just praying Taraweeh; that is an act of worship. Christians do worship on Sunday; Jews do worship on Saturday. Hindus do worship at their temple. Different religions have different forms of worship. What is the difference between someone who is worshipping & someone who is a slave? Worship happens at certain time, fasting is act of worship, Hajj is an act of worship but slavery is not specified by a time and is not limited to an act. Worship is limited to an act. A slave is a slave all the time, he is not a slave from 9 to 5 or between the prayers or right at the time of prayer. So Allah is not only demanding that we worship but also become His slave. When sleeping, wakes up, in masjid, in Ramadan and when Eid he is a slave.

Slavery is different from service (servant in English comes from service), some people translate it as servant of Allah but there is a difference. You provide service at a company, accountant, engineer, and programmer. In return you expect a paycheck. A service is an agreement in which both parties own something, you owe the work and they owe the money. A service is also limited; once you serve as accountant they cannot tell you to wash the windows unless the economy is really bad. If they do you'll say this is not part of my service contract, this is beyond my job.

A slave doesn't have a job description; a slave job description is 'whatever the master says' as opposed to servant there are certain things he does and everything else he is free. Allah declares himself rab & then rabbil aalameen, master of nations, people and generations of the world. Master & slave are ugly words in English, in human history and also particularly in American history these don't bring back fun memories, these are ugly things to remember. And whenever you think of a master do you think a slave loves their master or hates their master? In human history a slave hates their master. If you give slave a choice they'll prefer to be free, another thing they usually don't praise their master usually they don't thank their master.

Before Allah told us he is our master, he told us first Alhamdu lillah. Praise came first, in other words it's because you are so grateful to Allah and you have to praise Allah so much that naturally you want to become His slave. This is a different kind of slavery something that begins with hamd, no other slavery begins with hamd, no other slavery is voluntary, half way down the ayaat we volunteer ourselves as slaves 'You alone we worship...' Allah doesn't say become slaves, we say we worship, we enslave ourselves, we give ourselves in. Notice nobody ever applies for a job to become a slave, nobody ever says I make a really good slave, I'm really good at taking beatings, I love living in a shack in the

backyard etc. Nobody wants to be a slave but when it comes to Allah we declare in Fatiha that we actually want to be His slave.

Now another thing that you never associate with a master is mercy. A master is usually associated with oppression, forcing things on you, punishing if you disobey him but Allah describes Himself Arrahmani arraheem. Two words for mercy. Now the common translation given is the Beneficent, the Merciful but I'm going to give you a down to earth translation cause you don't use the word beneficent in everyday English so you don't probably connect with that word easily.

Arrahman means someone who is being extremely merciful right now, unimaginably, extremely merciful. Now when you say about someone being merciful they may not be engaged in mercy right now they may be merciful but not necessarily right now. When you say this is a nice guy that doesn't necessarily means he's being nice right now but when you say Arrahman what does it mean? that not only Allah is extremely merciful but that His mercy is being executed immediately. Arraheem means someone who has always been and will always be merciful. Arrahman takes care of our immediate need for mercy and Arraheem takes care of our future need for mercy. Both of them are covered in these two words and these two words are incredibly powerful in depicting Allah's mercy. Between these two words lies this understanding that we will never understand how merciful Allah is, we won't. Now let me tell you something about us as master. You own a car; a thousand years ago somebody was master of a goat or his or her cow. The cow stops giving milk what does the master have a right to do? As a master you can do anything, slaughter it if goat stops giving milk, as master of laptop if it stops working you can slam it on the floor or whatever. If you own something and it has a job to do, when it doesn't do its job then you have the full right to do anything with it.

We acknowledge that we are property belonging to Allah and we also have a task/job to do because if you are the slave then your job is whatever the master says. What if we never figured out what the master says or never cared? and we live life thinking that we are free. Does the master have the right to do away with us? Absolutely. If you disappoint the master once he has that right. Now imagine how many times you & I disappoint Allah and how many times humanity disappoints Allah, does he let it slide? Does He keep letting it go? Unimaginable how merciful he is being (Arrahmani arraheem) to us even though He is the master. You see the placement of those words? It puts us in an incredibly grateful position. You want to go back and say Alhamdu lillah again cause now we are grateful for His exceeding mercy that he doesn't punish us. By the way even though you learn His commandments e.g. don't lie whenever you do lie does lightning strike from the sky and cut your tongue off? You get to talk again don't you, whenever you steal there is no axe flying to chop your hand off, you could steal again, cheat again, oppress again and the more people do that and nothing happens you know what they do? They get more brave, if somebody cuts a stop sign first time they do it they are looking all over, second time look around little, third time they get more brave, they think its ok this is an ok neighborhood. And if they get caught at that time they are in shock how could this ever have happened. This is exactly the attitude of human being with Allah. Allah lets him

go out of mercy, he thinks Allah lets him go cause He didn't see or nobody is watching, we are not on camera, there is no surveillance or record but when Allah does catch, he is in shock how could have this happened, how did I become such a criminal, how did I let it go so far.

And then this is the part that I really want to emphasize and the rest would be brief. Maliki yawmi addeen, what is the polar opposite of mercy? Its punishment. If you could say mercy is at the positive end and punishment is at the negative end, what's at zero? Justice. You would think Allah told us about His mercy what else he is going to tell us about? His punishment. But in fact he tells us about His justice. Master of Day of Judgment when everybody gets what they deserve. From this we learn a profound lesson you don't have to fear the punishment of Allah; you have to fear the justice of Allah. If Allah's justice begins there is no difference between that and punishment. Allah ofcourse does not punish unless there is a right to do so. So if justice begins it means mercy has ended, Mercy is Allah doesn't do justice to you; he lets it slide but justice is everything you did get counted & audited. This is explained in the Quran elsewhere I'll give you a brief reference to it, you know people are given book in their right hand on the day of Judgment now just because the book is in your right hand doesn't mean you are done with the testing; now you have to present your book so now you think you are going to be nervous when you are about to present your book? You know when you are taking your test in class, some teacher likes to grade the test in the classroom in front of you, what happens to the student at that time? They are nervous. So now that idea, the book is to be presented before the angels, they have to open it up, you feel good because it's in your right hand, you have definitely failed if it's in your left hand. Now Allah out of mercy he says 'He will be given an easy audit' in other words not everything will be checked, the angels will go easy on this guy, he is about to present page 25 they'll be No No No we had enough you can go and when he gets to the other side he is incredibly happy because he passed, he graduated so he starts reciting and this occurs in another place in the Quran 'when he gets to the other side what does he say O read my book, look I graduated what did you get?' the point I'm trying to make is we fear Allah's justice, the messenger (saws) told us 'The one who is asked even once it's like they've been destroyed already' The angels comes to you and what were you doing on November 30th outside the AMT theatre at 3PM, what was that over there, one little question, that's enough. If the questioning begins we are done for. We beg Allah, this is a hadith of the prophet 'O Allah give us an easy accounting & reckoning in which we benefit from Allah's mercy and we stay away from Allah's justice' Allah's justice is for the wrong doers, Allah's mercy is for the believers. May we be included from them inshAllah.

Then after you understand these few things about Allah you understand one more thing there that is very important for theological purposes & students of philosophy. Now a day when our kids go to college its mandatory for them to take at least one philosophy course and guess where the emaan gets messed up? That one philosophy course. These professors their whole idea of being intellectual nowadays is to be agnostic. In other words I don't believe there is a God I don't believe there is no God I'm just not sure that's what makes me really smart. It's the stupidest thing I've ever heard but that's the academic culture today. Agnosticism is considered a high intellectual place and intellectuals that

have faith they consider them biased, they call it faith biased; I call it truth biased, right. Here is what I want to share with you that are really important for you to understand when you talk to other Muslims or Non Muslims about deen and Allah. It is impossible to believe in God without believing in an afterlife. If somebody says they believe in God but they don't believe in an afterlife that's impossible then what they are basically saying is they don't believe in God at all. These two things are connected you can't separate them. So I want to show you what the connection between these two things is, why are they inseparable from each other, the belief in God & belief in afterlife, why are these two things connected? If anybody believes in a God, then they have to believe that He is perfect in every way, He's got the best names, best attributes and he is flawless if you give any flaw to God, He's not God anymore, if you say anything imperfect about God then you believe in less than God and among His most perfect name is He's Just, isn't He? One of the attributes of perfection. So if we believe in God He has to be just that is necessary condition of believing in perfection of Allah. We believe Allah created this world and in this world is their justice or injustice? There is injustice; there are criminals who get away with it. There are innocent who get punished and people live their whole lives like that. There are people who do so much good & the only thing they get in return is the death penalty and there are people who do so much bad & they live the life of Kings, they kill and get away with it. If one person kills another person what is the most you can do to them? Kill them, if one person kills a hundred people, what's justice what should you do to this one person? What's the most you can do, how many times you are going to kill him? Once, is that justice? He paid for one life, he didn't pay for 100 lives, is that justice? No. And this guy might be a loner and the one he killed was supporting an entire family even if you kill him is that still justice? Was more damaged caused by that loss of life than this loss of life. Even if it is one for more it may not be just. Justice is a very tricky thing so the question that comes in the mind of an atheist is if God is perfect how come there is what? Injustice; because He created it so everything should be just.

Now the answer to that is very simple, I started by saying how many types of realities are there? The world of the unseen & world of seen. This is the seen world. Those of you who are in accounting you understand debit & credit. This is the world of debit; some debit some credit you know when the books are going to be balanced? Day of judgment; when justice is absolutely served. When one guy killed a hundred he pays for how many? He pays for a hundred, here he can't pay for a hundred but there he can pay for a hundred. In other words believing in a perfect God, as we do, necessitates that Allah executes justice that justice comes not in this life but in the next life. Believing in a God demands we believe He is perfect, believing He is perfect demands that we believe in justice, believing in justice demands that we believe in an afterlife. All these things are connected. Some basic lessons of Al-Fatiha for a crime to be punished and good deeds to be rewarded, isn't that justice? Good should be rewarded and bad should be punished. Who decides good and who decides what's bad? Before we get to that answer from Fatiha I want you to think about this, human society from its beginning has been in conflict there has been a fight between men & women, I'll give you a simplest version of it, I used to teach in an Islamic school, boys & girls in six grade half the class are boys the other half are girls and we can't give them

recess together so some days boys have recess other days girls have recess so I said in the class look we only have five weekdays how about we give 3 days to one group and 2 days to the other group and I'll let the girls decide who gets 3 days and who gets 2 days, guess what they decided? Girls. Then I said ok let the boys decide who get 3 and who gets 2, what did the boys decide? Boys. I'm putting the problem very simply to you when there is a conflict between man and woman what is man capable of fighting with only? Himself. What is the woman capable of fighting with? Herself. Lets put in contemporary terms you go to divorce court, the husband and the wife is there the judge is a woman, who does she feel bad for more? The woman starts sympathizing with the woman. If judge is a man who recently got divorced and he is a judge whom is he going to side with? He is going side with the man. You understand? Human beings have biases in the end the judge is going to be man or woman. You want to decide what are the rights of men, what are the rights of women, what are the obligations of men & women, how you create justice between men & women, in marriage, in business or in every aspect of social life how do you create justice. Lets let men decide they'll favor men, lets let women decide they'll favor whom? How can we get a judge who is neutral, a neutral judge doesn't side with men or women actually loves, sides & understands both of them perfectly. Who could be that? That could only be Allah, the one who created both of them & knows them better then they know themselves.

Here is another problem; the first was man vs. woman. The second is boss vs. employee in sophisticated terms we call it the problem of capital vs labor. The boss has an employee, he pays him lets say \$200/week and gives him 3 days off in a month, Now the employee wants to get paid more and he also wants more vacation, what does the boss want? He wants to pay him less and wants to give him less vacation. The employee wants to work less & gets paid more, the employers want to pay less and get more work out of him. So you have to have a balance between them, now that problem is an ancient problem, back in the day the feudal lord and the farmer today you have GM and the union. It's the same problem. The real question is how do you find justice between these two sides if you let the management decide who will they favor? Management. If you let the worker decide who will they favor? Worker. This is always going to remain a struggle, you have to have a balance between capital and labor; by the way our deen has that. Our deen has that balance between these two conflicts. The first is the social conflict, the second is the economic conflict here is the third conflict the government vs the people. The government says there should be more taxes, more control and the people say what? Less tax. The government says there should be less services provided the people say there should be more services provided. They both are at conflict between each other. So what's the balance between the government and the people? In the end if you have a judge either that judge sides with the government or that judge sides with people. You can't have both. So the third conflict is a political problem. The last problem is Allah created us with clay but he put inside it something else the Ruuh and this clay it feels hunger, thirst, it has desires, it wants to beautify itself, it wants to earn, it has greed, it has all these things but the Ruuh (closest word in English is soul) wants to worship Allah, wants to remember Allah, the soul says keep standing, finish it, the body says go take a break, go drink some water, go eat something,

the soul says wakeup and come for fajr, the body says stay sleeping. There is another war going on inside every person, the battle between soul and the body. There are some people who only take care of the needs of their body, there are other extremist who only take care of the need of their soul like some monasteries among the Christians, we are not going to get married, we are not going to eat good tasting food, we are going to wear uncomfortable clothes like some brands of ancient Sufism (in Islamic tradition), Suf comes from word 'Saf' which is wool, they used to wear really uncomfortable wool because they did not want to enjoy the pleasures of this life. They only want to keep concerned with their soul so they keep denying their bodies. Now is there a balance that can be reached between these two things? There is but its very difficult you know the Buddhist has his own balance and the Hindu guy has his own balance and the Christians try to figure out their own balance and they end up all in imbalance. Who is the only one who can provide the perfect balance between the body & the soul? The one who created the body & also created the soul. In other words true balance can only come from Allah. These four are basically the entire problem of humanity. When we get to the ayaa '*Guide us to the straight path*' where is this straight path its neither to the left nor to the right and the nation that goes on this path is called the middle nation, Why? Because this path is right down the middle. It doesn't favor men, it doesn't favor women, it doesn't favor government or people, it doesn't favor body or soul it is a balance between all of these things. It's right down the middle so we have to ask Allah for that we make Allah the judge. It's an incredible declaration in the Fatiha, recognition that true justice only comes from Allah; this is the quest for hidaya. A lot of times we think of guidance as something about staying away from certain haram things and that's it, that's what guidance is. Guidance is something so much more something so powerful the stuff we been reciting tonight we finished Baqarah tonight Alhamdullilah and we start Al-Imran the things we've been reciting thus far if the Muslims just understood a speck of what has been recited thus far we would be a different ummah, we would be an entirely different ummah. May Allah make us of those who beg Allah for His guidance and are able to live by that guidance. May Allah make us of those who followed the path who Allah already favored in the past and not make us of those who either they earned rage or went astray.

You know the Fatiha begins Alhamdu lillahi rabbi alAAalameen, Arrahmani arraheem, Maliki yawmi addeen. Those are all ideas, you could call them knowledge, the knowledge that praise belongs to Allah, gratitude belongs to Allah, the knowledge that he is master of the nation and people of the world, the knowledge he is exceeding mercifully, the knowledge that He is master of day of judgment, all of that is knowledge. When we say 'we worship', 'we enslave ourselves', this is not knowledge; this is action. The Surah began with what? Knowledge. And immediately we start talking about action, all of Islam is like that you have to have knowledge and that knowledge better leads you to action, that's all of Islam in Fatiha. Here are two extremes, you know we said it's the middle path right so there is balance between two ingredients knowledge & what? Action. That's also part of guidance. But what are two extremes sometimes people have knowledge but they don't have action and sometimes people have action but its not based on any knowledge and this used to be, if you want to look at nations of the past, Bani Israel (Jews) they had knowledge but no action, the

Nisara (Christians) they had a lot of action they worshipped a lot, what's missing is knowledge, you got two extremes each one missing one ingredient. Now in Fatiha the balance is the middle path (Ihdina assirata almustaqeem) but what are the two imbalanced paths? (ghayri almaghdoobi AAalayhim wala addalleen) The path of those who earned rage, you know who these people are? They have knowledge but they don't have action and who are the people that are lost? I don't say gone astray cause you don't use that nowadays anymore when you speak to each other, when somebody invites you to dinner and you get lost on the way you don't call them & say I've gone astray could you tell what exit to take, you don't do that. You say I'm lost. Addalleen are the lost. So you have almaghdoobi AAalayhim the people who have knowledge but don't have actions consistent with that knowledge on the other hand you have people who have action but its not based on any knowledge, when you act without knowledge what are you called? Lost subhanAllah the surah has that balance and warns us against these two elements of imbalance. These are some of the more basic lessons & profound wisdom, the gems/treasures that are embedded inside Surah Fatiha that we recite every single day. You know we ask Allah, this is the center of the Surah, Ihdina (guide us). If I ask you for water I'm not that thirsty right now & you don't give it to me I'll survive right, not the end of the world. But if I was dying of thirst the way I would ask you for water would it be the same? No. There is a difference in attitude, the way I ask, and the way I beg. We ask Allah for guidance every time we stand in Salah. How do we ask Allah for guidance, what words do we recite? Ihdina assirata almustaqeem. Are we really dying of the thirst for guidance? Or is this a casual if I get it good if not its Ok. There is always the next Rakah, I could ask again, what attitude is it with which we are asking Allah, Allah doesn't just know the words we are saying he also knows the attitude of our heart. We have to ask Allah for guidance sincerely, desperately, we have to feel the need for it, you don't ask for something you don't need. So until you feel the need for guidance you won't really learn how to ask for it you and I both. We have to feel that desperate need for Allah's guidance then we ask for it then Allah opens our heart to receive the message and wisdom of this Quran which is the guidance we are reciting through out this month. May Allah accept our standing in salaah, may Allah open our hearts to receive His guidance and change our behavior and our lives and lives of our family on account of it. May Allah enlighten our heart with the light of the Quran.