

SURAH FATIHAH IN THE LIGHT OF THE WRITINGS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH (as)

(Speech given by Atif Munawar Mir in Mississauga Mosque on March 23rd, 2008)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURAH FATIHAH

I will talk about Surah Fatihah in light of the writings of the Promised Messiah (as). One of the purposes of the Promised Messiah's (as) coming was to help us to rediscover the teachings and meanings of the Holy Quran. I have chosen to focus on those of his writings which relate to Surah Fatihah because of this Surah's importance. The Holy Prophet (sa) called Surah Fatihah Ummul Quran (Mother of the Quran)? Why was it called Ummul Quran? According to the Promised Messiah (as) this Surah captures the essence of the Quran in an excellent manner.¹

The Promised Messiah (as) has compared Surah Fatihah to a rose. Surah Fatihah's external feature (that is its linguistic structure) is beautiful. It has perfect diction and arrangement, an easy flowing style, classical vocabulary and sweet grace and majesty. Internally (its message), every phrase of this Surah, possesses truth and wisdom and induces righteousness.² Surah Fatihah starts by introducing us to the attributes of Allah by informing us who created the universe, who created the stars and Earth, who created humanity, and what will happen to humanity after they die. After declaring the attributes of Allah, it indirectly emphasizes the role and insignificance of humanity in the cosmos. Surah Fatihah also guides humanity as to how should they ask Allah for help and what is the path that leads to the perfection of their souls. **In seven verses, it covers all the subjects of the Holy Quran. In simple words, Surah Fatihah is the introduction or thesis of the Holy Quran.** The depth and breadth of the subjects covered in Surah Fatihah are infinite and the Promised Messiah (as) has explored the various subjects contained in this Surah from many different angles. However, if you look at Surah Fatihah, even superficially, it addresses two main topics: First is the attributes of Allah,

¹ Ahmed, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam, Commentary on the Holy Quran Volume 1 – Surah Fatiha (Compiled from the writings and pronouncements of The Promised Messiah and Mahdi Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian) Translated by Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, London Mosque, P. 3

² Ibid, p 6-7

second is the relationship between Allah and humanity. The scope of my speech is to briefly touch these two areas.

TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF ALLAH

Why Understanding Allah is Important?

The purpose of humanity's creation is to worship Allah. But to worship Allah, it is crucial to understand Allah? What are his powers? It is only by recognizing and acknowledging Allah's power and beauty that we can pray to him or thank him in proper manner.

Can we Understand Allah?

The problem is that human mind is limited and cannot fully comprehend the nature of Allah. That is why Allah sends us his Prophets and books to help us grasp the true knowledge of Allah's existence and of his nature. The Holy Quran is the only preserved book of Allah and Surah Fatihah provides us the Essence of the Holy Quran. That is why Surah Fatihah is incorporated in the five daily prayers and Hudhoor has asked us to recite Surah Fatihah seven times daily with deep concentration. By reciting and pondering over Surah Fatihah, we can begin to understand Allah, our creator and sustainer.

Allah teaches His own attributes to Us

Surah Fatihah starts by declaring the four principal attributes of Allah. These four attributes are:

1. Rabb
2. Rahman
3. Rahim
4. Maliki Yaum al-Din.

. **All other attributes of Allah are the offshoots of these four attributes.** All these four attributes tell us about Allah's true nature, His Perfect beauty and His beneficence.

Rabb and Rahman

The attribute of Rabb informs us that He is the creator, sustainer and developer of the universe. The attribute of Rahman informs us that it is Allah who has blessed all living

creatures with perfect “*shape and form*”³ and “*has bestowed its appropriate form on everything.*”⁴

When combined, the attributes of Rabb and Rahman help us realize that it was not evolution on its own that transformed raw energy and matter into planets, stars and life. Instead, evolution was guided by divine force, the process which Khalifatul Masih IV (ra) refers to as Divine Selection. As I stated before, the meaning of Rabb is sustainer that means Allah is actively involved in the operation of the universe.

Some say that universe is like a watch which Allah has created and like a watch the universe will run on its own until the batteries run out. As such, Allah does not intervene in the affairs of the world. The implication of this assumption is that the universe is being run by the natural laws of physics, chemistry and biology. But the attribute of Rabb and Rahman clears this mistaken notion about Allah. After creating life, Allah sustains life and the operation of the universe. The universe, on the surface, seems to be working on its own but underneath that surface, it is sustained by Allah. What does this mean?

The Promised Messiah (as) explaining the concept of Rabbil-aalameen says that “*Even after the creation of the universe that Source of beneficence is as indispensable as He was before anything had come into being and the world is as much dependent on His providence for its survival and support as it was for its coming into being and its taking shape. It is He who takes care of the Universe every moment and every particle of it is alive and fresh because of Him*”.⁵ Let me explain this a bit. If you ask scientists why planets move in an orbit, they will answer that such movement is made possible by the force of gravity. But they can’t explain the reason for gravity’s continuous existence? According to the Holy Quran, the continuous existence of the force of gravity is due to Allah who sustains the universe. As the Promised Messiah (as) says that, as *Rabbil-aalameen*, Allah is sustaining the entire universe, “*without a single moment’s interruption.*”⁶ He further says that “*It is His (Allah’s) power that descends from the sky in the form of rain and revives and refreshes the dry Earth and provides drink for the*

³ Ahmad, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam, “*The Object of Man’s Life and the Means of its Attainment*”, The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam, Islam International Publications, 1996, p. 108

⁴ Ahmad, Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam, p. 108

⁵ Ahmed, Surah Fatihah, 141

⁶ Ibid, 141

thirsty. It is His power that invests fire with the quality of combustion and invests the air with the quality to refresh life, make flowers blossom forth, lift clouds and convey sound... Then, are all these things God? Indeed not; they are only created things. But Divine power manifests itself through them as power of the hand manifests itself through the pen. We say that the pen writes but, in fact, it is the hand and not the pen that does the writing.”⁷

Rabb and Rahman Indicates Divine Force

Rabb and Rahman, the two attributes of Allah inform us about the majesty, beneficence and beauty of Allah. But these two attributes are not enough to completely comprehend Allah’s beautiful nature. Some scientists admit that they feel sense of awe when they see nature. However to them it is not enough to believe in God.

Unfortunately, modern scientists are relying on their intellect to read the “*Mind of God*” or to discover the ultimate secrets of the universe. Some scientists believe if we keep making new discoveries, we will reach the ultimate knowledge about the universe which will explain the entire complexity of the universe in one elegant mathematical equation. But other scientists have begun to realize that every discovery creates a new mystery. Every new knowledge creates new ignorance. Scientists investigate and collect facts and figures and try to understand the mysteries of creation but what they forget is that it is nearly impossible for us to understand the source of creation and future of the universe when we are a part of it. We dwell in the universe that, one may argue, limits one’s ability to investigate it. What is even more interesting is that the universe is expanding. It could be argued that scientists have increased in knowledge of the universe manifold in the last 400 years. **But due to the expanding nature of the universe, the undiscovered knowledge keeps increasing. Think of scientists in a ship in an ocean trying to reach the shore where they are confident that the ultimate secrets of the universe are waiting to be discovered. They are very happy that they are making progress but then suddenly they discover that the ocean is expanding in all directions faster than their ships. This means that despite moving forward, their destination is moving further and further away from them. The point is that humanity can’t find God without His help.**

⁷ Ibid, 99

Stephen Hawking acknowledges that no matter how advanced the human knowledge becomes, it is still unreliable. He writes as to how in the past people thought that the Earth did not orbit around Sun but sat on tortoise. Once a scientist asked an old lady who subscribed to the tortoise theory, as to where does the tortoise sit. She replied that it is tortoise all the way down. He acknowledges that it is a humorous story but at the same time he says that recent breakthroughs in physics, made possible in part by fantastic new technologies suggest answers to some longstanding questions about the universe but someday these breakthroughs may seem as obvious to us as the earth orbiting the sun – or perhaps as ridiculous as a tower of tortoises. Stephen Hawking admits that the knowledge acquired through human intellect could always prove to be nothing but a superstition in the eyes of future civilization.⁸

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientist of all times, states the insignificance of his knowledge in the following manner: *“I was like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”*⁹

Every new discovery should remind us that if nature is a book of infinite pages, then the modern science has enabled humanity to merely read the first sentence in that book. The Promised Messiah (as) says that the beauty and perfection of the universe should indicate to humanity that a divine force does exist. But unfortunately, scientists only study what they can see with their own eyes or with the instruments that they have created. They don't believe in the unseen. However, Allah has said in the Holy Quran that *“Eyes cannot reach Him but He reaches the eyes. And He is the incomprehensible, the All-Aware.”* (6: 104). This is where the attribute of Rahimiyyat comes into play.

Rahimiyyat

According to the Promised Messiah (as), one cannot achieve certainty in the belief of Allah until he attracts the third attribute of Allah mentioned in Surah Fatihah, which is Rahimiyyat. Unlike the attributes of Rabb and Rahman which come into play without any effort on the part of humanity, the third attribute of Allah, Rahimiyyat, becomes active only when we pray to Him. Rabb and Rahman make you feel that there

⁸ Hawking, Stephen, *“Our Picture of the Universe”*, A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to BlackHoles, Bantam Books, 1988, p. 2-3

⁹ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/i/isaacnewto395010.html>

could be a divine force behind the operation of the universe. But when we pray to Allah, Allah blesses us with his attribute of Rahimiyyat that means that Allah rewards us with the certainty of his existence.

The Promised Messiah (as) says: “... *prayer indeed attracts the grace that saves us and is named Rahimiyyat, impelling man towards continuous progress. It is by means of this grace that a true worshipper reaches the stage in which Allah becomes his guardian, his faith*”¹⁰ and the man reaches the stage where “*he believes in Allah with such certainty as if he sees Him with his own eyes.*”¹¹

The message of the Promised Messiah (as) is that Prophets and men of God found Allah by virtue of His attribute Rahimiyyat and not through Scientific Investigations.

Maliki Yaum al-Din (Reward of Excellence)

Let us come to the fourth attribute. What is the significance of the fourth attribute? The fourth attribute is a reward for those who see Allah with certainty and internalize the attributes of Allah into their souls.

The Promised Messiah (as) explains that the ones who benefit from this attribute, Maliki Yaum al-Din, are those “*who had withdrawn themselves from the world for His sake*”.¹² What is their reward? According to the Promised Messiah (as), their reward is nearness to Allah and thus eternal happiness.¹³ What does nearness to Allah feels like? The Promised Messiah (as) says that the feeling will be of “*comfort and joy and...reward will be seen as emanating directly from God, with no screen or barrier in between, nor will there be left any room for any doubt.*”¹⁴ This attribute of Allah completes the journey of humanity that started with the creation of the universe.

WHAT DO THESE ATTRIBUTES TELL US ABOUT THE NATURE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

The glorification of the attributes of Allah reminds us of the insignificance of humanity. We didn't create ourselves. We played no part in the cosmological and

¹⁰ Ahmed, Surah Fatihah, 80

¹¹ Ibid, 80

¹² Ibid, 110

¹³ Ibid, 110

¹⁴ Ibid, 110

biological processes that turned raw matter into the universe and human life. We don't control the length of our lives. We depend on Allah to raise us again after we die.

It is not us but Allah who is the center of the universe and we are tiny, insignificant creatures who have existed in the infinite time perhaps for only a moment. The Promised Messiah (as) explains that *“when a person learns that Allah sustains the worlds, all of them, there being not a stage that He does not look after, and perceives his own self prompting him to evil, he humbles himself and is filled with anxiety and turns for protection to His door....”*¹⁵.

So when we realize the true nature of our existence, it is natural that we beg Allah for help and guidance and that is why Allah has taught us in the Surah Fatihah that **We worship Him and seek His help**. In this verse we declare that we need divine help all the time.

The Promised Messiah (as) says *“Thou art our only God and in order to reach Thee we choose no other deity as our medium, neither man nor idol, nor do we rely on our wisdom or our knowledge; in everything we implore thee, the Absolute Almighty, for help.”*¹⁶.

The Promised Messiah (as) further says that in this prayer the worshipper declares *“Lord, we have adopted thee alone for worship, preferring thee over all else and we adore nothing save Thy countenance and we believe in Thy Unity.”*¹⁷ We should always ask Allah for help in good and bad times. If we don't pray to Allah for help then it means that we depend on our own efforts to achieve what we want and not God and thus are violating the principle of the unity of God.

We have to rely on our own efforts. The Promised Messiah (as) does point out, that it is *“necessary to employ all one's faculties”* before praying.¹⁸ But we must complement the personal efforts with prayers. Praying to Allah is the ultimate form of submission.

¹⁵ Ibid, 115

¹⁶ Ibid, 188

¹⁷ Ibid, 193

¹⁸ Ibid, 190

When we completely submit ourselves to Allah then we, according to the Promised Messiah (as) “...win... certainty of faith, and...arrive at the ocean of reality”¹⁹

What is the ocean of reality?

The Promised Messiah (as) explains the ocean of reality as a state when the “*The impression of His magnificence on the heart should be so deep that the entire world should appear dead in contrast with Him;*”²⁰.

When we were kids, we liked cartoons. When we became teenagers our preferences change. Spiritually, we grow in the same way. When the love of Allah is instilled in our hearts, the entire world starts to look like a childish playground.

How do we reach the Ocean of Reality

Next prayer in Surah Fatihah helps us to reach this ocean of reality.

When we reach the ocean of reality, we realize the beauty of Allah and we want to become beautiful like him and hence we surrender our will to Allah when we say **guide us to the right path** because we realize that only He knows the true and worthy path.

The Promised Messiah (as) says “*the reality of sirat-i-mustaqeem is the servant’s love for his gracious Lord, and his complete acceptance of the will of Allah and committing his soul and his heart to Him, and dedicating his whole attention to Him who created man, and praying to no one but Him, loving Him with all his heart and supplicating Him alone and seeking his mercy and compassion...and walking straight and fearing the Gracious Lord, His love permeating his whole being with Allah helping him, strengthening his belief and faith. Then the servant inclines totally towards his Lord...turning away from everything...and he follows...His wishes...and seeks none but Allah...and repents of priding himself or of being fascinated by wealth and the wealthy...He gives up the world and travels away from it and prefers the hereafter and seeks to put his trust in Allah and becomes His and is lost in Him...*”²¹

When we completely submit to Allah, the light of Allah starts to shine on our souls and we are then completely transformed.

¹⁹ Ibid, 192-193

²⁰ Ibid, 197

²¹ Ibid, 234

The Promised Messiah (as) says “...when a window facing the sun is opened, its rays enter through the window. Similarly when a person faces up to God, the Supreme, and there is no intervening screen between him and God, the Sublime, then at once a luminous flame descends on him and illumines him and dispels all his inner uncleanness”.²²

The Quranic position is that ego is a veil that separates the communion between God and servant. Once the ego is removed from the heart of individuals, they are able to perceive the divine reality that pervades the universe. The primary aim of Surah Fatihah is to make us humble and wipe out our egos so that we can get in touch with the divine reality, which is the purpose of our existence

HOW DO THESE ATTRIBUTES INDUCES RESPECT FOR OTHERS

When we have understood the attributes of Allah and His infinite power, we feel humbled. It changes our attitude towards other human beings. We realize that we should not be arrogant and envious. When we are arrogant we do not consider Allah Rahman. We feel that we deserve credit for what Allah has given us without any effort on our part. The Promised Messiah (as) says:

“I admonish my community to shun arrogance as arrogance is hateful in the eyes of God, the Lord of Glory. You may not perhaps fully realize what arrogance is. Then listen to me as I speak under the direction of God. Everyone who looks down upon a brother because he esteems himself more learned, or wiser, or more proficient than him is arrogant, inasmuch as he does not esteem God as the Fountainhead of all intelligence and knowledge and deems himself as something. Has God not the power to afflict him with lunacy and to bestow upon his brother whom he accounts small better intelligence and knowledge and higher proficiency than him? So also he who, out of a mistaken conception of his wealth, or status, or dignity, looks down upon his brother, is arrogant because he forgets that his wealth, status and dignity were bestowed upon him by God. He is blind and does not realize that God has power to so afflict him that in a moment he might be reduced to the condition of the lowest of the low, and to bestow upon his brother whom he esteems low greater wealth than him. In the same way he who takes pride in his

²² Ibid, 237

physical health, or is conceited of his beauty, or good looks, or strength, or might and bestows a scornful designation on his brother making fun of him and proclaims his physical defects is arrogant, for he is unaware of God Who has power to afflict him with such physical defects as to render him worse than his brother and to bless the latter so that his faculties should not suffer decline or be stultified over a long period, for He has power to do all that He wills.”²³

Similarly when we are envious, we are envious of what Allah has given another person. By envying someone we are thankless for what Allah has given us. There is no harm in wanting more. But instead of being envious, we should ask Allah for more. The treasure of Allah is infinite. We should embrace his Rahimiyyat and ask him for what we desire instead of be envious.

CONCLUSION

The primary function of Surah Fatihah is to remind us of the majestic attributes of Allah and hence instill in us a sense of awe, which should inject humility and emotion into our prayers. **The sense of awe and the resulting humility slowly remove egoistic behavior from our actions and we thus come to feel love for Allah.**

According to the Promised Messiah (as), the attributes of Rahmaniyyat and Rahimiyyat, make humans realize *“the essence of Divine unity, and his own lack of knowledge, information and insight and his error and helplessness...A person who is conscious of his own drawbacks and shortcomings, would not embark upon any enterprise with irresponsible self assurance. His appreciation of his standing as a creature and servant of Allah would impel him to supplicate to Allah, the all-powerful for help. ...Therefore, before exercising his own imperfect and ineffective energies, he spontaneously seeks Divine help through the prayer: In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful. In response to his humility he is granted power from the power of God and strength from His strength and knowledge from His knowledge, so that He may thereby achieve success in his objective.”*²⁴

²³ <http://www.alislam.org/books/essence2/chap12.html>

²⁴ Ahmed, Surah Fatihah 33-34

The Promised Messiah (as) found God in his heart. He wanted everyone to experience the joy that he felt after meeting Allah. That is why the Promised Messiah (as) says “*How unfortunate, indeed, is the man who does not even know that he has a God with power over all things! Our Paradise, indeed, is our God: our highest enjoyment is in God, for we have seen Him and all beauty found in Him. This treasure is worth having, even if at the cost of one's life, and this is a jewel which should be purchased even if obtainable only by sacrificing one's entire being. O ye that are devoid, run to this spring, for it will quench your thirst. It is the spring of life that shall save you. What am I to do, and how am I to impress this glad tiding upon your mind, with what drum should I go crying through the streets that This is your God, so that all should hear!*”²⁵

May Allah bless us so that we can also learn and act upon the message of the Holy Quran and find Allah in our hearts. ²⁶

²⁵ <http://www.alislam.org/library/links/00000221.html>