

Abu Hurayrah narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him). He said:

1 If anyone offers a prayer without reciting the Mother of the Qur'an, it falls short'. He repeated it three times, 'not perfect'.

2 It was said to Abu Hurayrah: 'We are praying behind the imam'. He said: 'Recite it in silence.

3 I heard God's Messenger (peace be upon him) say: "God, the Exalted, said: I have divided prayer in two halves between Myself and My servant. My servant shall have what he requests.

4 When God's servant says: 'All praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds', God will say: 'My servant has praised Me'. When he says: 'the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful', God will say: 'My servant has extolled Me'. When he says: 'Master of the Day of Judgement', God will say: 'My servant has glorified Me'. (In one narration: My servant has submitted himself to Me.)

5 When he says: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help', God will say: 'This is between Myself and My servant. My servant shall have what he requests'.

6 When he says: 'Guide us on the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray', God will say: 'This is granted to My servant, and My servant shall have what he requests'".⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 395.

From the Qur'an

﴿In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful (1) Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds, (2) The Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful, (3) Master of the Day of Judgement. (4) You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help. (5) Guide us on the straight path, (6) The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray.﴾ (1: 1-7)

﴿We have given you seven oft-repeated verses and this sublime Qur'an.﴾ (15: 87)

The Narrator

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī al-Azdī of Yemen was better known by his appellation, Abu Hurayrah. He embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He remained close to the Prophet, eager to learn, and he accompanied the Prophet wherever he went. He was one of the best memorizers among the Prophet's companions and the one who narrated the largest number of hadiths. Al-Bukhari mentioned that more than eight hundred companions of the Prophet or those who belonged to the *tābi'īn* generation narrated hadiths from him. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him as Governor of Bahrain. Later he returned to Madinah and devoted his time to narrating the Prophet's hadiths and educating people about their faith. He died in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

Summary

Abu Hurayrah narrates this hadith in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that a person who offers a prayer without reciting the Opening Surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, will find his prayer falls short of an important part that affects its validity. Abu Hurayrah was asked about reciting it when one is with a congregation. He said that it should be recited, due to the importance of a hadith in which the Prophet quotes God saying that He has divided *al-Fātiḥah* into two halves, retaining one half and giving the other to His servant.



Message and Meaning



The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that whoever offers a prayer but does not recite the Opening Surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, will find his prayer incomplete. In essence, it falls short of validity, which means that the acceptability of the deed is affected. This is confirmed by the Prophet's statement: 'No prayer is valid if one does not recite the Opening Surah of the Book'.⁽¹⁾

This opening surah is also called the Mother of the Qur'an, because it sums up its essence. The meanings of all the Qur'an's surahs are related to it, as the Qur'an focuses on praising and glorifying God, serving Him, the promises and warnings about the Day of Judgement, and the accounts of past communities. By the same token, Makkah is called the 'mother town'.



Abu Hurayrah, the narrator of this hadith, was asked about reciting this surah by a person in the congregation. He answered that such a person recites it inaudibly. Although this answer is given by Abu Hurayrah, it carries the same status as though it were said by the Prophet. 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit reports: 'We were in congregation praying Fajr behind God's Messenger (peace be upon him). He recited the Qur'an but he sounded uncomfortable. When he finished the prayer, he said: "Perhaps you are reciting when you are behind your imam?" We said: "Yes, we do, quickly". He said: "Do not do it, except the Opening Surah, because no prayer is valid without reciting it"'.⁽²⁾



Abu Hurayrah then explains what he said. He mentions that God says in a *qudsī* hadith that He divided its recitation into two halves, one for Himself and the other for His servant.

This division applies to the meanings of what is being recited. Thus, God returns what His servant is saying with a similar phrase. Thus, when the worshipper says, 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds', God says: 'My servant has praised Me'. This division may also refer to the fact that one half of the surah is an acknowledgement of one's status as a servant of God, as well as a glorification of God, while the other half is a supplication and appeal for help. God has promised to answer supplications. The point of the division is the verse that says: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help'. (1: 5) The first sentence of this verse and the preceding verses consist of glorification and praises of God, while the second sentence and the rest of the surah is a supplication for guidance and help.

That reciting *al-Fātiḥah* is referred to in this hadith as 'prayer' is a reference to the main part of something by the name of the total. This is the same as in the verse that says: 'Do not raise your voice too loud in prayer, nor say it in too low a voice, but follow a middle course in between'. (17: 110) What is meant refers to the recitation of the Qur'an in prayer: it must be neither too loud nor too quiet.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 756; Muslim, 394.

2 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 823; al-Tirmidhī, 311.

4

The Prophet (peace be upon him) then says that when God's servant says: 'All praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds', God will say: 'My servant has praised Me'. When he says: 'the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful', God will say: 'My servant has extolled Me'. When he says: 'Master of the Day of Judgement', God will say: 'My servant has glorified Me'.

Praise, extolling and glorifying are similar in meaning. They all signify praise and the mention of fine attributes. The only difference is that praise does not relate to action. God says: 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all worlds'. We praise Him because He is the Lord of all worlds. Extolling means the mention of those attributes that deserve to be extolled. Hence, God mentions this action when His servant refers to Him as 'the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful'. Thus, God's attribute of grace and mercy invites that a person extols God. Likewise, when the Last Day is mentioned as well as that God is the Master of that Day who determines what happens then, this is aptly described as a glorification of God stressing His supremacy.

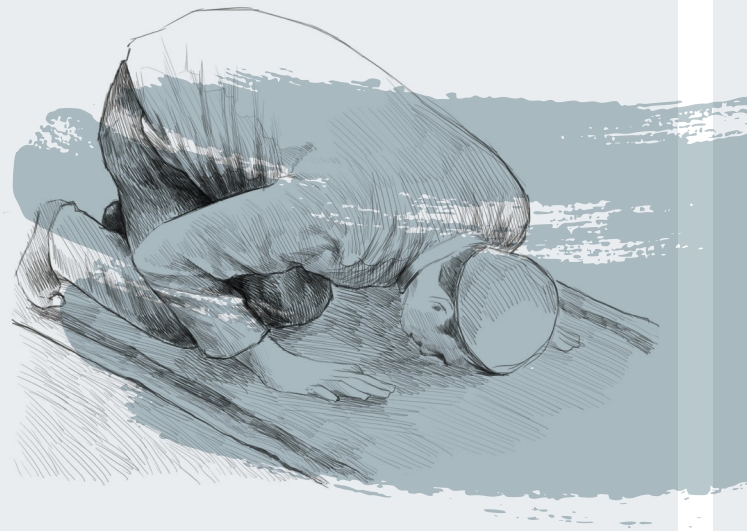
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When the worshipper says: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help'. (1: 5) God says: 'This is between Myself and My servant. My servant shall have what he requests'. The verse signifies humility before God, expressing one's need for His help and total devotion to Him. Worship covers all that God loves and accepts of words and actions, whether manifest or private. Moreover, the verse implies glorifying God and acknowledging His ability to grant what His servant requests.

6

When he says: 'Guide us on the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray', God will say: 'This is granted to My servant, and My servant shall have what he requests'. This means that God will answer this supplication and grant the worshipper his request.

'Those who have incurred Your wrath' includes all people who deliberately and persistently disobey God and incur His displeasure. 'Those who have gone astray' includes all those who turn away from God's guidance, either through ignorance or deliberately.



Implementation

1

Surah *al-Fātiḥah* is the Mother of the Qur'an, and it sums up its essence. All the meanings of all surahs refer to it. An intelligent person will identify its meanings, deduce its rulings and learn the reasons for its special merit.

2

All fields of knowledge of this life and the life to come are referred to in this surah. It refers to the disciplines of praise, Godhead, Lordship, multiple worlds, mercy, dominion, the reckoning of people's accounts, worship, seeking help, guidance, the path, the straight course of action, blessing, and what is to be avoided of incurring God's wrath, and the avoidance of going astray.

3

The hadith shows that it is obligatory to recite *al-Fātiḥah* in every *rak'ah*. It is not valid for a Muslim to pray without reciting it.

4

The Prophet (peace be upon him) repeated the words 'it falls short' three times, so that it would be learnt and held in memory. He also wanted to emphasize this for his audience. The Prophet frequently resorted to repeating his words. We all need to learn from him.



5

People asked Abu Hurayrah about reciting *al-Fātiḥah* by those in the congregation, thinking that it may have a different ruling. Abu Hurayrah did not object to their questioning. No one need be too shy to ask about something he does not know. Moreover, a scholar should not be irritated by questions, even if these are repeated or the answers are included in what he said.



God, limitless is He in His glory, referred to *al-Fātiḥah* as prayer because it is the most important part of prayer. Therefore, we must not read it casually or hastily, without reflecting on its meanings.



During the recitation of Surah *al-Fātiḥah*, one should reflect on the appeal one makes to God, Mighty and Exalted, and God's responses. It is important that we are fully attentive when we pray, so that we make the best of our prayer and discharge our duty fully. The best benefit of prayer accrues when one is fully attentive and feels one's humility before God.



God is pleased with His believing servants and presents them with pleasure. When they say, 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds', He says: 'My servant has praised Me'. He is pleased with His servant. What could anyone do that would bring more benefit or greater reward than an action that pleases God?



Every Muslim should reflect on the verse that says: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help.' (1: 5) It is said that this short verse sums up the very essence of all revealed scriptures. All creation have been brought into existence so that they worship God, as He says: 'I have not created the jinn and mankind to any end other than that they may worship Me.' (51: 56) Worship is a duty binding on God's servants and they cannot fulfil it unless God helps them to do so. Hence, this verse is shared by God and His servant: worship is a duty owed by His servants to God, and His help is a favour He bestows on them.



God ordered His servants that they should appeal to Him to guide them on the straight path, which is the one followed by prophets, devout people and martyrs. Whoever follows this path and keeps straight on it will achieve happiness in both this world and the next. He will also be able to traverse the fine path on the Day of Judgement. Whoever leaves it is either one who incurs God's wrath because he knows the way of guidance but does not follow it, or one who has gone astray, unable to determine the way of right guidance, such as idolaters.



God tells His servants to request His guidance on the straight path and to help them avoid the path of error. Therefore, we must ensure not to imitate those who have incurred God's wrath or those who have gone astray.



When the worshipper concludes reciting *al-Fātiḥah*, God answers his request saying: 'This is granted to My servant, and My servant shall have what he requests'. At this point, the angels confirm the worshipper's supplication saying: Amen. Therefore, it is recommended that the congregation should do the same as the angels, which is a formula ensuring answering the supplication.

