

Alhamdulillah Rabb al-Aalameen
Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem
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Iyyaka Na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'een
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Gems

Alhamdulillah Rabb al-Aalameen

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِيْنَ

Praise is for Allah, the Rabb of the Aalameen

There is a difference of opinion on whether this is the first ayah of this surah or the second (the first being the basmalah). In this explanation, we shall follow the former position of this being the first ayah.

The phrase, 'Alhamdulillah is an all inclusive phrase, it is not merely a declaration of thanks--- since thanking does not require nor imply praise---rather it contains a greater meaning. Ibrahim alayhi as-salaam thanked his father because Allah commanded him to do so, but he did not praise him. Allah is worthy of being praised and thanked at the same time. Therefore, in the phrase, 'Alhamdulillah,' praise and thanks are combined.

Hence, an accurate translation of that part of the ayah would be, "All praise and thanks be to Allah." Note, that the verbal-noun 'praise' is mentioned here as a noun and not a verb (e.g. praise Allah). This subtle feature implies permanence, as nouns imply permanence and verbs imply time-constraints and temporariness. And this is appropriate because the praise of Allah is timeless, it was there before we were here, it is here now, and will remain here after us. So when we say, 'Alhamdulillah,' we are declaring that all praise and thanks are for Allah, and they are independent of us.

The next part, 'Rabb of the Aalameen,' has great implications to our lives. Usually the word Rabb is translated as Master, while it is perhaps the closest noun in the English language, it does not do complete justice to the context of the Quran. The word Rabb in this verse is related to 'Huda,' which means guidance. This is logical because the first act of a slave for his master would be to ask for guidance and instructions. In Arabic, guidance is related to Hadiya, which means 'gift.' To the Arabs, guidance was also a gift; for a beduin lost in the desert nothing is more valuable than guidance.

A mention of a master would be incomplete without the mention of the slave over whom they are masters. Similarly, the next part of the ayah mentions the 'slaves,' as the Aalameen, which is a comprehensive plural that refers to all sorts of created beings or things in the universe, but particularly to the mankind and jinn.

In the Quran, the word Rabb is frequently mentioned in close proximity to the word guidance (هدى), e.g. **Innani hadaani rabbi ila siratil mustaqim, sabbihisma rabbikal a'ala.** The natural question would be about their relationship.

If a master did not say anything to his slave, the slave might ask his master what he wants him to do, because without instructions how can a slave be a slave of his master? A slave cannot be a slave without obeying their master and obedience is an action upon knowledge in the form of instructions from the master, and this is guidance. If the slave acted against that knowledge, then they would be upon misguidance, and vice versa. This is why we immediately ask for guidance after declaring Allah as our Rabb.

So an elaborate translation of this verse would be, "All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Master of all things and beings created by Him."

And Allah knows best.

Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem

After calling Himself the Master, He gives Himself two descriptions, in the next ayah:

الرحمن الرحيم

The most common translation of this ayah is, "The Most beneficent, The Most Merciful." In contemporary context, such a translation almost fails its purpose as those English words are seldom used in normal speech and literature, let alone being properly understood.

Fundamentally, the translation is accurate as the Arabic refers to Mercy, however both ar-Rahman and ar-Raheem are derivatives of Mercy. This is why one needs to understand properly why they are different. Generally speaking, when synonyms are used in the same sentence in Arabic, they are intended to join their unique qualities. Similar, is the case here.

Both those words have Rahmah in their roots. Rahmah means mercy in Arabic, and has also been used as 'womb' of the mother. This is from the Arab idea of mercy in the womb of the mother, where the foetus has no worries and all its needs are taken care of by the mother--- hence the child is under the mercy of the mother, from every angle. However, since they are used together, they bring their own qualities to this ayah.

Ar-Rahman has three features in its linguistic structure and meaning.

1. By definition, it is something extreme. The addition of the 'aan' at the end is a hyperbole, as it turns the mercy into something unimaginable, extreme; Allah is extremely, unfathomably merciful.
2. This structure also implies that this is something happening in the present. For example, you see someone donating money to someone who is needy, and you call this person a generous person. This is happening in the present and the person's generosity is manifesting itself right now, so the implication of your description is different than when you describe that person to your friend. In the latter case, you may still call that person generous, but it doesn't guarantee that the person is being generous right now. This linguistic feature is not common in the English language, but in Arabic, it is indicated by the structure, as is the case with ar-Rahman; Allah is being merciful right now.
3. The third unique feature of this structure is transience, which means something that is not permanent. This is also shared by other Arabic words that sound the same, such as hungry (جوعان), thirsty (عطشان), angry, and what is common in these words is that they are all temporary, they are present and then something takes them away; food takes away hunger, drink takes away thirst. And this feature implies that this mercy of Allah is temporary and something will take it away.

Based on that, we understand that Allah is ar-Rahman and that means that He is extremely merciful to us right now, but He could stop being merciful to us (if we disobey Him).

As for ar-Raheem, it brings two other unique linguistic features to the ayah:

1. It implies permanence. So Allah is ar-Raheem and perpetually merciful, always merciful, constantly merciful, endlessly merciful, and His mercy is always going to be there.
2. Secondly, it is not necessarily happening right now. That is, Allah is always merciful and His mercy is perpetual, but He may not be merciful to us at this moment.

This in reality complements the meaning of ar-Rahman. This is because in this ayah, Allah is describing His mercy completely, and while in other places of the Quran, we may find that a certain type of mercy is referred to---e.g. in surah ar-Rahman, Allah mentions blessings that are extremely useful, present right now, but temporary, and so He refers to His mercy by calling

Himself ar-Rahman. So in this surah Allah gives us a complete definition of His mercy, “He is unfathomably, extremely merciful right now, and is perpetually merciful, but while His mercy is always going to be available, it may not necessarily be bestowed upon us in the present and may be taken away from us if He wills.”

A side-note, we are recommended to begin our activities with the basmalah, and in it we seek Allah’s mercy, keeping in mind the meanings of the two descriptions.

Another benefit of this verse is in the order that the two words are mentioned, the present is mentioned first and then the future. To understand that, imagine if you needed money to pay your rent, and someone came to you to discuss about an interesting investment opportunity with future returns. You wouldn’t pay attention to this discussion as you are concerned with the present state, and need help in the present. Once your present worries are settled, you start worrying about the future.

Since, ar-Rahman deals with the present, it is what we would need first, what we would need right now, and so it is mentioned first. Once our present worries are taken care of, we start worry about the future, and then ar-Raheem takes care of our future worries. Allah created us and knows best what we need and how and when we need it. This verse is a clear indication of that.

In light of this, we learn how elaborate the description of Allah is, even though it is only manifested in two words. az-Zamakhshari once said, “that of ar-Rahman and ar-Raheem, the former is like the huge towering waves of the ocean, and the latter is like the calm sea. And one cannot imagine both together, and they cannot imagine those two names at the same time, they are beyond our imagination.” This is the mistake made by people who try to define Allah’s mercy without accounting for all those meanings, and that leads them to fallacious conclusions and doubts: ‘Why is there violence in the world if Allah is Merciful?’ or ‘Allah is extremely Merciful and will excuse us all for all our mistakes.’ To claim to fully understand Allah’s mercy is to err, that is beyond our capacity. We can only praise Allah at just the limited amount of knowledge that He has given us about His mercy through those two words and their linguistic miracle.

Ibn Abbas, radi Allahu anhum, described ar-Rahman as being for all the creatures in the universe, but ar-Raheem is only for the believers. Which means that perpetual mercy and reward in the afterlife is only for the believers, even though everyone and everything is able to make use of Allah’s blessings in this world.

Also note, that if Allah left out either one of ar-Rahman or ar-Raheem, there would be chaos in the world with either the lack of the common blessings or that of accountability.

Maliki Yawn ad-Deen

مالك يوم الدين

This is a follow up to the previous ayah, that while Allah is extremely and perpetually merciful, He is also the Owner and the King of the day of judgement, lest a person misuse Allah's mercy to commit sins.

In a certain recitation of the Quran, the first word is recited as Maalik, with an elongated 'aa' sound (this means owner), and in others, it is recited as malik, without an elongation (and this means king). It is interesting how these two recitations, while conveying subtly different meanings, cover a comprehensive description of Allah and His relation to the day of judgement. This is because a King is used to describe the ownership on a massive-level: lands, countries, while Owner is used to describe ownership over smaller things: property, houses. The linguistic connection here is interesting because Allah is the King of the great things that will happen on the day of judgement, that is a great day and will last for a great amount of time, and Allah is the Owner of the people's small deeds that are going to be counted.

The addition of the term 'Day' is also important. To understand fully, imagine a person with a bag, if a person owns the bag, generally-speaking they own what is inside the bag as well. If Allah owns the 'Day' of judgement, then naturally and logically He owns whatever is going to happen during that time as well. Also note, it is impossible for human beings (or any other created being or thing) to own time. We can claim to do so, but in reality we have no control over what happens to us during that time, let alone what happens anywhere else in the massive universe that Allah has created. And so, by Allah being the Owner of the Day of Judgement, He is the Owner of whatever happens during it. In this world, people can pretend to be owners and kings, but on the day of Judgement there will be no owner nor king, nor sovereign, except Allah subhanahu wa ta'aala.

In this ayah there is another comparison with the previous one. This is the whole concept of judgement/accounting/reckoning on that Day. Note, that while Allah mentioned His mercy in the previous ayah, He did not follow it up with mention of punishment, rather He described it as justice. This is true, because one may say there are only two types of people on the day of Judgement: Those upon whom Allah bestows His mercy, and those who are given justice.

These three ayaat cover everything a person needs to know about Allah. This is a complete introduction to Himself. And this knowledge, just like any other, should lead to results. All these descriptions of Allah lead us to the next ayah.

Iyyaka Na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'een

إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين

In reality, the first ayah should suffice for us to declare our enslavement to Allah, Who is the Rabb, the Master. If that is not enough, then He is the extremely Merciful, who is being merciful to us right now, and His Mercy is always there for the believers but can be taken away from us if He wills, and if that is not enough, then the fact that He is the King and the Owner of the day of Judgement, when there will be no king or owner of anything, except Him. And this is the thought-process of the believer.

This ayah is often translated as, “You Alone we worship and You Alone we ask for help.” Unsurprisingly, this translation fails to convey the entire meaning of the verse. Firstly, we need to add the missing dimension of slavery to Allah in that translation. In Arabic, the phrase we worship (نعبد) includes both slavery (عبد) and worship (يعبد) are combined. This is important to understand because a person may appear to worship Allah, but not necessarily act like His slave; worship and slavery are not the same. This is the case of a person who only takes from Islam what pleases him. While a true slave is one who only does what his master asks him to do. That is the master-slave relationship.

This ayah is therefore a declaration of slavery, to none other than Allah. When we declare slavery to Allah, only then we truly free ourselves. Otherwise we are either enslaved to entertainment, culture, peer-pressure, false ideologies, fashion, and so on. To be free from all that is by being a slave of Allah, the Creator, the Only One worthy of being enslaved to. The only One we need to impress is Allah.

The next part of this ayah is iyyaka nastain. While this is often translated as “You Alone we ask for help,” the word ‘help’ does not do justice to the statement in this ayah. The word nastain is the same as istiaana (to seek) help, and is a derivative of the word ‘aun,’ which is not merely help, rather a type of help that you seek when you are already struggling with something. For instance, you are on the highway and have a flat-tire, you have everything with you to fix that tire, but you ask someone for help because you would rather listen to the radio. This is seeking help in a matter that is not difficult for you and you are not struggling in. On the other hand, imagine a similar scenario, but this time you are not strong enough to lift and fit the spare tire. This time you are already struggling and so the help you seek here is different. When we are told to seek help from Allah in this verse, it is the help in matters we are already making considerable effort in, and struggling to complete. In reality, if one is not struggling, then it may be even be appropriate for that person to seek help. A common example of that is a person who complains about not being a good Muslim, complains that Allah is not helping him be one, but does not make effort to actually be one. Such a person is not struggling and so is not technically doing istiaana.

Another way of looking at it is as a warning from Allah to only ask for help if we are sincerely struggling, and need it desperately. This is the case with the righteous of the past, Ibrahim alayhi as-Salam was first thrown into the fire and then the fire was cooled by the will of Allah, the outnumbered believers first went to the battlefield of Badr and then the angels descended to help them. If we understand this, it would change the way we act and seek help. Put this into perspective, how bad it is to lie to a human being, and how often we insincerely seek help from Allah in our prayers when we recite this ayah.

Another gem in this phrase is the fact that Allah did not mention what it is that we seek help for. This would be necessary as you need to inform the one you seek help from, what it is that you are struggling with. This absence of the subject can be interpreted in a number of ways.

One of the reason for that may be that the One we ask help from already knows what we are struggling with---Allah is The all-knowing, The all-aware---and does not need to be told what the problem is. A second reason could be that the list of things we need help with is so long that it is easier to just ask for help without listing them. This is not untrue as we have uncountable challenges in our lives that we need help with. A third way of interpreting this ayah could be that this cry for help is a cry of desperation. Imagine that you were in the woods and slipped off a cliff, you are now hanging for dear life by a branch of a tree. How would your cry for help be in such a case? Would you say, for example, "I am in need of immediate help as I have slipped down the cliff and am hanging by a branch. I fear that I will fall down to my death if I don't get immediate help." Rather, the instinctive response would be to simply scream, "Help!" If we put that into context in the ayah, then this would mean that the cry for help that we direct towards Allah is for an extremely desperate situation that has rendered us almost speechless. We cannot even come up with words. In reality, all those are different ways of understanding the reality of our situation and the reason why we say to Allah, *iyyaka nasta'een*.

Note, that this cry for help is also related to previous verses, and in particular the verse where we declare our slavery to Allah. Think about it this way, slavery to Allah is something that is in reality a challenge, as we are always going to be tempted and seduced by shaytaan and his followers, and because this slavery is such a difficult task, we have to ask Allah for help with it. If you intend something that is extremely difficult, it would be normal to ask for assistance in performing it. Also note, that this help is not limited to help in being slaves of Allah, this is because the wording is not restricted in any way. However, the first thing that we would need help with is slavery to Allah, and so it is the first thing mentioned after we say to Allah, *iyyaka na'budu*, that You alone we enslave ourselves to and worship. And while slavery is the first thing we seek help with, we seek help in all matters, but once slavery to Allah is taken care of, everything else is taken care of.

Once we ask Allah for help in being His successful slaves, He responds, in the next ayah, with what we are supposed to seek.

Ihdina as-Siraat al-Mustaqim

اهدنا الصراط المستقيم

Allah directs us to ask Him to guide us to the siraat al-Mustaqim. Note, that immediately after a declaration of seeking help from Allah alone, we are to seek help in guidance, another reminder of the master-slave relationship. We could have asked for help in a number of good things: forgiveness, rizq, easy life, a ton of other things, but guidance is the most valuable of them all, and with guidance everything else is solved. Also, look at the example of Musa, alayhi as-Salam, and Pharaoh; Ibrahim, alayhi as-Salam against his people; Muhammad salla Allahu alayhi wasallam, versus the 'rich' and 'powerful' of his community, real success was with the ones who were rightly guided, regardless of the worldly false standards of a 'good-life'.

As for the imperative verb, 'Ihdina,' one may ask why it is in the plural first-person. Why not ihnidi? The answer to this has great implications to our life as an ummah, in general, and as communities and individual families, in particular. Allah asks us to live this life together. The collective life of a Muslim is extremely important. It encourages one to do good deeds and discourages evil. The rewards of collective good deeds are multiplied. And the angels descend upon a gathering in which the remembrance of Allah takes place. And so, the fact that we ask Allah for help in a gathering is not to be taken lightly.

A side note, we recite al-Fatiha at least 17 times each day, and each time we go through this ayah where we beg Allah to guide us to the straight path. To put things into perspective, imagine yourself sitting in a restaurant. You are extremely thirsty and ask the server for water. After the first drink, you feel like having some more and ask the server for another glass. Would your second request sound the same as the first one? Will it have the same level of urgency? Imagine that there was no easy way of getting water, yet your throat was dry with thirst. Imagine you were unable to get water from anywhere, would you be in a state of desperation? Would you cry out for water? Would you keep repeating your cries for water until you received it and were satisfied? Similar is the case with guidance. Allah, by making it mandatory for us to recite this surah in every salah---to the point that the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wasallam said that there is no salah without the fatiha---has shown us the reality of our lives in relation to guidance. We beg for guidance over and over each day, yet fail to realize that this is because we don't own guidance. We need guidance, we are desperate for it. Perhaps our situation is comparable to a person who is unaware of some internal physical injury. This person might not get treatment for it because they may not realize the magnitude of their injury. Like that, we, fail to truly reflect upon the implications of the constant repetition of al-Faitha in our lives, from the day salah becomes mandatory upon us to the day we die, we are to repeat this surah, and beg Allah for guidance. It is almost as if we ask Allah for guidance at Fajr, and lest we get misguided by noon, we ask Allah again for guidance at Dhuhr, and lest we forget it by the afternoon, we do so again at Asr, and so on. We are to ask Allah for guidance our whole lives. And if that is not enough, we recite al-Faitha in the first rakah, and we bow down to Allah, and rise up and ask for guidance again, as if we were prone to have not been guided during the time we were praying! In essence, our lives are the times we pray, the hours between are times when we see whether we have been guided or not.

This is another indication of the difference between knowledge and guidance. Many people have knowledge, few are guided by it. Knowledge is easy to obtain, guidance is only from Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, no one can misguide, whomsoever Allah leaves to go astray, no one can bring back to the path of guidance.

As for the word 'siraat,' then there can only be one 'siraat'. This word comes from 'suraat', which means a long straight sword. Siraat is a kind of path, from A to B, without any alternate route. So, for instance if you deviated slightly from that path, your GPS would not calculate a new route, rather it would instruct you to rejoin the point of the siraat that you deviated from, there are no shortcuts. That is why in the Arabic language, it doesn't even have plurals, unlike sabeel (subul), tareeq (taraaiq), shari' (shawaari'), and so on. There is only a siraat. Just how Allah says, *إن الدين عند الله الإسلام*

Linguistically, there can only be one siraat, it has to be straight and linguistically it also has to be wide, as Shiekh Ahmad al-Kubaisi explains. The benefit of wide path is perhaps that it can accommodate more travellers. Also, historically speaking, a siraat is very dangerous. Since the path is so straight, simple, predictable, and without many turns, it would make caravans vulnerable to attacks. Likewise, a siraat makes it easy for its users to be attacked.

The next word in the ayah is al-Mustaqim, which is commonly translated as straight. Now, what is the problem with that translation? Well, we already saw that the word siraat itself implies straightness, so this would be a redundant translation. Mustaqim is related to istiqamah, which means to seek straightness (when something stands straight), and it is related to qaamah, which means to stand (like how it is used in the iqamah). Another dimension this adds to the meaning is that Allah is telling us to tread a path that is going straight up, a spiritual journey to Him. Literally, this path is going up like a ladder, leaving this dunya. We are basically struggling against the gravity of the worldly life, on our journey to Allah. And this gravity of this dunya, its temptations, seductions will always be there till we die and end our initial journey. It doesn't matter how much worship we have done, this gravity is always going to be there with us while we are alive. In reality, the higher you are up the ladder, the harder you will fall once you slip. And the more Allah has raised you with His blessings, and you still disobey Allah, the harder you are going to fall. In fact, Allah has compared such a person to likes of a dog (not even a direct comparison with a dog, perhaps implying this person is below the dog). Allah says in surah al-A'raaf (v.176), If it had been Our will, We should have elevated him with Our signs; but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject Our signs; So relate the story; perchance they may reflect." And this is the trick of the shaytaan, who slowly brings the human to a path of disobedience, as Allah describes his action in surah al-A'raaf (v.22), "Fa dallahuma..." that he slowly got them into what he wanted; like someone raising a bucket from a well, slow and steady.

So we discussed that this path is straight, long, wide, difficult, heading upwards, and now we know where we have to go.

Siraat al-lathina ‘an’amta ‘alayhim, ghayri al-maghdubi ‘alayhim wa la-ad-daalleen

صراط اللذين انعمت عليهم غير المغضوب عليهم ولاضالين

Now that Allah made clear to us where we have to go, Allah makes us describe the previous people who were successful in crossing the straight, long, difficult journey upwards to Allah. This is important even in our worldly dealings when we look up to the experiences of people who have been successful in fields that we have questions in. When you are in college, you ask for advice from senior students or graduates, because they have successfully been through the hurdles of academic life. Likewise, in this ayah we ask for the path of those people upon whom Allah has already showered His blessings. A side-note, this is in past tense, which subtly shows that the real role models of Islam are not the ones who are still alive, rather the ones who are gone. The ones who are alive are as volatile as us and as prone to the dangers of the shaytaan. The graduation ceremony is death. We ask Allah to show us the path of those who have graduated from this life successfully. Also note that we say ‘anamta alayhim’, again associating guidance with Allah, that only Allah owns guidance and only Allah can bestow upon whom He wills and take away from whom He wills.

The word an’ama comes from nu’uma, which refers to softness/relaxed state. It is no coincidence that cows and sheep are called an’aam in Arabic. The relation is that cows and sheep when they move are very relaxed, unlike a tense animal such as a cat. Remember that Allah described this path as a hard path and the tasks as difficult task, and that the higher up the ladder one goes, the harder it becomes to stay there and keep climbing. But Allah then says that the ones who succeed this stage are those upon whom relaxation is bestowed, they are now calm.

The next part, ‘ghayri almaghdubi alayhim’ is interesting. It is commonly translated as, ‘not the path of those who earn your wrath’ or the like. However this phrase doesn’t even contain the pronoun ‘your’, and that has greater implications than just a grammatical pattern. To understand this, know that in Arabic when you want to say that everyone is mad at someone, you call that person, ‘maghdub alayhi’, which basically means that the one upon whom the anger descends. So the people referred to in this phrase means that these are the people upon whom anger is being hurled at, it is being thrown at them. When such a statement is mentioned, and the doer is not mentioned for the action, is it not possible that there might be more than one doer? So not only is Allah angry at them, but the angels are angry at them, the believers are angry at them, the previous and later generations are angry at them, to such an extent that such are the people upon whom anger is thrown.

Another reason why Allah may not be mentioned in this phrase may be that these people receive so much anger that Allah does not want His name mentioned anywhere near them. And Allah knows best.

Then Allah adds another description of these failed people, ad-daalleen. This is usually translated as, ‘those who go astray’. Perhaps a more common contextual translation would describe them as people who are lost. While this is a lesser degree of failure than having everyone’s anger flung at you, it is still failure as they did not get Allah’s guidance.

An interesting relationship in this ayah is between the two types of failed people. To understand it, imagine that you have two children playing in a room, and there is a cookie jar on a table. You tell only the older of the two children that neither him, nor his brother is to eat any of the cookies

while you are gone. You return to the room after a while and both children have finished the cookie jar. How would you feel towards both children? The older one, the one that you instructed, clearly disobeyed you, while the younger one didn't know any better and just followed his brother's actions. You would be angry at the older one but not so much at the younger one. The older one disobeyed while the younger one was merely lost and not guided. So, the maghdubi alayhim are those who knew what was right and wrong, yet they still chose to disobey Allah, while the daalleen were the ones who were lost. However, ignorance is not equal to innocence. And according to some ahaadith, the maghdubi alayhim are the Jews, while the daalleen are the Christians. Even in the Quran, certain behaviours of the Jews are highlighted that show how they were at times arrogant despite being knowledgeable, and disobedient as a result. While many times when the Christians are mentioned, they exhibit behaviours of people who didn't really know any better and were lost. And the Quran is a teaching for us to not become like either of them (this doesn't mean we start calling random people on the street as the 'receivers of anger', or the 'lost'). Also, by leaving the description open-ended, this category could include anyone, even from the Muslims. This is why we ask Allah for guidance and safety from being amongst the failures.

Gems

Balancing Knowledge and Action

This surah is all about nouns. This surah begins by introducing us to Allah. It begins with knowledge. If we have knowledge, it should lead to action. Knowledge of Allah led us to one action on our part and that was our decision to be slaves of Allah. If we do have the action, then we are on the straight path, as-Siraat al-Mustaqeem, a path people took before us---people of knowledge who turned it into action. So guidance is when we balance knowledge with action. As for misguidance, this can be of two types: One is when we have knowledge by no action, or action without knowledge. The surah begins with knowledge, then it talks about action, then when they are both together it talks about guidance, then it tells us not to be like people who have knowledge by no action, then it talks about people who have action but no knowledge. It is absolutely marvellous how Allah says this.

Symmetry

The Prophet of Allah described in a hadith qudsi, that Allah calls the fatiha something that is between Him and His slave. The first part is for My slave, the middle is between us and the last is for Me. So the middle part of the surah is *iybaka na'budu wa iybaka nastaeen*. If we divide this verse into equal parts, the middle part is 'wa', the first part is us proclaiming our worship to Allah alone, and the second part is declaring our dependence on Allah alone, again dividing the verse between Allah and us.

A Mix of Nouns and Verbs

We learned that nouns are permanent and verbs are temporary. In Arabic grammar, there are two types of sentences: those that begin with nouns (nominal), and those that begin with verbs (verbal). The first part of the surah is about Allah, the middle part is about Allah and us, and the last part is about us. The first part contains only nominal sentences, and this part is about Allah, and it is only befitting to describe Allah in a permanent sense. The last part is composed of verbal sentences, and we humans are temporary, we were created by Allah and we eventually die---again this usage is suitable. As for the middle part, that is supposed to be between us and Allah, it is both a verbal sentence and a nominal sentence. The schools of Arabic grammar might have debates on which one it is but in reality this is a clear difference between the three parts.

All of this was revealed at once to the Prophet, there was no editorial process anywhere. This is another proof of the perfect speech of Allah.

Also note, the surah begins with Allah's sovereignty over people, and the ending is how people should be divided---not by ethnicities, or languages, rather on their actions, knowledge and results.

Individually Collective

Hamd is something subjective to what we are used to. Every one has their own way of praising and thanking Allah. Also, we are individual slaves of Allah, and our relationship is between us and Him, and we all have a personal experience of this. Also, we all experience mercy in ways that are specific to us. Also, everyone will come to Allah individually on the day of judgement. Each of those were personal aspects. Immediately after that, things change from individual to collective---collective proclamation of worship to Allah alone and dependence on Allah alone, a collective seeking of guidance from Allah, and protection from being unsuccessful.

This surah is a balance between individual Iman and collective action. Knowledge and personal relationship with Allah are in the heart, but our actions will be with other Muslims. We

have to do them together. The life of the Muslim should be in balance. According to a certain narration, Umar bin Khattab described taqwa as having a sense of balance.

Continuum in the Quran

The last surah of the Quran, in order, is surah an-Naas. And often when the Prophet would recite an-Naas, he would immediately go to al-Fatiha, as if the Quran didn't have an end. The first surah begins with praise, something positive, and the last surah begins with something negative, seeking refuge (from evil). Al-Fatiha begins with a noun, an-Naas begins with a verb. In al-Fatiha we say Maalik, in an-Naas we say Malik. In al-Fatiha we mentioned mercy, in an-Naas we seek protection from evil. In al-Fatiha, we enslave ourselves to Allah and declare His tawhid in being worshipped using a verb/nouns combination (iyyaka na'budu), while in an-Naas we mention a noun (illah an-Naas). In al-Fatiha, we mentioned two types of bad things: maghdubi alayhim and ad-Daaleen, while in an-Naas we mention two evils, the waswaas from the Jinn and those from the people (naas). In al-Fatiha, the verbs were all plural, while in an-Naas all verbs are singular. Individually we get evil influences from Shaytaan, collectively we get evil influences from failed nations. So in al-Fatiha, the negative influences are from the failed nations while in an-Naas the evil influences are individual influences from shaytaan and an-Naas. Even this is balanced.

Conclusion

As Ustaadh Noman Ali Khan says, we haven't really understood the Quran, we have to enjoy what it has to offer, we cannot approach it with extreme emotions or preconceived conclusions, rather we must come to it hoping for guidance. Aw kama qaal.