

SURA FATIHAH

The Opening Chapter of the Holy Qur-an

BY

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All submission (praise and thanksgiving) is for *Allah* —the Creator and Maintainer of the world; the Beneficent (in giving free gifts); the Most Merciful (in giving manifold rewards for every good action). The Owner of the time of requital. Thee do we serve and to Thee do we look for help (as the last resort). Guide us on the right path—the path of those who are blessed: not of those who have invited Thy wrath, and the misled.

What a wonderful piece of literary composition! What a miracle in language! Seven short verses only, but comprehensive enough to include the whole of the Qur-an, and called, for this reason, the Mother of the Book; few words, but each word equivalent to a volume, pregnant with truths to serve as our surest guides on all planes—physical, social, economical, intellectual, moral and spiritual.

At the very outset it speaks of *Allah*, the Name given to God by the Arabs, together with four other

Attributive Names which lead us to a belief in the existence of the Deity, based on intelligence and reason ; referring indeed even to quite recent discoveries of science which distinctly tend to promote such belief. These Names not only do away with all those Attributes of Divinity current in other religions, Attributes which are repugnant to reason and intelligence, but make of *Allah* our Guide and Model in the pursuits of everyday life. It is clear that if Some One is the Author of this beautiful and beneficent universe He is the One who should be followed by us in every way. In short, the chapter is a summary of the whole Qur-án. It gives us a code of life, a code wide enough to bring within its purview all that is necessary for human thought and action in the way of advancement. It presents a religious creed to which no one who has studied Nature and its phenomenon with care and observation can take exception ! To whatever creed or class we may belong, we need a code of life, and such a code, in its most perfect form, will be found in these verses.

Humanity could not make even the semblance of progress while it believed that the universe was a haphazard product, the result of mere chance. To-day we realize that the world was designed for our use and benefit, and it is our belief in such a design that urges us to research in its various avenues. But the very idea of design leads us to believe in the existence of a Designer, and next, in the fixed nature of the ways which He has adopted in working out His scheme. This would facilitate our task of research. The Qur-án has, when it is a case of essential verities, never left us

to the mercy of hypothesis or surmises, but gives cogent reasons to establish the validity of each. It comes, therefore, with strong arguments for the existence of the Designer, but shows us also that it is to our own interest to cultivate a belief in the Deity. The history of progress begins with our acceptance of the fact that there exist laws ruling everything in Nature. It is for us to discover these laws and through them achieve wonders in the way of progress. The very idea of law creates belief in the Law-Giver, and so, we cannot make any progress unless we believe in the existence of the Supreme Being.

The world has never been free from atheism. It is more the wrong conception of Divine Attributes than the existence of the Lord itself that gives birth to scepticism. We are asked to hold beliefs by some persuasions, the very acceptance of which is an insult to our intelligence, otherwise no one can take exception to the First Intelligent Cause who decidedly works in the universe all around. Nature exhibits some morals that appear to belong to an Intelligent Being ; we must look to the observance of these laws in the Universe, particularly those affecting our creation and sustenance. We would willingly follow them if they constitute a religion just as we follow the will of a person, out of gratitude, if we are under his obligation in some way. The Qur-án came with this Gospel, and it therefore serves as a real consolation to the secular church.

It, however, may be rightly asked that how can we follow in the ways of the Lord when we do not believe in His existence. Though Science in its initial stages

created an atheistic bent of mind, it has now taken a new turn. It is more an advocate of Divine existence than otherwise. The world has never been free from atheism, and though it had existed from all time, yet no sacred Book, until the coming of Islam, had tried to refute it. Buddhist literature makes no mention of the Deity. Other books, though devoted to Him, give no reasons to prove His existence. Therefore in these circumstances it was natural that scientific mind should have sown the seeds of atheism. It came to its full growth in the first half of the last century, but received a severe check when it became known that scientific research had begun to discover certain laws at work in nature. It was also observed that though these were apparently at conflict, yet, as often as not, they all served the one end. "Monism" was the name that was given to the phenomenon of harmony in the working of this heterogeneous mass. Further exploration revealed in nature Intellect, Power, Rule and Design, and ultimately the evolutionary principles at work in the Universe. This led men to believe in the existence of One Great Mind working behind the scene Who furthered the great Scheme. Thus the idea of God became established but in a most hazy manner, inasmuch as some were found to contend that these things could just as well be the inherent qualities of matter exhibiting themselves in the course of its development without the agency of any Mind. The Qur-án, however, dealt with the subject from an angle which made it impossible for any sceptic to honestly disbelieve in the Mind. The Book did not only lay down logical

premises and then deduce inferences wherewith to preach Divinity, since this method, scholarly and precise as it might be, would not suit every type of intellect; but it also spoke directly of God and referred to such phenomenon in nature as were too apparent to leave any doubt concerning Him. The Book adopted various ways of achieving this purpose, but I would speak here only of such things out of many, which also comprehend the above-mentioned verities as discovered by Science.

The Rule of Law obtaining in the world is repeatedly alluded to in the Book, and has been described in the clearest terms as a work of God. "Everything in heaven and in earth," the Book says, "submits to Him voluntarily and involuntarily."¹ No one can fail to observe that things in Nature are, as it were, bound to pursue a course prescribed for them by Some One Who has been styled *Allah* in the Qur-án. By way of illustration it refers to the mightiest things and every other luminary moving in the ethereal firmament as being bound with the chains of Law² as being unable to swerve an inch from the orbit of revolution allotted to them. Though moving very near to each other, they never come in each other's way. This, the Book says, is under the decree of the Lord Who is All-Mighty and All-Knowledge.³ The Book also defines the time when this Rule began. No sooner were the things necessary for their further development created, than the Law was at once ordained to guide them.⁴

1 The Holy Qur-án 3 : 82.

2 *Ibid* 36 : 38.

3 *Ibid* 36 : 38.

4 *Ibid* 25 : 1.

Evolution.—The Holy Qur-án, as I observed elsewhere, is the first book that draws our attention to the principle of Evolution at work in the creation of all things. There was nothing haphazard about it, any question of things coming into existence suddenly of their own accord, as it were, hardly arises. There was first a design; then arrangement of original things before their combination; next, they were put in the course which they had to follow through several stages of development till they reached the final goal. The Book also spoke of the various faculties reposed in the original ingredients, which were disclosed gradually in the course of Evolution. It established the working of a ground scheme under the ever-vigilant eye of its Maker, through thousands of years in some cases, in order to bring things to their final fruition. The Holy Book ascribed all this to the One Great God.¹

Monism.—The discovery of Monism had to wait for some fifty years before the idea of God dawned on men of science. It was the discovery of the mind working in Nature which, together with belief in Monism, established Monotheism. But the Qur-án spoke, at the same time, of the Great Designer, wherever it referred to Monism; which was declared to be a part of the scheme. The Book, for instance, announces that all that is in the heaven and the earth is subservient to man.² From the mightiest Sun³ down to the insignificant atom, everything is created to serve one main object: the service of man. How could this grand purpose be attained if there were more than one

¹ The Holy Qur-án 20 : 52 ; 80 : 19 ; 27-32. ² *Ibid* 45 ; 15.

³ *Ibid* 14 ; 23—33,

hand to work it out? Not even the imagination of all the poets could depict or suggest harmony in the ancient deities. The divinities in Greek or Indian mythology had always some apple of discord to set them by the ears. Again, the Book refers to various other phenomena in Nature that work apart from each other in different spheres which nevertheless converge to the same one end—the service of man. In chapter 2, verse 146, it cites the coming of the rain, which helps us in the production of crops, and traces its origin from the very beginning when the heavens and the earth were created. The latter was made to stand on its axis at a certain angle, and this caused the alternation of day and night. From the torrid regions of the Earth water evaporated upwards, and when cold winds came to occupy the vacuum thus made, the vapours became condensed into clouds which were spread about by the blowing of the winds. These clouds came in the form of rain to fertilize the earth everywhere. The same blowing of winds, on the other hand, helped the navigation on the sea, which, too, produced its treasures for our profit. Thus we find several laws working in spheres far distant from each other to achieve these results. The laws often conflict in their functions, but for all that they are tending to the same end. This is the conclusion as stated in verse 163: “Your God is one God—the Beneficent and the Merciful.” Thus Monism and oneness of design which should be spoken of as it were in one breath, establish Monotheism in unassailable manner.

The Book refers to complementary and supple-

mentary relations existing between things in Nature, and makes mention of the purposes for which they have been created; their propriety, fitness and the perfection of their fashioning. These four features may be possessed by matter, but it cannot display them unless it comes under the operation of the Mind. Qur-án always speaks of them as instruments to work out some deliberate design. Let me refer to water again in this regard. By means of water our nourishment comes from Heaven, and that nourishment is one of its chief purposes. It travels thousands of miles towards a new sphere of action—the Earth which is ready to receive it in the most proper manner for the purpose. How can an inanimate thing become complementary to another thing from which it is far apart, while that other thing supplements the latter's shortcomings in producing the harvest, unless some mind intends that this should be so. The water comes in a most appropriate form, not in a huge volume, as in the case of floods when it would wash the Earth of all seeds and gravel which is so necessary for cultivation, but gently dropping, since moisture is the chief requisite for growth of verdure, and water cannot moisten clay unless it comes in the form of drops which trickle down gently in its recesses, and the Earth, on the other hand, cannot retain the moisture if its volume be ponderous.

Perfection.—Perfection is observable everywhere. Everything in Nature is free from defect and flaw; and contains nothing which is evil. Even man with all his inordinacy was born with a sinless nature. Nevertheless, perfection in things is mere chance. It is something

designed. Had things reached their final stage as a direct growth from their origin, one might perhaps think otherwise, but a most complicated process is to be observed in Nature before things attain perfection. No sooner do incipient specks emanate than they come under a long series of collocations specializing new ingredients at each stage of their journey to the goal. Innumerable things are blended together to secure perfection. It has already been shown that ingredients cannot combine with each other unless they come under the control of a Mind. The phenomenon presents a very Mighty and Wise Law extending to the limits of the Universe, which knows not only the whereabouts of the original ingredients, but also wields power over them to bring them to the required place so that they may mix with other ingredients. They combine in prescribed proportion and follow a given course. If such things may be taken as an index of the Mind of their Maker, He must be pure of evil and imperfection, and possess all that is good. Science tells us the same regarding the course which things pursue in order to become perfect. The Holy Book refers to these prominent features in the following verses :

Whatever is in the heaven and whatever is in the earth declares the *Tasbih* (glorification) of *Allah*, the King, the Pure, the Mighty, the Wise.¹

We also read the same in 59 : 1—24 and 51 : 1. On another occasion the Book says :

Whatever is in the heaven and whatever is in the earth

¹ The Holy Qur-ân 62 : 1.

declares the *Tasbih* (glorification) of *Allah* ; to Him belong the Kingdom and to Him is due all *Hamd* (praise) and He has power over all things.

The current translation of *Tasbih* and *Hamd* " glorification " and " praise " is not adequate, as the English words do not convey the real significance of the words. *Tasbih* means to declare that *Allah* is free from all evil and error ; *Hamd* that He possesses all that is good. No one can deny the truth of these verses as Science will confirm it word by word. They are sufficient to prove the working of the Mind on matter in creating the cosmos. The Book also refers to four other functions of the Mind observable in the creation of everything. They are *Takhliq*, *Taswiyah*, *Taqdir* and *Hidayat*, which again cannot adequately be rendered into English. I will, therefore, explain them. *Takhliq* is the infinitive of *Khalq* which generally means creation. But it signifies three other different functions, namely, the shaping, the combining and fixing the proportions into which incipient things have to combine in order to create new things. In other words, the work of creation synchronizes with these three things, though they, in a way, precede creation. Combination is the first thing in origination, when shape and proportion are designed. It creates something which in its turn combines with other created things. So the process of combination and creation continues until things take their designed shape at their final development on the earth. Combination is the first process in creation, coming, as it does, immediately after Emanation. But matter itself cannot combine unless it comes under the operation of

some Mind. Electricity, for instance, is created when a metal combines with an acid. Both the elements are in our possession, but they themselves cannot mix with each other unless we combine them for the purpose. How can electricity come into existence in the clouds if there is no Mind to combine the elements in the upper regions? Similarly, hydrogen and oxygen combined become water. We have got them both here, but they never combine with each other. How wonderful of the Qur-án to refer to the very action of *Khalq*, i.e., combination when speaking of the existence of God.

Taswiyah means the reposing of the various faculties in the ingredients of things which disclose them in the various stages of evolution through which they pass before their final development. *Taqdir* is the prescribing of laws which rule creation in the various stages.

Hidayat means guidance to things for observing the proportion in which they have to mix and the way they have to pursue in the evolutionary course from the beginning to the end. These four functions clearly prove the existence of Mind. They work in Nature. They cannot be the qualities of Matter. In short, the said four Names act as the best guide in building up life, so that it may excel physically, morally and spiritually.

Allah.—The word *Allah* is very eloquent in the whole religious literature of the world. The word has, from the very beginning, been used by the Arabs as a proper name signifying the Deity. Even in the Days of Ignorance, when they practised the worst type of

polytheism, the Arabs never applied this sacred Name to any other object of adoration. They worshipped different gods from time to time, but always reserved the name of *Allah* for the One, whom they regarded as a Spirit, presiding, as it were, over the Arab pantheon. In this respect the holy word differs from all like words in any other language that stand for God. They may be used as common names to be applied to God as well as to things, or persons other than God. For instance, *God* in English, *Khudawand* in Persian, *Sahibji* in Panjabi, *Phia* in Burmese, etc., etc., are often used for God, but they also denote various objects of adoration, as well as men of rank and position, but *Allah* is a species of proper name. It may be taken as meaningless in itself, as some grammarians hold, but like other proper names, it possesses certain Attributes. These verses speak of four, but their significance brings within their scope the other 96 Attributes given in the Qur-án. It should not, however, be forgotten that this sacred list in the Qur-án is in no sense exhaustive. The Lord possesses many other qualities that stand far beyond number and imagination. These hundred Names are such as can be read in the pages of Nature. We can perceive them and, to a certain extent, imitate them. In this sense we have been spoken of as prototypes of God and we have been asked to assume His colours and imbue ourselves with the Divine character, otherwise even the working of these Qur-ánic Names baffles our ingenuity. Take an instance. *Al-Musawwir*, The Fashioner, is one of His Attributes. We also fashion things in our small way,

but can we understand, even dimly, His workmanship in fashioning the various things in their embryonic condition ?

My surprise knows no bounds when I think of the Divine Economy in the selection of these Names for our contemplation. Not only do they serve the purpose of theology, but they are comprehensive enough to bring within their scope all that is needed to guide us through all conceivable avenues of human activity, and perfect our civilization. They are our guide in mundane affairs, in ethics, in economics, in morals and in spiritualities.

Whatever branch of life we may enter upon, we find in these Names the surest of guidance. We may entertain any belief or belong to any persuasion we cannot dispense with good character and actions. We therefore must receive from the Muslim formula of faith our inspiration for them. We must keep *Allah*—God in the *Qur-án*—always before our eyes. We should remember His Attributes as given in the *Qur-án* through our actions. For this reason we find hardly any page in the Book that does not make mention of the Lord.

There is, however, another reason for it. We have been declared in the *Qur-án* as the Vice gerent of God on the earth. Nature discloses the best of civilization. If it is the work of God we can as well command the highest progress if we represent Him in a proper manner. But how can we do so unless we appear in His colours ? The Holy Book, therefore, declares it to

be our religion. This also explains why the Book insists upon our belief in the Oneness of God. We cannot serve two masters nor act as lieutenant of the two Rulers. Besides, if the perfection of our character lies in our imitation of God's Attributes, how can we afford to be polytheist? We, no doubt, have passed the days of ignorance when we used to bow down before such effigies as we made with our own hands but the worst type of polytheism according to Qur-ánic teachings lies in obeying our low behests. They lead us to do what is contrary to the requirements of these Excellent Names. How can we win favour with the Lord with such tendencies? If Divine forgiveness depends on our repentance from misdeeds—the fruits of polytheism as explained here—there, then, its follower cannot claim it. The Book asks us to approach our Lord through these Names, which means that we cannot obtain any audience with Him if our actions deviate from the requirements of the Names. But in doing so, we shall be doing all that is needed to perfect our progress. What a wonderful arduous task has the Book come to perform? It comes to give us a religion, but it makes our progress to be our religion. It asks us to worship God, but it proposes that we would adore Him by following such of His Names as will perfect our civilization. Let the Moralists on one side and the people of culture and progress on the other contemplate on these Qur-ánic Names, and see if they can find a better code of life.

The Book properly calls these Attributes Excellent

Names, thus negating the association of God with any form of evil. It is a blasphemy even to imagine that 'God' is the author of evil. Evil is born when we abuse a thing which is meant for good. Evil is the misapplication of things that are really good. Similarly every Attribute that the Holy Book ascribes to God, can create evil if misused. For instance, we read of God as the Possessor of love. But love has got its wicked side too, if we yield to the dictates of lust. God is Merciful. But mercy becomes murder, in the words of Shakespeare, when we forgive those who kill others. He is the All-Giver. But His blessings will create laziness and sloth, if they are showered undeservedly, and the same may be said concerning other Attributes. It reminds me of Nietzsche's Superman. According to him he who subjects others to his will and knows how to make others do what he wants, is the Superman. The conception is perhaps a beautiful one, but it suggests the idea of arrogance and self-will. A person may have a wrong angle of vision and so cause immense harm to society. Moreover, the philosopher's definition of 'Superman' is not exhaustive. We require other things to perfect our character. We find two Names in the Qur-ánic list of Divine Attributes which satisfy the best aspects of the Superman theory. They are *Al-Qahhár*¹ and *Al-Jabbár*.² Both the words have the

¹ The Holy Qur-án 7 : 39 ; 13 : 16 ; 36 : 85 ; 39 : 4.

² *Ibid* 59 : 23.

same meaning but, with different shades. The Attributes signify a person who can bring others to subjection and compel them to do what he wishes. But it *must be for the good of the persons so compelled, which idea is wanting in the Superman conception.* But these are only two Attributes of the Qur-ánic Superman. There are 98 others. Islam has taken another precaution in the use of these Names. The prefix *Al* is always used before them in Muslim literature. *Al*, of course, is the definite article in Arabic, but in the case of the Attributes it suggests that they are to be taken in the best form.