

Suratul Fatiha, The Chapter Of The Opening

1:1-5

(١) بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

(٢) الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِیْنَ

(٣) الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

(٤) مٰلِكِ یَوْمِ الدِّیْنِ

(٥) اِیَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَاِیَّاكَ نَسْتَعِیْنُ

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful (1).

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds (2).

The Beneficent the Merciful (3).

The Master of the Day of Judgement (4).

Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help (5).

Commentary

Verse 1

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

People often take the name of one of their great and powerful personalities at the time of doing or beginning a work. By this association, it is believed, the work would achieve success, greatness and blessings; or that it would be a memorial to keep the named one's memory alive for ever.

This is also observed in naming a child, a project, a house or an association – they give it the name of a deeply loved or highly respected person, so that his name would continue in this form; for example, a man names his son after his father, in order to perpetuate the father's memory.

This verse runs on the same line. Allah began His speech with His Own name – Great is His name – so that the ideas taught in this chapter be stamped by, and associated with it. Also, it teaches a lesson to mankind, showing them the perfect manner of starting all their talks and actions; it guides them to put the stamp of the divine name on all their activities; doing every work for the sake of Allah, associating it with His good names and attributes.

In this way that action would neither be rendered null and void, nor remain incomplete; it has been started in the name of Allah, and negation and annihilation cannot reach that sacred name.

Allah has declared variously in the Qur'an that what is not for His Person must perish, is in vain; He will proceed to the deeds not done for His sake and shall render them as scattered floating dust; He shall forfeit what they have done and shall nullify their deeds; and that nothing shall remain except His honoured Person.

Therefore, what is done for the sake of Allah and performed in His name, shall continue and will not perish. Everything, every work and every affair shall have its share of eternity – as much as it is related to Allah. It is this reality that has been hinted at in the universally accepted tradition of the Prophet: "Every important affair, not begun with the name of Allah, shall remain incomplete. . ." The word *al-abtar* (الأبتار = translated here as "incomplete") means a thing whose end is cut off, an animal whose tail is severed.

The preposition "bi" (بِ = in, with), in the phrase "In the name of Allah", is related to an implied verb, "I begin". This verse, at this particular place, begins the speech which is a single action; this singleness comes from the singleness of its meaning; that is, the meaning intended to be conveyed, the aim and

purpose of the speech.

Allah has mentioned the purpose for which His speech –the whole Qur'an – has been revealed:

. . . indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety. . . (5:15 –16).

There are other verses which show that the aim with which the Book – the speech of Allah – has been sent down is the guidance of the people.

Therefore, the full import of the sentence would be as follows: The guidance, total guidance is begun with the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; He is Allah, Whom the servants return to; He is Beneficent, Who has opened the way of His All-encompassing mercy for believers and disbelievers alike, the mercy which provides them with all that is necessary and good for their existence and life; He is Merciful, Who has reserved His special mercy for the believers, the mercy which ensures their happiness in the life hereafter and their nearness to their Lord. Allah has said:

. . . and My mercy encompasses all things; so I will ordain it (specially) for those who guard (against evil) and pay zakat, and those who believe in our signs (7:156).

This explanation has been written, putting this verse in the framework of the whole Qur'an, of which it is the first sentence.

Again, Allah has repeatedly mentioned “chapter” in His speech. For example:

Say: “Then bring a chapter like this. . . ”(10:38);

Say: “Then bring ten chapters like it, forged. . . ”(11:13);

And whenever a chapter is revealed. . . (9:86);

(This is) a chapter which We have revealed. . . (24:1).

It shows that Allah Himself has divided His speech in various parts, each part being called a chapter.

It naturally means that every chapter is a single unit in structure and in fullness of meaning; and that that unity is not found between various verses of a chapter or between one chapter and the other. It necessarily follows that the theme of every chapter is different from the other; every chapter is revealed with a certain aim in view, and when that aim is achieved the chapter comes to its end.

Therefore, the verse, “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful” coming at the beginning of every chapter, refers to the particular theme of that chapter.

Accordingly, this verse, at the beginning of this chapter of “The Opening”, refers also to the theme of this

chapter. It appears from its semantic flow that its purpose is to praise Allah and to pledge the believer's servitude (declaring that he worships only Allah and seeks help from Him only) and then to pray for divine guidance. This speech has been uttered by Allah, on behalf of His servant, so that the servant may learn how, by repeating these words, he may show his gratitude to, and servitude before, Allah.

This pledging of servitude is the important work which the servant of Allah intends to do; and which he begins in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. In this context, this verse would mean: In Thy name, I pledge my servitude to Thee.

In this first verse of this chapter, therefore, the preposition, "in", is related to the implied verb, "I begin"; and the aim is to perfect the sincere servitude by addressing the pledge to Allah Himself. Some people have said that the implied verb is "I seek help" (by); although this view is not objectionable, but "I begin" is more appropriate – the chapter explicitly seeks divine help, "and Thee do we beseech for help"; therefore, it is not necessary in the beginning.

"*al-Isim*" (الإسم = name) is the word that points to the named thing or person. It is derived from *as-simah* (السمة = sign, identifying mark) or *as-sumuww* (السّموم = height, eminence). In any case, it is the word by which an individual thing or person is spoken of or spoken to. Naturally, it is other than, and separate from, the named thing.

The following is a sample of the academic exercises so much loved by the ancients:

There is a name that means "the person himself seen in the light of an attribute"; such a name is not separate from the named person; it is the person himself. The word *al-Alim* (العالم = The Knower), one of the divine names, points to the Person of Allah as seen in the light of His attribute of Knowledge. At the same time, it refers to Allah Who cannot be known except by one or the other of His attributes.

Let us explain this matter in another way: "Name" points to the named person; likewise the personal traits and characteristics point to the holder of those traits and characteristics – in this way, we may say that the personal traits are the "names" of the person concerned. "Name", accordingly, can be of two kinds: in words, and in substance.

The direct name is of the second type, that is, the personal trait that points to its own subjects – for example, the "Knowledge" that points to Allah, the holder of the knowledge. And the word "the Knower" is in reality an indirect name – it points to the direct name, that is, the attribute of knowledge, which in its turn directly points to its holder, that is, Allah. "Knowledge" is, thus, the name of Allah, and "the Knower" is "the name of the name".

The above was the result of the academic analysis (or should we say, mental luxury!) mentioned earlier; but such things should not be imposed on language and literature. "Name", according to the "plain Arabic language", means what we have written earlier. There was a lot of controversy going on among the theologians of the early centuries of Islam: whether the name was separate from the named person

or not.

Such unnecessary polemics is out of place at present times; it is self-evident that “name” and “named” are two things, and not one. We should not waste time and energy in quoting the ancients' arguments and counter-arguments, and in judging who was right.

“Allah” (الله = the divine name) was originally *al-llah*; the “l” in the middle was omitted because of frequent use. *Al-llah* (الاله) is derived from *alaha* (أله = he worshipped) or from *aliha* or *waliha* (أله or وَله = he was bewildered).

It is on paradigm of *al-fi'al* (الفعال) on meaning of *al-maf'ul* (المفعول = object-noun); for example, *al-kitab* (الكتاب) means *al-maktub* (المكتوب = the written); likewise *al-llah* means *al-Ma'lah* (المألوه) that is the One who is worshipped, or the One about whom minds are bewildered.

Quite clearly, it has become the proper name of God. It was commonly used in this meaning in Arabic long before the Qur'an was revealed. The fact that even pre-Islamic Arabs used this name for God, may be inferred from the following verses:

And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: `Allah`. . . (43:87).

. . . and they say: “This for Allah”-so they assert – “and this is for our associates”. . . (6: 136).

Other divine names may be used as adjectives for this name; for example, “the Beneficent and the Merciful Allah”; also, this name is used as subject of the verbs derived from other divine names; for example, “Allah knew”, “Allah had mercy”, “Allah gave sustenance” etc. But the word, “Allah”, is never used as adjective to any other name, nor is the verb derived from it used to describe other names. It is a clear proof that it is the proper name of God.

The divine existence, inasmuch as Allah is the God of everything, presupposes that He should have all the attributes of perfection; and, as a result, this name points to all perfect attributes. That is why it is said that the name, “Allah”, means “the Person Who is the Essential Being, and Who encompasses all the attributes of perfection”. But the fact is that it is the proper name of God and no other meaning (except that related to worship or bewilderment) has been taken into consideration here.

“*ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*” (الرحمن الرحيم = The Beneficent, the Merciful) are two adjectives derived from *ar-rahmah* (الرحمة = mercy) .

When you see someone suffering from a deficiency which he cannot remove by himself, the reaction which you experience and which tells you to provide him with what he needs in order to make up his deficiency, is called mercy. Ultimately, mercy means giving and bestowing to fulfill other's need. It is this latter meaning in which this attribute is used for Allah.

“*ar-Rahman*” (الرحمن) is on a paradigm which is used for magnification and exaggeration. “*ar-*

Rahīm (الرحيم) is a paradigm of *as-Sifatu 'l-mushabbahah* (الصِّفَةُ الْمُشَبَّهَةُ = perpetual adjective, inseparable attribute). Therefore, “*ar-Rahman*” (translated here as “the Beneficent”) relates to that all-encompassing mercy that is bestowed upon the believers and the unbelievers alike. It is used in the Qur'an, mostly in this meaning. Allah says:

The Beneficent (God) is ***firm in power*** (20: 5);

Say: “As for him who remains in error, the Beneficent (God) will surely prolong his length of days. . . (19:75).

“*ar-Rahīm*” (translated here as “the Merciful”), on the other hand, is more appropriate for that mercy which shall remain for ever, the perpetual inexhaustible mercy that shall be bestowed on the believers in the life hereafter. Allah says:

. . . and ***He is Merciful to the believers (33:43);***

Surely to them (i.e., the believers) ***He is Compassionate, Merciful (9:117).***

That is why it is said that the mercy of “*ar-Rahman*” is common for the believers and the unbelievers, and that of “*ar-Rahīm*” is reserved for the believers.

Verse 2

All praise is due to Allah

It has been said that “*al-hamd*” (الحمد) is to praise someone for a good acquired by his own intention, “*al-madh*” (المَدْح = also translated as praise) is more general – it is used to praise even that good which someone is given without his will and power.

If you praise someone for his benevolence, you may use either word – *al-hamd* or *al-madh* but if you want to praise a pearl for its lustre, you may use the verbal-*madh*, but not *al-hamd* because the pearl has not acquired that lustre by its own will and power. “*al*” (الْ = translated here as “all”) in “*al-hamd*” denotes either species or praise, or each and every praise. The end-result is the same in either case; that is why it has been translated here as “all”. Allah says:

That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of every thing (40:62).

Whatever there is, is created by Allah. Again He says:

. . . ***Who made good everything that He has created (32: 7).***

Everything is good because it has been created by Allah and is attributed to Him.

In other words, a thing becomes good because it is created by Allah; and everything created by Him is

good. Every creature is good and beautiful because Allah has made it so; and every good and beautiful thing is created by Allah, attributed to Him. Allah says:

He is Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all) (39:4);

And the faces are humbled before the Living, the Self-subsistent God . . . (20:111).

In other words, He has created the creatures by His own knowledge, power and will, and not because He was compelled by someone else to do so. Therefore, everything is His own good work, done by His own will.

The above discourse was about Allah's action. Coming to His names, He has said:

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god; His are the very best names (20:8) ;

And Allah's are the best names; therefore call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names (7:180).

It is clear that Allah is good in His names and good in His actions; and that every good and beauty emanates from Him.

Therefore, Allah is praised for His good names as He is praised for His good actions. Every praise, uttered by any speaker for any good deed is in reality addressed to Allah only; because every good (which is the object of praise) emanates from Him only. In short, to Him belongs the species of the praise and all and every praise.

The verse: "Thee do we worship", shows that the whole chapter is revealed on behalf of man. Allah teaches him in this chapter how to praise his Lord and how to show his allegiance to, and humility towards, Him. And the phrase, "All praise is due to Allah", further strengthens this inference, as will be seen in the next paragraph.

The praise means to attribute, to ascribe; and Allah has declared that He is above all that His servants ascribe to Him. He has said:

Hallowed be Allah (for freedom) from what they ascribe, except the servants of Allah, freed (from sins) (37:159 -160).

This declaration is general and unconditional; and it is further proved by the fact that not a single verse in the Qur'an ascribes the action of "praise" to anyone except Allah and some of the prophets (who were doubtlessly freed from sins).

Allah addresses Nuh (Noah -a.s.) in these words:

. . . Say: "All praise is due to Allah who delivered us from the unjust people" (23:28).

And He quotes Ibrahim (Abraham –a.s.) as saying:

“Praise be to Allah, Who gave me in old age Isma’il and Ishaq . . .” (14:39).

Also, He told His Prophet, Muhammad (s.a.w.a.), in several places,

And say: “Praise be to Allah. . . “ (27:93).

Further, he says about Dawūd and Sulayman (peace be on both of them):

. . . and they both said: “Praise be to Allah. . . “ (27:15).

Another exception is of the people of the Paradise –and they also are freed from spite and rancour as well as from vain and sinful words:

. . . and the last of their cry shall be: “Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds” (10:10).

As for other creatures, the Qur’an never says that they “praise” Allah – they always “glorify Allah with His praise”. Allah says:

. . . and the angels declare His glory with the praise of their Lord . . . (42:5);

and the thunder declares His glory with His praise . . . (13:13);

and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise . . . (17:44).

In all these verses “praise” is preceded by glorifying; rather “glorifying” is the main verb and “with praise” is only a clause, attached to it. None except Allah may comprehend the beauty and perfection of His work, nor can anyone else understand the beauty and perfection of His names and attributes. Allah says:

. . . they do not comprehend Him in knowledge . . . (20 :110).

In this background, if they were to praise Him it would mean that they had comprehended Him in their knowledge; in other words, Allah would be surrounded by their limited understanding, confined within the boundary of their comprehension. Therefore, they were careful enough to first declare His glory from all the limits of their comprehension, before starting His praise. Allah says:

. . .surely Allah knows and you do not know (16:74).

So far as His purified servants are concerned, He treats their utterance of praise as though He Himself has said it, because they are free from sins and defects.

From the above discourse, it becomes crystal-clear what the good manner of servitude demands: The servant should praise his Lord in exactly the same words the Lord Himself has chosen for Himself; no

deviation from it would be tolerable, as the Prophet has said in an universally accepted tradition; “I do not enumerate Thy praise; Thou art as Thou Thyself hast praised Thyself . . .”

Therefore, the divine word, “All praise is due to Allah”, is a sort of a training to the servant – a training without which he could not know how to declare the praise of Allah.

Verses 2,3 & 4

the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgement

“*ar-Rabb*” (الرَّبُّ) is the Master Who manages the affairs of His servant. The word, thus, connotes the idea of ownership. Ownership (in our social structure) is a special relationship of one thing with another – a relationship that allows the owner to do with the owned thing as he wishes.

When we say, “This thing belongs to us”, it shows that it has a special relationship with us that allows us to do with it as we wish; had it not been for this relationship, we would not have had this authority over it.

In this social context, it is an idea which the society has laid down but which has no existence outside imagination. This idea is derived from another real and positive concept, which too is called “ownership”:

Our limbs and faculties, like the sight, the hearing, the hands and the feet, belong to us – they exist because of our own existence, they have no independent existence, they depend on us for their existence and continuity, and we use them as we like. This is the real ownership.

The ownership that may be attributed to Allah is the real one, and not that which is based on subjective outlook. Obviously the real ownership cannot be disjoined from management of the affairs of the owned thing.

The owned thing depends on the owner in its existence, as well as in all affairs related to its existence. Allah is “*ar-Rabb*” “the Lord of everything because the Lord is the owner who manages the affairs of, and looks after, the owned thing – and only Allah has this attribute.

“*al-'Alam*” (العالمين) is the plural of *al-'alam* (العالم = the world) which literally means, “what one is known with”. This paradigm is used for “instrument”, like *al-qalab* (القالب = the mold, the form), *al-khatam* (الخاتم = the seal, the instrument of sealing), and *at-tabai'* (الطابع = the stamp, the impress).

The word *al-'Alam* is used for the universe – the whole creation taken together. Also it is used for each genes or species taken separately, for example, the inorganic world, the vegetable world, the animal world, the human world.

It is also used for a class of a species, like the Arab world, the African world etc. This last meaning is more appropriate in the context of these verses: The verses that enumerate the good names of Allah until they come to “the Master of the Day of Judgement”. The judgement is reserved for mankind alone

or together with the jinn.

Therefore, the “worlds” should refer to the worlds of the human beings and the jinn, that is, their various groups. The word *al'alamīn* (the worlds) has been used in this sense in other Qur'anic verses too. Allah says:

...and has chosen you above the women of the worlds (3:42) ;

...so that he may be a Warner to the worlds (25:1);

What! do you commit an indecency which any one in the worlds has not done before you (7:80).

“The Master of the Day of Judgement”: We have explained above the meaning of ownership, that is, mastership. The word “*al-malik*” (المالك) is derived from *al-milk* (الملك = possession, to possess).

Some reciters have read this word as “*al-malik*” (المالك = the sovereign, the king); it is derived from *al-mulk* (المُلك = country; kingdom). The king is the one who has the authority to manage his nation's affairs; nevertheless he does not own the nation or the country. In other words, he holds the authority for management and administration.

The reciters have given the reasons for their preference of either recitation. But the fact remains that Allah is the Master as well as the King, and both words are equally correct, so far as the divine authority is concerned. Looking at it from linguistic point of view, the word, “King” is generally used in context of time and period.

It is said, “The King of that time”; but they do not say “the master of that time”, as it would be stretching the meaning too far. In this verse, Allah has used this word in reference to a certain “day”; therefore, linguistically, it would be more proper to say, “The King of the Day of Judgement”. Moreover, Allah has used the word, “Kingdom” in context of the same day in other verse:

To whom belongs the kingdom of this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all) (40:16).

Traditions

Ar-Rida (a.s.) said in explanation of the divine words: ***In the name of Allah:*** “It means: 'I mark my soul with one of the marks of Allah', and it is (His) worship.” He was asked: “What is the 'mark'?” He said; “The brand.” (‘*Uyḡnu ‘l-akhbar* and *Ma‘ani ‘l-akhbar*).

The author says: This meaning emanates from the explanation given earlier that the preposition, “in”, herein connotes beginning. As the servant marks his worship with the name of Allah, he brands his soul – real doer of the worship – with one of the divine marks.

It is narrated in *at-Tahdhīb* from as-Sadiq (a.s.), and in ‘*Uyḡnu ‘l-akhbar* and *at-Tafsīr* of al-‘Ayyashi

from ar-Rida (a.s.) that this verse “is nearer to the Greatest name of Allah than the iris of the eye is from its white”.

The author says: This tradition will be explained when we shall talk about the Greatest name.

Amiru 'l-mu'minīn (a.s.) said that (this verse) is from the chapter of The Opening; and verily the Apostle of Allah used to recite it and count it as one of its verses, and he used to say, “The Opening of the Book is ‘the seven oft-repeated’ (verses)”. (*‘Uyūnu 'l-akhbar*)

The author says: This matter has also been narrated by the Sunni narrators. ad-Dar-qutnī narrates from Abū Hurayrah that he said: “The Apostle of Allah said: When you recite (the chapter of) The Praise (i.e., The Opening), you shall recite, ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***, because it is the source of the Book and (is) the seven oft-repeated (verses), and, ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*** is one of its verses.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “What have they done? May Allah destroy them! They proceeded to the greatest verse of the Book of Allah, and thought that it would be an innovation (unlawful act) if they recited it loudly!” (al-Khisal)

al-Baqir (a.s.) said: “They stole the most exalted verse of the Book of Allah, (that is) ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***. It should be recited at the start of every big or small work, so that it may be blessed.

The author says: There are numerous Tradition of this meaning coming from the Imams of *Ahlu 'l-bayt* (a.s.). All of them prove that the verse (***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***) is a part of every chapter, except the ninth (“Repentance”); and the Sunni Tradition also prove it

Anas (ibn Malik) said that the Apostle of Allah said: “Just now a chapter has been sent down to me.” Then he began reciting, ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.***” (*as-Sahih*, Muslim).

Abu Dawud narrates from Ibn ‘Abbas (and they say that its chain is “correct”) that he said: “Verily, the Apostle of Allah did not know the separation of a chapter (and in another narrative it is ‘end of a chapter’) until came down to him: ***In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***”

The author says: This matter has been narrated by Shi‘ite narrators also from al-Baqir (a.s.).

It is reported in *al-Kāfi*, *at-Tawhīd*, *Ma‘āni 'l-akhbar* and *at-Tafsīr* of al-‘Ayyashi that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, *inter alia*, in a tradition: “And Allah is God of everything, *ar-Rahman* (the Beneficent) for all His creations, *ar-Rahīm* (the Merciful) especially for the believers.”

as-Sadiq (a.s.) has said: “*ar-Rahman* (the Beneficent) is a special name with a general attribute; and *ar-Rahīm* (the Merciful) is a general name with a special attribute.”

The author says: The preceding Commentary may explain why the mercy of “the Beneficent” is general for the believer and the unbeliever alike, and why that of “the Merciful” is reserved for the believer only.

The description given in this tradition that “the Beneficent is a special name with a general attribute, and the Merciful is a general name with a special attribute”, perhaps this refers to the fact that the mercy of the Beneficent is limited to this world and is common for the whole creation; and that of the Merciful is common to this world and the hereafter but is reserved for the believer.

In other words, the mercy of the Beneficent is reserved for the creative blessings that are bestowed on believers and unbelievers alike; and that of the Merciful is common to the creative and legislative blessings (the latter opening the way to happiness and felicity) and is reserved for believers, because only the bounties bestowed upon them will last for ever, and the (good) end is for guarding (against evil) and for piety.

It is narrated in *Kashfu 'l-ghummah* that as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “A mule of my father was lost. He said: ‘If Allah brought it back to me, I would thank Him with praises He would be pleased with.’” Shortly afterwards, it was brought before him with its saddle and rein (intact).

When he sat on it and arrayed his clothes, he raised his head towards heaven and said: ‘Praise be to Allah.’ He said nothing more. Then he said: “I did not omit, nor did I leave out, anything; I have declared that all praises are for Allah, Powerful and Great is He!; because there is no praise but it is included in this (formula).”

It is narrated in *‘Uyūnu ‘l-akhbar* that ‘Ali (a. s.) was asked about its explanation. He said: “Verily, Allah has explained to His servants broadly some of His bounties on them, as they cannot know all His bounties in detail – they are beyond enumeration and description. Therefore, He said: Say: ‘All praise is for Allah on what He has bestowed upon us.’”

The author says: The Imam points to the fact mentioned earlier that the praise, in this verse, is from the servant, and that Allah has revealed it to teach him the manners of servitude and worship.

From Philosophical Point Of View

Reason tells us that an effect, as well as all its characteristics and affairs, depend on its cause; whatever perfection it may be having, is a shadow of the cause. If beauty or goodness has any existence, then its perfect and independent entity is for Allah only, as He is the Cause of all causes.

The praise and thank is addressed, in reality, to the cause which creates the perfection and excellence referred to. As every perfection is caused by Allah, every praise and thank, in reality, is addressed to Allah. Therefore, all praise is for, and due to Allah.

Verse 5

Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help

“*al- Abd*” (العبد) means slave, a human being who is owned. In its abstract sense, it is applied to other intellectual beings also, as the words of Allah show:

There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Beneficent God as (“*abdan*” عبداً = a slave) (19:93).

In modern usage, it is commonly translated as 'servant.' “*al -’Ibadah* “ (العبادة = to serve, to worship, to obey) is derived from this word. Its inflexion and meaning changes according to the context. al-Jawhari has written in his dictionary, *as-Şihah*, that “the basis of *al-’ubudiyah* (العبودية = bondage, servitude) is “*al-khudu’* (الخشوع) submission.”

But this explanation is not of the word; it only shows a concomitant quality of its meaning; because *al-khudu’* is used with the preposition “*li*” (لِ), and *al-’ibadah* is used without any preposition. 1

When a servant of Allah worships Him, he stands before the Lord as a slave stands before his master. That is why worship is diametrically opposed to arrogance and pride – but it is not so opposed to polytheism; after all, a slave may be jointly owned by two or more masters. Allah says:

Verily those who are arrogant to My worship shall soon enter Hell, disgraced (40:60).

. . . and he should not join anyone in the worship of his Lord (18:110).

It should be noted here that polytheism – joining someone in the worship of Allah – is a possibility, and that is why it has been made subject of this prohibition; none forbids an impossible thing. But arrogance does not exist with worship, and that is why the expression, “arrogant to my worship”, has been used in the first verse.

Servitude is effective in those affairs which are owned or controlled by the master; and not in other matters related to the slave, like his being son of his father, or having a height of so many centimetres – there is no submission or servitude in such things. But the mastership of Allah is not limited; His mastership is not shared by anyone else, nor is the servitude of the creatures divided between Allah and someone else.

A master has only limited authority over his servants – he may employ them to perform certain duties, but he cannot kill them or punish them unjustly. But Allah has total and all-encompassing authority over His servants; He does whatsoever He wills with them and about them. His ownership is unconditional and unlimited; and the servitude of His creatures is likewise unconditional and unlimited.

This “ownership” is true and exclusive on both sides: The Lord has the exclusive ownership, and the

slave has the exclusive servitude. The construction of the sentence, “Thee do we worship”, points to this exclusiveness – the object, “Thee”, has been placed before the verb, and worship is mentioned without any condition.

It has been explained earlier that the owned thing exists and subsists because of, and with, its owner. In this sense, it should not divert an onlooker's attention from its owner. You look at a house belonging to Zayd; if you are looking at it merely as a house, you may possibly lose sight of Zayd; but if you look at it from the angle that it is a property of Zayd, you cannot wean your thoughts from him.

The only true attribute of the universe is that it is created and owned by Allah. Nothing in the creation can hide the divine presence, nor should looking at these things make one forgetful of Allah. He is ever present, as He has said:

Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that he is a witness over all things? Now surely they are in doubt as to the meeting of their Lord; now surely He encompasses all things (41:53-54).

The true worship, therefore, is that in which the worshipped and the worshipper both are present. Allah should be worshipped as the One who is present before the worshipper – and that is why the third person of the preceding verses has been changed to the second person in this verse, “Thee do we worship”.

The worshipper should be present before his Lord, not only with his body but also with his soul; otherwise, the worship would be a body without soul, a form without life. Nor should he divide his attention between his Lord and someone (or something) else – neither openly, (as the idol worshippers do) – nor secretly (like the one whose mind is on something else while worshipping Allah, or the one who worships Allah because he wants to enter the Garden or to save himself from the hell).

All these diversions are various facets of polytheism, and Allah has forbidden it in His Book:

. . . therefore, worship Allah, being sincere to Him in religion (39:2).

Now, surely, sincere religion is for Allah (alone), and (as for) those who take guardians besides Him, (saying): We do not worship them save that they may make us nearer to Allah, surely Allah will judge between them in that in which they differ (39:3).

Worship shall be a true worship when it is done with pure intention, and this purity has been named as the presence of the worshipper. This will happen only when the attention of the Worshipper is not fixed on anyone other than Allah (otherwise, it would be polytheism); and when his aim of worship is not any other hope or fear like that of the paradise or the hell (otherwise, the worship would not be purely for Allah).

Moreover, he should not be concerned with his own self, as it would tantamount to egotism and arrogance, completely opposite of submission and servitude. Probably the plural pronoun – “we” worship

– points to this fact; it negates the individuality of the worshipper as he includes himself in a multitude of people; it removes egotism, creates humility, and effaces the tendency of self-importance.

The declaration of one's servitude with the words, "Thee do we worship", is free from all defects, so far as its meaning and purity are concerned. Yet, as the servant describes the worship as his own act, it could create an impression that he thought to be independent in existence, power and will, while in fact he is only a slave and slave owns nothing.

The second sentence, "and Thee do we beseech for help", removes this possible misunderstanding. It means: "We ascribe the worship to ourselves and make this claim only with Thy help; we are never independent of Thee.

In other words, the complete verse, "Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help", gives a single meaning, and that is "worship with purity of intention". Probably, that is why both sentences have the same style; otherwise, it could be said, 'Thee do we worship; help us and guide us . . .' The style has been changed in the next verse, "guide us . . ." and its reason will be explained later.

The above-given explanation makes it clear why the pronouns in this verse have been changed from the third to the second person; why the restrictive device of putting the object ("Thee") before the verb has been chosen; why the worship, in "do we worship", is used without any condition; why worshipper includes others with him in this declaration of allegiance and worship; why the second sentence is needed after the first; and why both have the same construction and style.

The scholars have written other fine points about this verse; the reader is advised to refer to their books for this purpose; Allah is the creditor whose debt can never be repaid.

1. This argument seems inconclusive. If two words are synonymous, it is not necessary for them to have the same preposition, al-Mawla (المولى) and al-awla (الأولى) have the same meaning – guardian, master, but the former is used without a preposition while the latter is followed by the preposition "bi" (بِ = for, with, etc.)

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