

Fast 13: Prayer — Significance of reciting *Surah Fatiha*

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١﴾

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

Master of the day of Recompense.

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٣﴾

You do we serve and You do we beseech for help.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٤﴾

Guide us on the right path,

إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٥﴾

The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours,

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴿٦﴾

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

- The opening chapter of the Holy Quran, the *Fātiḥah*, is the most essential part of the Islamic prayer, being the only portion of the Quran which must be repeated in every *rak'ah* of a prayer. It is the guiding principle of a Muslim's life in *ten ways* as below.
- **First**, we desire to give praise to God under all circumstances. Whatever the circumstances may be when a Muslim comes to prayer five times a day, good or bad, happy or unhappy, joyful or distressful, he is required to give praise to God Who brings about all these conditions. This attitude of mind keeps a person calm and steadfast, not going to either extreme of elation or dejection.
- **Second and third**, we remember that God is 'Lord' (*Rabb*) and, that too, of all the worlds. The word *Rabb* means the one who fosters things from the crudest state to that of highest perfection. This reminds us that whatever may happen to us, whether we receive a blessing or face disaster, we can still be sure that God is leading us to perfection through these different stages of life. The addition of the words "the worlds", meaning all worlds or all nations, opens up our minds and widens the sphere of our love and sympathy towards all human beings, to whatever nation or creed they may belong, and further to the whole of God's creation. The person who recognizes that God is the 'Nourisher to perfection' of all human beings cannot have hatred towards any of them.
- **Fourth**, we recall that God is "Beneficent" and "Merciful" — Loving. He has

provided us with everything necessary for our development, physical as well as moral and spiritual. The choice is ours whether we take advantage of those means and reach the goal, or reject or ignore them and fail to develop.

- **Fifth** and **sixth**, we bring to mind that God is Master of the Day of Recompense or Judgment. The word ‘Master’ indicates that God is not like a judge, who is bound to apply punishment for any sin. God is a Master, Who can forgive if He likes, however great the offence may be. The addition of the words “the Day of Recompense” is by way of reminder that man must face the consequences of his own deeds. There is no deed, good or bad, that is without a consequence, and if these consequences are not seen in this life, there is still a Day of Requital, even after death.
- **Seventh**, we say: “You do we serve”. We pledge to carry out God’s commands and these words give us the strength to do so.
- **Eighth**, we say: “You do we beseech for help”. This is the attitude of entire dependence on God and never despairing of success, because even if our efforts have failed, there is God to help us.
- **Ninth**, we come to the prayer: “Guide us on the right path”. This is the soul’s inner desire, of being led on and on to our goal. Islam requires a Muslim to be content with what he has, and his circumstances, but also to have the desire to move forward. He gives praise to God at every step, yet his is not a stationary condition; he is not the slave of his environment, but forever struggling and striving to master it.
- **Tenth**, we close with the words: “The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favours, not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.” This is the longing to:
 - Walk in the footsteps of those who have received Divine blessings of any kind, worldly or spiritual, and
 - The desire to be able to avoid the errors of those who have been the objects of God’s displeasure or those who have gone astray. These are the followers of the two opposite extremes, while those who have received the Divine favours are those who keep to the middle path — which is the straight path. One extreme in religion is to focus only on the outwards acts of worship while paying no attention to their spirit or purpose. The other extreme is to think that the outward acts are unnecessary and to give them up altogether.