

## ب, B

Bada' **بداء**: starting point, the beginning/start of something, the onset

Badiya **باديه**: desert or semi-arid environment

Badr **بدر**: Geographically, Badr is a highway station located 200 miles from Mecca and 80 miles from Medina, and it is the site of the early Muslims' first battle in defense of the creed. The Muslims numbered only 313 men who had to fight mostly on foot because they had only 2 horses and 70 camels. Their enemies, the polytheists of Quraish, numbered between 900 and one thousand men. But the Muslims were fired with holy zeal and enthusiasm, so much so that they defeated their enemies, killing seventy of them and wounding many others. Their losses were: 14 from among the Muhajir fighters and 8 from the Ansar. The battle started on the 17th of the month of Ramadan in 2 A.H., which coincided with March 16, 624 A.D.

Bagha **بغى**: transgressed, behaved in an aggressive or unfairly hostile way, oppressed

Baghidh **بغيض**: hated, contemptible, abhorred

Ba'is **بائس**: destitute, needy, indigent, distressed, wretch, miserable

Bakka'in or Bakka'un or Bakka'oon **بكاؤون**: weepers. These were the people who could not accompany the Prophet on his Tabuk campaign because they lacked the resources. They started to weep when they realized that they could not go.

Balagha or Balaaghah **بلاغة**: wise rhetoric, elocution, mastery of oratory and language

Baqi` or Baqee **بقيع**: the cemetery where some members of the Prophet's family and many sahaba are buried. It is located in the south-east side of Medina. The tomb of the Mother of the Faithful Khadija daughter of Khuwaylid, the Prophet's first wife and main supporter in spreading Islam, was also located there before it was demolished by Saudi authorities, and so was the grave of Hamzah, uncle and strong supporter of the Prophet. Only traces of both graves can now be seen at the Baqee'. A number of graves of other sahaba were gradually razed as well.

Bara'a or Baraa'ah براءة: dissociation, rejecting responsibility for; it also is one of the Chapters of the Holy Qur'an and it has another name: Surat at-Tahreem, Chapter of Prohibition (Ch. 9). It was revealed to ban non-Muslims from entering the Haram of the Ka`ba in Mecca up to a certain perimeter. It is the only Qur'anic chapter which does not start with the basmala.

Barak-Allah or Barakalla, Barakalah بارك الله: This is an expression which means "May the blessings of Allah (be upon/with you)." When a Muslim wants to thank another person, he uses different statements to express his thanks, appreciation and gratitude. One of them is to say "Baraka Allah."

Barakah or Baraka بركه: blessing, Divine Grace

Barzakh برزخ: barrier, separator, the place and time wherein the souls undergo a life of their own in the spiritual world till the Day of Judgment when each soul is re-outfitted with an eternal, indestructible, body, physical form or shape; see the Holy Qur'an, 23:100, 55:20 and 25:53.

Basira or Baseerah بصيره: (intellectual) vision, insight, circumspection, discernment

Basmala بسملة: the uttering of "Bismillahir-Ramanir-Raam" (In the Name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful); see also Bismillah... below. Basmala (or Bismillah, Arabic بسملة) is an Arabic language noun which is used as the collective name of the whole of the recurring Islamic phrase bismi-llahi ar-rahmani ar-rahim. This phrase constitutes the first verse of every "sura" (or chapter) of the Qur'an (except for the ninth sura), and is used in a number of contexts by Muslims. It is recited several times as part of Muslim daily prayers, and it is usually the first phrase in the preamble of the constitutions of Islamic countries.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم bismi-llahi ar-rahmani ar-rahimi

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful"

The word "basmala" itself was derived by a slightly unusual procedure in which the first four pronounced consonants of the phrase bismi-llahi... were taken as a quadri-literal consonantal root b-s-m-l (ب س م ل). This abstract consonantal root was used to derive the noun basmala, as well as related verb forms which mean "to recite the basmala". The practice of giving often-repeated phrases special names is paralleled by the phrase Allahu Akbar, which is referred to as the "Takbir تكبير" (also Ta'awwudh تعوذ etc.); and the method of coining a quadri-literal name from the consonants of such a phrase is paralleled by the name "Hamdala" for Alhamdulillah.

In the Qur'an, the phrase is usually numbered as the first verse of the first sura, but according to the view adopted by at-Tabari, it precedes the first verse. It occurs at the beginning of each subsequent sura of the Qur'an, except for the ninth sura (see, however, the discussion of the 8th and 9th chapters of the Qur'an at eighth sura), but is not numbered as a verse except, in the currently most common system, in the first sura (chapter).

The Basmala occurs twice in the 27th sura, at the beginning and in verse 30 (where it prefaces a letter from Sulayman (Prophet Solomon) to the Queen of Sheba, Balqees (or Balqis).

The Basmala has a special significance for Muslims, who are to begin each task after reciting the verse. It is often preceded by Ta'awwudh. In Arabic calligraphy, it is the most prevalent motif, more so even than the Shahada. The three definite nouns of the Basmala, Allah, ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim correspond to the first three of the traditional 99 Names of Allah in Islam. Both ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim are from the same trilateral root, rahm "to feel sympathy or pity". According to Lane, ar-rahman is more intensive, including in its objects the believer and the unbeliever, and may be rendered as "The Compassionate", while ar-rahim has for its peculiar object the believer, considered as expressive of a constant attribute, and may be rendered as "The Merciful".

In a commentary on the Basmala in his Tafsir at-Tabari writes: "The Messenger of Allah (ص) said that Jesus was handed by his mother Mary over to a school in order that he might be taught. [The teacher] said to him: 'Write "Bism (In the name of)".' And Jesus said to him: 'What is "Bism"?' The teacher said: 'I do not know.' Jesus said: 'The "Ba" is Baha'u'llah (the glory of Allah), the "Sin" is His Sana' (radiance), and the "Mim" is His Mamlakah (sovereignty).'"

The total value of the letters of "Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim" according to one Arabic system of numerology is 786. There are two methods of arranging the letters of the Arabic alphabet. One method is the most common alphabetical order (used for most ordinary purposes), beginning with the letters Alif ا, ba ب, ta ت, tha ث etc. The other method is known as the "Abjad nimerals' method" or ordinal method. In this method the letters are arranged in the following order:: Abjad, Hawwaz, Hutti, Kalaman, Sa'fas, Qarshat, Sakhaz, Zazagh; and each letter has an arithmetic value assigned to it from one to one thousand. (This arrangement was done, most probably in the 3rd century of Hijrah during the 'Abbasid period, following the practices of speakers of other Semitic languages such as Aramaic, Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldean etc.)

Taking into account the numeric values of all the letters of the Basmala, according to the Abjad order, the total is 786. In the Indian subcontinent the Abjad numerals have become quite popular. Some people, mostly in India and Pakistan, use 786 as a substitute for Bismillah ("In the name of Allah" or "In the name of God"). They write this number to avoid writing the name of God, or Qur'anic verses on ordinary papers, which can be subject to dirt or come in contact with unclean materials. This practice does not date from the time of Muhammad and is not universally accepted by Muslims.

The basmala, or the phrase bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, is one of the most oft-recited phrases in the life of every single observant Muslim. It occupies a key place in the Qur'an itself, for it is the only non-Qur'anic phrase that all copies of the Qur'an included, apparently as a 'marker' between the Suras. Numerous works have been written specifically about the basmala. In this response, a brief linguistic and grammatical explanation will be offered, followed by a discussion of the name ar-Rahman.

## The Basmala as Portrayed in Early and Medieval Islamic Sources

The first verse of the Qur'an has almost unanimously been portrayed as being Qur'an, 96:1, 'Recite in the name of your Lord who created.' From this, some derived that the status of a rudimentary basmala was established, as the 'name of your Lord' is invoked. In another early Meccan Sura, Noah is told to ride the Arc '...in the name of God' (Qur'an, 11:41). In yet another Meccan Sura, reputed to have been revealed after this one, Solomon writes a letter to the Queen of Sheba in which her advisors tell her, **"This (letter) is from Solomon, and it (says): In the name of God, the Rahman, the Rahim" (Qur'an, 27:30).**

The fact that the basmala in its present form was introduced to the Meccan Arabs by the Prophet is quite explicitly mentioned in many sources. One incident, recorded in some canonical works of hadith and the Sirah of Ibn Ishaq (d. 150/767), mentions that during the writing of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in 6 A.H., one of the emissaries of Mecca, Suhayl ibn Amr, refused to allow the Prophet to begin the treaty with the basmala. His reputed reason was, "As for this 'ar-Rahman', I do not know who He is, but rather, write as we are accustomed to write, 'In your name, O God! (bismik Allahumma).'"

There are quite a few prophetic traditions that expound upon the blessings of this phrase and when it should be said. It might also have served a more mundane role: Ibn Abbas is alleged to have said that the Prophet was not able to recognize the end of one Sura from the beginning of the next until the basmala was recited by Gabriel.

The basmala is the only phrase of the Qur'an that Sunni scholars have disagreed about: is it a verse of the Qur'an or not? There is agreement that it is a part of Qur'an, 27:30, where it is mentioned in Solomon's letter to Sheba, and there is also agreement that it does not form a part of Sura 9. But there was a disagreement about its status at the beginning of all other Suras, especially the first, al-Fatiha. This disagreement is found amongst the four canonical schools of law as well as the ten recitations (qira'at) of the Qur'an. Some of them opined that the basmala was a separate verse at the beginning of every Sura, others said it was part of the first verse. A third group claimed it was only a verse at the beginning of the al-Fatiha, while a fourth denied that it was a verse in any of these instances. And a fifth group posited that it was a verse by itself, not connected to any Sura, which had been placed there as a 'divider' to separate two consecutive Suras. This difference of opinion had a direct impact on certain rituals, such as whether one was obliged to recite the basmala out loud in every prayer or not.<sup>6</sup>

## A Grammatical Breakdown and Exegetical Explanation of the Basmala

The basmala consists of four words, the first of which has a prepositional letter attached to it. All of these words are nouns; no verbs or verbal nouns are present. The first letter of the basmala, the 'b-' is a prepositional letter (harf jar), thus causing the first word ('bism') to be in a genitive state. The preposition

b- has many uses, but over here appears to be for seeking help (istianah).<sup>7</sup> The word *ism* is the Arabic for 'noun'. Linguists differed whether it originated from *sumuw* (s-m-w), meaning 'to elevate', or from *wasam* (w-s-m), meaning 'to brandish'; the Basran school opted for the former, whilst the Kufan preferred the latter.

Due to the fact that the phrase *bism* is in a genitive state, it needs some actor (*amil*) to which it can be attached (*taalluq*). The Kufan school of grammar typically assumes that all missing actors must be verbs, as that is the basis of words for them. In contrast, the Basran school considers all missing actors to be nouns due to their position that nouns are the basis of words. The Kufans then split up amongst themselves in three specific issues regarding the *basmala*. Firstly: what was this missing verb? Was it, 'I recite,' or 'I begin,' or perhaps a verb that varied depending upon the action being done at that time? Secondly, what was the tense of the verb: was it a command or was it in present tense? In other words, is the recitor saying, 'I recite with the name of God', or is God saying 'I command you to recite with the name of God?' Thirdly, what was the position of this missing verb: before the 'bism' or after?

Most Kufans, as well as *az-Zamakhshari* in his *al-Kashshaf*, came to the conclusion that the verb is specific to the context of invoking the *basmala* (hence it can be used for any permissible act), that it was in the present tense (since the purpose of the *basmala* is to obtain God's blessings upon the recitor), and that the missing verb's place was after the 'bismi' (since it is more blessed to begin with the name of God, and since it reminded one that the purpose of doing any act was for God, and because it is a clear refutation of the pagans who would begin by saying 'In the name of al-Lat').

The Basrans, on the other hand, generally held that the missing noun was 'My recitation' (*qira'ati*), or 'My beginning' (*ibtida'i*), and that it was placed before the genitive. The question also arose: what does it mean seeking help from the 'name' (*ism*) of God? Specifically, the issue concerned the theological controversy over the implication of the Divine Names: are these Names God Himself, or do they belong to God, or originate from Him, or is the noun 'ism' superfluous (*za'id*) and only needed for emphasis? The Asharites, Mutazilites and Ahl al-Hadith (to name the more prominent groups) each had their own positions.

The next noun in the *basmala* is the divine name 'Allah'. This name raises a whole slew of questions, of which only a few will be dealt with here. There is no doubt that the name 'Allah' was the primary name of the Islamic divinity. The name appears more than 2,700 times in the Qur'anic text, and there is an overwhelming amount of evidence to show that this name was used for many centuries by the pagan Arabs to refer to a Supreme God – a god that even they, with their permissive idolatry, refused to draw or carve images of.

The linguistic meaning and origin of this name has always been a topic of much discussed in Muslim scholarship. Although a minority of Sunni theologians and linguists considered this name to be a proper name, devoid of any meaning, the majority of them considered it to be derived from some three letter root. Some suggested that it was a rare transmutation from *walaha*, which means 'to confound and

confuse', as if the nature of God ('Allah') confuses and befuddles the minds of all those who try to grasp or understand Him. Others suggested that it is from laha, which means 'to conceal and cover', since the true nature of God is concealed from all. However, the most prevalent opinion, amongst linguistics, theologians, and exegetes, is that the name is derived from alaha, which means 'to show servitude and worship'; hence God ("Allah") is the only Being that is worthy of servitude and worship.

Some Western Islamists have posited Aramaic, Syriac or Hebrew origins for this name; strong evidence to substantiate this claim, however, remains lacking.

To summarize before moving on, the first two words of the basmala translate as, 'My recitation is with the name of Allah' for the Basris, and as, 'With the name of Allah I recite...' for the Kufans.

This name (viz., 'Allah'), is then followed by two other nouns, ar-Rahman, and ar-Rahim. Both can be derived from the root r-h-m, which means 'to have mercy, to be compassionate.' Both utilize known and common morphological forms: falan for the first and fail for the second. Before translating the basmala, it is crucial to understand the grammatical role of these two nouns, as that will decidedly determine the understanding of the basmala. We shall discuss the alleged origins of 'ar-Rahman' in the next section.

Almost all classical works that I was able to reference (including works of theology, exegesis, and shuruh al-hadith) appear to understand these two nouns as adjectives of the first noun, viz., 'Allah'. Many books of grammatical analysis do not even mention any other opinion. If these two nouns are understood as being adjectives (i.e., nat), it will imply that both ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim describe and characterize God ('Allah'). So it is as if the basmala translates as (according to the Kufan understanding), "With the name of Allah, who is ever Merciful (ar-Rahman) and extremely Compassionate (ar-Rahim), I begin this recitation."

Numerous opinions are found in classical sources regarding the difference between these two names. Most scholars (but not all) are in agreement that the two names are not synonymous or even as efficacious as each other, but rather that ar-Rahman is more indicative of God's mercy than ar-Rahim. Some opine that ar-Rahman is indicative of God's mercy to believers and unbelievers in this world, and ar-Rahim is indicative of His special mercy to believers in both worlds. Yet another opinion is that ar-Rahman indicates that God's Mercy is an essential part of His character, whereas ar-Rahim indicates that God's actions are always merciful.

Many scholars have sought to understand the wisdom of this particular order of names. At-Tabari posited that the reason these three names are in this order is that the Arabs typically start off with the primary name and then with its descriptions. God's primary name is 'Allah', hence it was used here. And since ar-Rahman was more specific to God than ar-Rahim, it was given precedence to it.

So far we have considered both nouns to be adjectives, and this is by far the 'standard' opinion. There seems to be another opinion, rarely expressed, that considers these two nouns to be substitutes (badal). As a substitute, the basmala would translate as (according to the Basran opinion this time, for ease of

understanding), ‘My recitation begins with the name of Allah; my recitation begins with the name of ar-Rahman; my recitation begins with the name of ar-Rahim.’ The purpose of these reiterations would obviously not be to express three distinct deities but rather to express three of God’s 99 names. A modern theologian, Muhammad Abduh, who appeared to lean towards such an explanation, claimed that this reiteration was meant as a refutation of the Trinity of the Christians, who began their rites with ‘In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.’ By mentioning three of His Names, God intended to demonstrate to the Christians that even if He has many attributes, He is still One in His essence.

Some modern Islamists pose a third position, and that is that only the first of these two nouns is a substitute (*badal*), and the second is an adjective (*naʿ*) of it. If this understanding is taken, the *basmala* would translate as, ‘My recitation begins with the name of Allah, the merciful ar-Rahman.’ I was not able to find any scholar within the Muslim tradition who understood it in this manner. Additionally, since both ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim are placed after the first noun, in the same grammatical context, one would have to show why one of these nouns should be given a different grammatical role than the other, as this would be an awkward rendering of the Arabic expression.

If this third position is taken, then obviously the question arises as to why two names are emphasized (‘Allah’ and ‘ar-Rahman’), and what the relationship is between them. In order to do this, we need to first discuss the opinions regarding the origins of the name ‘ar-Rahman’.

## Origin of the Attribute ar-Rahman

The discussion regarding the origins of the name ar-Rahman is an ancient one. The Qur’an itself quite explicitly states that this name was unknown to the Quraysh (as in Qur’an, 25:60). Most scholars are of the opinion that ar-Rahman is a unique name of God, and so cannot be used to describe the creation, unlike most other Divine Names, including ar-Rahim. This is due to 17:110, where the two names ‘Allah’ and ‘ar-Rahman’ appear to be equivalent in sanctity.

There is also a tradition in the canonical works, a *hadith Qudsi*, in which God is reported as saying ‘I am ar-Rahman; I created the ties of kinship (*ar-Rahm*), and from it derived one of My Names.’ This was one of the primary evidences used by those who claimed that this name is derived from *r-h-m*. On the other hand, a number of early Islamic authorities, such as al-Mubarrad, considered ar-Rahman to have a Jewish origin. Quite a few authorities are on record as stating that this name was a name given to ‘ancients’ as well.

It is clear that the Qur’an itself considers the name ar-Rahman to be an ancient name. Apart from the reference in Solomon’s letter (already given), this name is used as the God of all previous nations in Qur’an, 43:45; Abraham beseeches God with it (Qur’an, 19:44); Aaron uses it to remind the Israelites of their God (Qur’an, 20:19); it appears on the tongue of an Israelite community (Qur’an, 36:15); and it appears on the tongue of Mary, mother of Jesus twice (in 19:18 and 19:26).

It is claimed by some that this name was a Meccan name that was later not emphasized as much, and perhaps even sidelined by later Muslims as a primary name of God. However, the name is mentioned in quite a few Medinan verses as well (for example, Qur'an, 2: 163, and 59:22). In addition, every single Sunni theologian who discussed the Divine Names considered the name 'ar-Rahman' as being one of those 99 names.

To conclude, as with many issues dealing with the academic study of religion, how one chooses to interpret the basmala has a lot to do with one's basic theological and historical premises. If one believes that Muhammad conjured up a new monotheistic system in order to unite the Arabs, then it is plausible to suggest that he might have wished to unite various factions of Arabia under the deities that they would be familiar with, hence 'Allah' for the Arabs of Hijaz and 'ar-Rahman' for the Arabs of Southern Arabia. And this is indeed the position of many modern Islamists.

But such a position does lead to other questions, such as: why did he only choose the name of the god of one faction of Arabia (Southern Arabia), and not other areas and provinces? And why was he so stubbornly opposed to all the Meccan (and Hijazite) pagan deities, allowing no compromise with those deities whatsoever? Also the question arises as to how the name of this obscure divinity reached him. The claim that Muhammad was reaching out to convert Arabs in Southern Yemen while he was still in the early stages of his career at Mecca presupposes that he was envisioning this new religion to be a dominant force in the farthest corners of Arabia, even while being persecuted and rejected in his own city.

“That ar-Rahman should have been the name of a single God in central and southern Arabia is in no way incompatible with the fact that, when adopted by Islam, it assumes a grammatical form of a word derived from the root rahm.”

Batil or Baatil باطل: false or falsehood, nullified, voided

Batsh بطش: Despotic behavior, tyranny

Batul or Batool بتول: ascetic. It is ascribed to Fatima (the Prophet's daughter) and Virgin Mary.

Bawadi بوادي: plural of Badiya

Bay'a or Bay'ah بيعة: oath of allegiance, pledge to a man of authority or prominence

Bayan بيان: Statement, account, declaration, explanation, clarification, announcement

Bayt al-Mal بيت المال: State Treasury in the Islamic State

Beed بيض: plural of أبيض abyad, white

Bid`a or Bid`ah بدعة: innovation, novelty, (in religion) heresy

Bigha' بغاء: prostitution

Bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ : This is a verse/statement from the Qur'an which is articulated before the recitation of the Qur'an. It is also recited before doing any daily activity, even when a husband starts making love to his wife, for love-making between legal spouses is as sacred as anything else can be, and it is rewardable by the Almighty, too, Who will surely punish those who permit themselves to have intercourse outside of the sacred limits of marriage unless they regret, repent and do good deeds to wipe out the bad ones.

Islam is not just a religion, it is a way of life, the most clean and the most fulfilling, one which brings happiness in both this life and in the Hereafter. The Basmala means: "In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful." In the Fatiha, the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an, the Basmala is a verse all by itself, whereas in all other chapters, with the exception of Bara'ah or Tawbah where it is not recited, it serves as an introduction to other verses. On pp. 39-40, Vol. 1, of his Tafsir, al-Qummi chronologically arranges the isnad of one particular statement made by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) and recounts the longest list of narrators we have ever come across.

The list of narrators ends with Abu Busayr, a well-known companion of this great Imam (ع), saying that he once asked Imam as-Sadiq (ع) about the exegesis of the Basmala. The Imam said the following: "The ب is derived from الله بهاء "baha-Allah," the Splendor of Allah; the س is derived from الله سناء "sanaa-Allah," the Majesty of Allah; the م is derived from الله ملك "mulk-Allah," the Kingdom of Allah; "Allah" is the God of everything; الرحمان is the One Who is Merciful to all His creation; الرحيم is the One Who singles out those who believe in Him to receive the greatest share of His mercy."

On p. 506 of Misbah al-Kaf'ami مصباح الكفعمي, the Messenger of Allah (ص) is quoted as saying that when a teacher, who teaches a child to recite the Holy Qur'an, tells the child to recite this Basmala, and when the child recites it, the Almighty will decree a clearance for the child, for his parents and for the teacher from hell, and that it is comprised of nineteen letters, the same number that corresponds to the number of the keepers of the gates of hell; therefore, whoever pronounces it, Allah will permit these letters to close the gates of hell against him.

Bi'tha بعثه: the beginning of the Prophet's mission, his call to Prophethood, which started during the month of Ramadan, 13 years before the hijra, which coincided in the year 610 A.D.

Burda برة: garment, gown

Busr بصر: partially ripe dates

Buhtan بهتان: falsehood, untruth

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