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Home > Questions on Jurisprudence > Chapter Two: Is The Basmala A Qur'anic Verse? Is It To Be
Recited In The Prayer? > Takbirat al-Ihram

Chapter Two: Is The Basmala A Qur'anic Verse? Is It To Be Recited In The Prayer?

The opinions of the Muslims who emphasize personal opinions (ahl al-ra'y) have differed on this. Malik and al-Awza`i have said that the verse is not a part of the Qur'an and have unanimously forbidden its recitation in the obligatory [prayers] whether it be at the beginning of 'surah' (a section of Holy Quran) al-Hamd, or, the 'surah' after it, or, whether it (the prayer) is recited loudly, or, silently. Yes, they have allowed it's recitation in the supererogatory (non-obligatory) prayers.

As for Abu Hanifa, al-Thawri and their followers, they recited it at the beginning of the mother of the Qur`an (surah al-fatiha); but, they made it compulsory to recite it silently even when the prayers are recited loudly. This shows their agreement with Malik and al-Awza`i; maybe it proves that since we do not know the reason for reciting it silently in the prayers recited loudly except if it (the basmala) is not a part of the mother of the book.

But, al-Shafi`i recited it (the basmala) loudly in the loud prayers, and in the silent prayers he recited it silently. He counted it as a verse in the opening [chapter] of the book. This is [also] the opinion of Ahmad b. Hanbal, Abu Thawr and Abu `Ubayd. Differing reports have been reported from al-Shafi`i as to whether it is a verse in every chapter except for surah al-Bara'a (chapter 9), or, whether it is not a verse except for the mother of the book. Both reports have been transmitted from him. But, the researchers amongst his companions have agreed that the basmala is a part of all the chapters. They have interpreted away the two sayings reported from their Imam, al-Shafi`i.

As for us, the Imami (Shi'i) community, we have agreed, in following the teachings of the Imams of guidance from the family of the Prophethood, that it is a complete verse in the sab' al-mathani (the seven most repeated verses) and of every chapter in the great Qur`an except for [the chapter of] Surah al-Bara'a (chapter 9) and that one who omits it intentionally in the prayer, his prayer becomes invalid whether it be an obligatory, or, recommended (non-obligatory) prayer.

[We have also agreed that] it is essential to recite it loudly when the prayer is offered loudly, and it is

recommended to recite it loudly in the silent prayers, and it is part of a verse of surah al-Naml (chapter 27). The textual proofs of our Imams in all of this are overwhelming and it's meaning successively transmitted .The contents are clear to refute their opposition to it (the basmala) like the saying of Imam Abu 'Abd Allah al-Sadiq, peace be upon him, "What is it with them? They depend on the greatest verse in the book of God, the Almighty, the most Glorious, and they claim it is an innovation if they declare `In the name of God the most merciful, the most beneficent' openly."

Our argument is based on the path of the masses, and its authentic traditions which are many:

First: What has been established from Ibn Jurayj from his father from Sa`id b. Jubayr from Ibn `Abbas on the saying of the most High: "We have given you the seven most repeated verses." He said: "The opening [chapter] of the book, in the name of God most beneficent, most compassionate; Praise be to the Lord of the Universe and he recited the chapter." Ibn Jurayj said: "I said to my father: `Did Sa'id tell you from Ibn `Abbas that he said: `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' is a verse?' He replied: `Yes." This hadith has been reported by al–Hakim in his al–Mustadrak and al–Dhahabi in his al–Talkhis; they have both declared that its chain of transmission (isnad) is intact.

Second: What has been correctly reported from Ibn `Abbas. He said: "When Gabriel used to come to the Prophet (S), and would recite `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' he would know that it was a chapter [to be revealed]."

Third: What has also been correctly reported from Ibn `Abbas who said: "The Prophet did not use to know the end of a chapter until `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' was revealed."

Fourth: What has also been correctly reported from him: "The Muslims did not know the end of a chapter until 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' was revealed. When 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' was revealed that the chapter had ended."

Fifth: What has been correctly reported from Umm Salama: She said: "The Prophet (S) used to recite `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent, Praise be to God the Lord of the Universe' to the end of the chapter, he would recite it word by word." It is also reported from Umm Salama by another chain that she said: "Indeed the Prophet of God (S) would recite in the prayer `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' and would count it as a verse. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe [would be] two verses, the most beneficent, most merciful, three verses, the master of the day of judgement, the fourth, You alone do we worship and from You alone we seek help, and he gathered five fingers."

Sixth: What has been correctly reported from Na'im al-Mijmar. He said: "I was behind Abu Hurayra, and he recited `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' that he recited the mother of the Qur'an until he reached 'and amongst those who have gone astray', and he said: `amin' and the people said: `amin' When he recited the greetings (salam) he said: `By Him in whose hand is my soul, I am portraying the prayer of the Prophet of God (S)."

Also, from Abu Hurayra who said: "The Prophet of God (S) would recite `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly in the prayer."

Seven: What has been correctly reported from Anas b. Malik: He said: "Mu`awiya led the prayer in Medina, he recited it loudly, and he recited in it `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' at the beginning of the mother of the Qur'an; but, he did not recite `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' for the sura after it until he completed that recitation. When he recited the salam, the Muhajirun and Ansar who had heard [the recitation] yelled from all sides: `O Mu`awiya, did you steal [something] from the prayer, or, did you forget?'

After that, whenever he prayed, he would recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' in the sura after the mother of the Qur'an." This hadith has been reported by al-Hakim in his al-Mustadrak and has met the conditions stipulated by [Sahih] Muslim. More than one author of the Musnad works have reported it like Imam al-Shafi`i in his Musnad. He added his comments to it which are interesting for us to cite. He said: "Mu'awiya was a ruler of great power, and might. If the loud recitation of the tasmiya (basmala) had not been established amongst all the Muhajirun and Ansar companions, they would not have been able to exhibit their disapproval when he omitted the tasmiya."

We have a comment on this tradition which every researcher should take note of: One who examines this hadith will find proofs in it for our rulings on reciting the basmala and on not allowing the division of the surah which is recited in the prayer after the mother of the Qur'an since there was no reason for their refuting it except based on our ruling on the two issues.

Eight: What has been correctly reported from Anas and from another chain of transmission: He (Anas) said: "I heard the Prophet (S) reciting in the prayer 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly."

Ninth: What has been correctly reported from Muhammad b. al-Sirri al-`Asqalani: He said: "I prayed behind al-Mu`tamir b. Sulayman the morning and evening prayers an amount which I cannot [even] count; he used to recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly before the opening [chapter] of the book and after it [at the opening] of the surah. I heard al-Mu`tamir saying: `I will not desist from following the prayer of my father.'

And, my father said: `I will not desist from following the prayer of Anas b. Malik.' And, Anas said: `I will not desist from following the prayer of the Prophet of God (S)." I figure from this and other traditions that they used to recite, after the mother of the book (surah al-Fatiha), the complete surah [starting] with the basmala upto its end, as is our ruling, and is proven by many [other] traditions.

From al-Qatada: He said: "Anas b. Malik was asked: `How was the recitation of the Prophet of God (S)'? He replied: `It was elongated, then he recited `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent', and he elongated the rahman, he [also] elongated the rahim."

From Hamid al-Tawil from Anas b. Malik, he said: "I prayed behind the Prophet (S) and behind Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman and `Ali (as); and, all of them would recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly."

All these traditions, and those before them have been reported by the leader of the muhaddithun (hadith reporters) Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad b. `Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Nisaburi in his al-Mustadrak. He says at the end [of these traditions] "I have cited this tradition as a testimony to what preceded it. These traditions, which we have cited, are opposed to the tradition of Qatada from whom our Imams report, and the words are from Anas. He said: "I prayed behind the Prophet (S), and behind Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman, and I did not hear any of them recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent.""

Al-Hakim then said: "This chapter has [traditions] from the Commander of the faithful, `Uthman and `Ali (as), Talha, Ibn `Ubayd Allah, Jabir b. `Abd Allah, `Abd Allah b. `Umar, al-Hakam b. 'Umayr al-Thamali, al-Nu`man b. Bashir, Samura b. Jundab, Burayda al-Aslami and `A'isha, the daughter of the truthful one (may God be pleased with them) all of them are reports I have in a chapter which I have left out for the sake of brevity; I have abridged from them what is germane to this chapter. Similarly, I have mentioned [them] in the chapter on the companions, the successors, and their followers (may God be pleased with them) who recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly."

I say: Al-Razi mentions in his Tafsir al-Kabir that al-Bayhaqi narrated [traditions] on reciting 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly in his Sunan from `Umar b. al-Khattab, Ibn `Abbas, Ibn `Umar and Ibn al-Zubayr. Then al-Razi says in these words: "As for `Ali b. Abu Talib's (may God be pleased with him) reciting the tasmiya loudly, this has been established by mutawatir [traditions], one who follows `Ali b. Abu Talib in his religion is properly guided." (Al-Razi said): "The proof of it is the saying of the Prophet of God (S): 'O God let the truth revolve where Ali goes."

Sufficient for our proof that the basmala is a Qur'anic verse at the beginning of every chapter except for al-Bara'a is the fact that since the coming of the Qur'an to this day all the companions, the successors, and all the followers and the followers of their followers in all the generations of this umma are agreed on this by a consensus which they implement by writing the basmala at the opening of every chapter except for al-Bara'a.

They wrote it (the basmala) just as they wrote all the other verses without any distinctive mark [distinguishing it] even though they all agreed that they would not write anything but the Qur'an in it.

Otherwise [they would have] a clear distinctive mark [separating it from the Qur'an] thus ensuring that nothing which is not a part of it (the Qur'an) could be mixed with it.

Do you not see how they separated from it (the Qur'an) the names of its chapters, and the symbols of its thirtieth (ajza') and sixtieth part and its quarters, fifths, tenth parts? They put these outside the chapters in such a way that it can be known that they are outside the Qur'an, thus preserving it and being cautious of it.

Maybe you are aware that the umma is hardly united on an issue as completely as it is united on this. This in itself is a proof that 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' is an independent verse at the beginning of every chapter, the previous, and later generation have written it at its beginning, thanks be to God for [showing] the correct [way].

Also, amongst the famous transmissions of the Prophet of God (S) is his saying: "Every matter of importance which does not begin with 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' will fail and every important matter which doesn't begin with `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' is incomplete, or, deficient."

It is well known that the Qur'an is the best that Allah has revealed to His Last Prophet (S) and [other books to his preceding] Messengers and that every chapter in it is important and great. Allah (S.W.T.) has challenged human beings in it but they failed to bring forth something like it. Is it then possible for the Qur'an to be incomplete? God is most HIGH and His wise criterion (the Qur'an) is most great, His chapters are above all of that completely.

Prayer is [the path to] success, it is the best act as is recited from the highest minarets and pulpits, those in deserts, and cities know this. Nothing can equal, or, compare with it (the prayer) after faith in God, the most High, and in His books, and Messengers, and the last day. Is it allowable for God, the most High, to legislate it incomplete and deficient? No pious, or, corrupt person will dare say this but the pious Imams Malik and al–Awza'i and Abu Hanifa, may God be pleased with them, were negligent of this obligation. Every one who strives to derive rulings from the shari'a proofs is excused, and rewarded whether he is right, or, he errs.

The Argument of our Opponents on the Issue

They have argued in [several] ways:

One: If the basmala was a verse of surah al-fatiha, it would mean the repetition of the [words] "most merciful, most compassionate" in the surah al-fatiha (since they also occur in the surah al-fatiha). Moreover, if it (the basmala) was a part of every chapter, this would mean it would be repeated in the Qur'an 113 times.

The answer to the above argument: Circumstances may require due to the great importance of the issue, and to accentuate it. There is a lot of this [type of repetition] in the wise book. It is sufficient for you [to note] the chapters of al–Rahman (55), al–Mursalat (77) and al–Kafirun (109). What is more important in this world and the hereafter, and deserves more stress, and consideration than the name of God most beneficent, most compassionate?

Were the Prophets sent, and angels descended, and heavenly books revealed except by the name of God (Allah) most beneficent, most compassionate? Guidance is by HIM, the most High and Glorious.

Were the heavens and earth and those who live in them established except by the name of God most beneficent, most compassionate? "O human beings, remember the blessings of God upon you, is there a creator apart from God, who sustains you from the heavens and earth, there is no god but Him, so how come you fabricate [things]?"

Second: What has been reported from Abu Hurayra as a marfu`u tradition from the Prophet, who said: "God the most High says: `I apportioned the prayer between ME, and MY slave into two halves. When the slave says: `Praise be to the Lord of the Universe', the most High says: `MY slave has praised Me.' And, when he (worshipper) says: `The most merciful, beneficent', God the most High says: `MY slave has lauded me.' And, when he (worshipper) says: `The master of the day of judgement', God the most High says: `My slave has glorified ME.' And, when he says: `I worship YOU alone and from YOU I seek help', God the most High says: `This is between ME and MY slave." The reason for it being used as proof is that "In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent" is not mentioned amongst the verses of the surah al-fatiha. If it was a verse, the tradition would have mentioned it.

The answer: This is contrary to the narration of Ibn `Abbas, also attributed, with an incomplete chain of transmission, to the Prophet (A.S) in which it is stated: "I have apportioned the prayer between ME and MY slave; when the slave says: `In the name of God most beneficent, most compassionate' God the most High states: `MY slave has invoked ME." The tradition is long; but, we see from it that it includes the basmala so the tradition of Abu Hurayra is refuted. Moreover, Abu Hurayra reported from the Prophet of God (S) that he recited 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly in the prayer. He (Abu Hurayra) would recite it loudly and would say: "I am showing you the prayer of the Prophet of God (S)." His two traditions on this have been presented to you.

Third: What has been reported from `A'isha: "The Prophet (S) would start the prayer with the takbir (glorifying God) and the recitation of `Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe." There is no argument for them based on this [tradition] because `Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe' has been made to be the name of this chapter just as you would say: "I recited: `Say! He is the One Lord" and, so, and so recited 'WE have given you a clear victory' etc. So, the meaning of the hadith is that he (A.S) would begin the prayer with the takbir, and by the recitation of this surah the beginning of which is 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent.'"

Fourth: The tradition of Ibn Mughfil in which he states: "My father heard me when I was reciting `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent', and he said: `O my son, be careful of innovation, for I have prayed behind the Prophet of God (S), Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman, and I did not hear even one of them recite it."

The answer: The Imams of the [science of] wounding and authenticating (al-jarh wa'l-ta`dil) do not know of Ibn Mughfil, nor, is there any trace of his tradition amongst them. Ibn Rushd has mentioned him when discussing the basmala in his book Bidaya al-Mujtahid but he omitted [to mention] what has been reported from Abu `Umar b. `Abd al-Barr in the text that Ibn Mughfil is an unknown person.

Fifth: The report of Shu`ba from Qatada from Anas b. Malik. He said: "I prayed with the Prophet of God (S), Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman and I did not hear anyone of them recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent." Similar to this is the hadith of Hamid al–Tawil, also reported from Anas. He said: "I stood behind Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman and not one of them would recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent."

The answer: You have read our arguments on what has been correctly reported from Anas. It contradicts these two reports, so examine what we have mentioned before. Imam al-Razi has mentioned this report of Anas in the argument with his opponents. Then he says: "The answer to this is from several dimensions.

Firstly, Shaykh Abu Hamid al-Asfarayani says: Six reports have been reported from Anas on this topic. As for the Hanafis, they have reported three narrations from him one of which states: "I prayed behind the Prophet of God (S), and behind Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman and they would start the prayer with 'Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe.'" The second one states: `They did not use to recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent'.

And, the third one states: `I did not hear any one of them recite `In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent." These three narrations are in agreement with the view of the Hanafis. He (al-Asfarayani) said: "Another three [reports] contradict these [three reports]. The first one is his (Anas') report that when Mu`awiya omitted 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' in the prayer, the Muhajirun and Ansar rebuked him and this shows that [reciting] the basmala loudly was like a common practice, well established amongst them."

And, he said: "The second of them (the report) is reported by Abu Qalaba from Anas that the Prophet of God (S), peace be upon him and his family, and Abu Bakr and `Umar would recite 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly", and the third of them (the reports) says that he (Anas) was asked about [reciting] 'In the name of God most merciful, most beneficent' loudly, and persisting in it and he said: "I do not know this issue." Al-Razi said: "It is clear that the reports from Anas on this issue are greatly confused, and haphazard; they are contradictory, so it is essential to refer to all the other proofs."

Imam al-Razi says: "Also, there is another accusation in this that `Ali (as) would recite the tasmiya with a loud pronunciation. When the Banu Umayya came to power they went to extreme lengths in prohibiting the loud recitation [of the basmala], striving to obliterate the memories of `Ali (as), peace be upon him." Al-Razi said: "Perhaps Anas was scared of them (the Umayyads) so for this reason his verdicts were confused."

And, he said: "Whenever we are uncertain of something, [one thing] we do not doubt is that when there is a contradiction between the likes of Anas, and Ibn Mughfil, and the verdict of `Ali b. Abu Talib, peace be upon him, who remained [on the verdict] all his life, it is more appropriate to accept the saying of `Ali." He said: "This is the decisive answer to the question." Then al-Razi said: "One who takes `Ali (as) as the

Imam of his religion has surely clung firmly to his religion and his self." I say: Thanks be to God who has quided us to this, but for His quidance we would not have been quided.

Recitation (of Surah Al-Fatiha) in the Prayer

The jurists have differed on [the question of] the recitation [of the surah al-fatiha] in the prayer. Abu Bakr al-Asam, Isma'il b. `Aliyya, Sufyan b. `Uyayna and al-Hasan b. Salih have claimed that it is not obligatory in any prayer. It is merely recommended.

This is a rare verdict; it is contrary to the proofs, and goes against the consensus of the community. They have argued based on what Abu Salama, and Muhammad b. `Ali have reported from `Umar b. al-Khattab when he prayed the maghrib prayer without reciting [the surah al-fatiha] in it. He was asked about that and he said: "How was the bowing (ruku') and the prostration?" They said: "It was fine." He said: "Then there is no problem."

The answer: If he (`Umar) did not attribute it [to the Prophet (S)] then it was his opinion. Perhaps he was amongst those who believed that omitting the recitation unintentionally does not invalidate the prayer, and God knows best.

Al-Hasan al-Basri and others have stated that the recitation is obligatory in one cycle [of prayer]. Like the previous case, this is a rare verdict and goes against the consensus reached by the 'ummah' (society). They have argued based on his (S) saying: "There is no prayer except with the surah al-fatiha of the book" adhering [to the view] that an exception to a negative [statement] is a positive one, so they say that even if one surah al-fatiha is recited in the prayer it is essential to maintain that this is correct due to the rule based on [the concept of] 'exception.'"

The answer: According to the custom (`urf), this hadith is not applicable to the case of the prayer when it is offered with the [complete] surah al-fatiha neither is the hadith a specific rule which nullifies a general rule. It is by no means applicable in this case. The tradition is applicable for the prayer which is devoid of the surah al-fatiha, and in that case it (the prayer) is not a [valid] prayer. It is like his (S) saying: "There is no prayer except by purification."

[This shows] his stressing the surah al-fatiha for it is a part of the prayer and [stressing] the purification for it is a condition for it (the prayer). There are many [examples] of this [kind of] speech. Don't you see, if it was said "there is no oxymel except with vinegar," for example, no one would understand that what is called vinegar, even if it be a drop, or, less than that, is sufficient, or, not sufficient [to make oxymel]. They merely understand that oxymel is composed [of things] and that vinegar is one of the most important parts of it. If the vinegar is removed then the oxymel is nonexistent.

If, as they claim, the proof they derive from this hadith is proper, then the proof could lead [to the view] that no act or speech in the prayer is obligatory as long as the surah al-fatiha is recited, as is clear to

one who examines it.

Imam Abu Hanifa and his companions said: "It is not obligatory to recite the surah al-fatiha itself in any prayer, what is essential in the prayers is any [form] of recitation. Abu Hanifa saw it sufficient to recite any Qur'anic verse even if it be just one word like "Madhamatani" (two green gardens). But, his two companions Abu Yusuf and Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybani deemed it sufficient [to recite] three short verses like "thumma nazara" then "abasa wa basara" then "adbara wa istakbara", or, [it was sufficient to recite] one verse which was equivalent to three short verses, or, more than them. The Hanafis have acted according to this.

Abu Hanifa also allowed the translation of what is recited in the prayer from the Qur'an in any foreign language even if one knows Arabic well. He deemed it sufficient to recite "do balk sabz" the translation of madhamatani (two green gardens) in Persian instead of the surah al-fatiha, and the surah, but his two companions allowed the translation only for those unable [to recite] it in Arabic, not for those able to recite it in Arabic; the Hanafis have acted according to this.

The recitation [of surah al-fatiha] is obligatory for them in the first two cycles in every prayer of two cycles like the Friday, and morning prayers, or, the zuhr and `asr and `isha' for a traveler. As for the prayer of more than two cycles, like the maghrib and `isha' for one praying at home, and the zuhr and `asr, the recitation is obligatory for them in [any] unspecified two cycles. Thus one praying can choose to recite it in the first two cycles, or, the last two, or, the first and the third cycles, or, the first and the fourth, or, the second and the third cycles, or, the second and the fourth. If he recites [surah al-fatiha] it in the first two cycles, for example, he can choose in the last two; if he wishes, he can recite [the surah al-fatiha], or, he can glorify God (Allah S.W.T.), or, if he wishes, he can remain silent spanning the time of the glorification. This is their [Hanafi] school of thought which is common to their jurisprudence.

They have argued that any form of recitation is sufficient based on the hadith of Abu Hurayra which is present in the two Sahihs (two Books of Hadiths – sayings of Prophet Muhammad A.S. compiled by al-Bukhari and al-Muslim). He said: "The Prophet of God (S) entered the mosque. Then a man entered, and prayed. Then he came to greet the Prophet of God (S). After the Prophet of God (S) returned his greetings, he said to him: 'Go back and pray, for you have not prayed.' The man went back and prayed the way he would [normally] pray then he came to the Prophet (S), he greeted him and the Prophet of God (S) said: "And peace be unto you, go back and pray for you have not prayed."

And, he did this three times. The man said: "I swear by the one who has sent you with the truth, this has not pleased me, so teach me." He (Prophet A.S.) said: `When you stand up to pray, first glorify God, then recite what is easy for you from the Qur'an then bow down until you are at ease whilst bowing, then stand straight and then prostrate until you are at ease in prostration, then sit up until you are at ease whilst sitting, then do all that in your whole prayer."

The point from which they derive their proof is his saying: "Then recite what is easy for you from the

Qur'an" as it apparently supports their claim.

The answer: Abu Hurayra is amongst those whose traditions we (Shi'i) do not value as we have explained at length [elsewhere]. We have presented rational, and scriptural indubitable proofs in a published book1 which we have devoted to him, so any one who is fond of researching the clear truths should refer to it.

It is not possible for the Prophet of God (S) to have acted according to this tradition as it occurs in a situation in which it was essential [for him A.S.] to explicate the issue. We examined [the tradition], and we did not find a trace of explanation which is worthy of the Prophets (S); since, it lacks much of what the 'ummah' have concurred of what is essential in prayer like the intention, and sitting when bearing the last testimony, and the essential parts of prayer following each other in proper sequence; similarly, the last testimony, and sending greetings to the Prophet (S), and the greetings etc. Moreover, leaving him to offer an incorrect prayer three times is [something which] does not concur with the character of the Prophet (S), this [act] is not permissible for him (S).

Abu Dawud has reported this anecdote in his Sunan in the chapter on the prayers of one whose backbone cannot be straight in the bowing and prostration, with a chain of transmission to Rifa`a b. Rafi' al-Ansari, He was amongst those present at Badr that the Prophet (S) said to the man whose prayer was not proper. "When you stand up and face the qibla, and glorify God (Allah S.W.T.), then recite the mother of the Qur'an (Surah al-fatiha), and recite what Allah (S.W.T.) wishes you to recite."

This anecdote is also reported by Ahmad b. Hanbal and Ibn Hibban with a chain of transmission ending with Rifa`a b. Rafi`i. It states that the Prophet (S) said to that man whose prayer was improper: "Then recite the mother of the book [surah al-fatiha] and then recite what you wish."

It is well known that Abu Hurayra cannot be compared with Rifa`a, neither is he equal to Rifa`a in his speech, or, action. Without doubt, when the two are in conflict, Rifa`a's traditions are to be given preference over the traditions of Abu Hurayra. Therefore, you see that in Fath al–Bari, al–Qastalani interprets what is reported in the hadith of Abu Hurayra to accord with what is reported in the hadith of Rifa`a.

One who studies the views of the past, and later [scholars] on the hadith of Abu Hurayra and his saying: "Recite what is easy for you from the Qur'an" will find all of them (apart from the Hanafis) either refuting, or, interpreting it. If you wish, refer to their views on this hadith of Abu Hurayra in all the commentaries on the two Sahihs.

Moreover, Abu Hurayra himself contradicted this hadith of his by what has been correctly reported from him when he said: "I heard the Prophet (S) say: `The prayer in which the opening [chapter] of the book is not recited is not complete." And, he (S) [also] said: "Indeed, the Prophet of God (S) commanded me to go out, and announce in Medina that there can be no prayer without the recitation of the Qur'an, even if it be with the opening [chapter] of the book, or, more [than that]." And, he said: "I heard the Prophet of

God (S) say: 'One who prays without reciting the [surah al-] fatiha of the book then it (the prayer) is incomplete, it is incomplete, it is incomplete."

There is another outstanding issue which they ask about. I mean the reason why the Hanafi jurists accepted the apparent [meaning] in the hadith of Abu Hurayra: "Recite what is easy for you from the Qur'an." [They did this] without [quoting] the clear text, that is, it is essential to be calm when standing, sitting, whilst bowing and in prostration. Moreover, what they accept is against the clear 'sahih' traditions, and opposed to [the views of] most of the Muslims. What they did not accept is supported by the 'Sihah' and by the masses.

Perhaps the Hanafis can cite as proof for their view on this issue by [citing] the saying of Almighty Allah (S.W.T.): "Recite what is easy for you in the Qur'an."

The answer: This verse is certainly not connected with what is being discussed concerning the recitation in the prayer. This is clear from the context in surah al–Muzammil (chapter 73), whosoever so wishes, let him refer to it and examine what the commentators have said about it so that the truth may become clear for him.

Furthermore, the [School of] Hanafis have argued for the permissibility of translating into foreign languages what is recited in the prayer from the Qur'an by several arguments:

1) That Ibn Mas`ud made some foreigners recite: "The tree of Zaqqum is a food for the sinners (ta'am alathim)." A foreigner recited it as the food for the orphans (ta'am al-yatim). He (Ibn Mas`ud) said to him: "Say the food of the corrupt one (ta'am al-fajir)." Then he (Ibn Mas`ud) said to him: "It is not a mistake to recite in the Qur'an al-hakim instead of al-alim, to insert a verse of mercy in the place of a verse of chastisement."

Answer: This is not connected to that we discuss, it doesn't prove anything to what the claimant is claiming. Even if it is correct, the view of Ibn Mas`ud is restricted to him, it does not prove anything.

Two: The saying of the Almighty: "It is in the previous books," similarly: "This is in the previous scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham, and Moses."

The reason for deriving proofs by these verses is that the community agreed that the recitation was not in Arabic letters in previous books, nor, were the scriptures of Abraham and Moses in Arabic; rather, they were in Hebrew, or, Aramaic.

Answer: This, like the previous case, does not constitute proof for the claimant, rather, it is further remote [from the truth].

Third: The Almighty said: "And, He revealed this Qur'an to me so that I may warn you thereby." The non-Arabs do not understand the Arabic letters unless the meaning is mentioned to them in their language so that they may be warned by it.

Answer: This would only be proper proof for allowing the commentary of the Qur'an in their language so that they may benefit from its wisdom, etiquettes, commands and prohibitions. This is one thing; [while to talk] gibberish in the prayer in which one is commanded to recite the Qur'an, is another issue.

When the surah al-fatiha is recited, to what Arab, or, non-Arab do the letters of the mother of the book, [which are] recorded in the scriptures, not come into his mind? What person of taste would negate the enunciation of the recitation of the surah al-fatiha, and the recitation of the Qur'an for gibberish in Persian, or, other foreign eastern, or, western languages?

Imam al-Razi has refuted these views, for he has transmitted them from the [School of] Hanafis, and has other views, so refer to them. I hold Imam Abu Hanifa above this, he failed completely in his derivation of proofs. I feel sorry for him that he fell to this low level. In deriving secondary shar'i rulings, he depended on analogy and seeking that which is good (istihsan). He arrived at the decision based on this basis of personal views.

As if he deemed it to be in the interests of non-Arabs to translate for them the recitation in the prayer in their languages; he saw this to be the best [way] for their understanding its meaning and for their humility in it (the prayer). It is as if he drew an analogy of the recitation [of the surah al-fatiha] of a non-Arab in his language with listening to an exhortation and his hearing academic lessons in his language.

This is the theory of Ataturk regarding the prayer which he did not take it from Abu Hanifa. It is merely a personal thought. What helped Ataturk in holding the theory is that he did not respect shar'i proofs, he did not know, or, learn them in the reforms that appeared good for him to undertake. If there was in the shar'i proofs something which would allow him to have recourse to [personal choice of good] 'istihsan', there would have been some justification for his views; but, how wrong he was!

Al-Shafi`i, Malik, Ahmad b. Hanbal and others have made it compulsory to recite the surah al-fatiha in Arabic in all the cycles of the obligatory, and supererogatory prayers. Their proof for that is the hadith of Abu Hurayra in the anecdote of an Arab whose prayer was not proper due to the statement of the Prophet of God (S) whereby he taught him the prayer, and instructed him to recite [the surah al-fatiha], and then told him: "Do that in every [standings] prayer." You already know our view on this tradition for we have said that we do not accord any value to it.

The 'Imamiyya' (Shi'i), in following the Imams of the purified family, maintain that the recitation of the surah al-fatiha in correct Arabic is obligatory in the first two cycles in every obligatory, and recommended prayer, whether the prayer [is offered] alone, or, with the Imam. As for one following [in congregational prayer], the Imam recites on his behalf. As for the last two cycles, it is obligatory to recite either the surah al-fatiha, or, the tasbih (glorification), one can choose between the two. The Imam cannot recite the surah al-fatiha, or, tasbih on behalf of those following him.

Our proofs for all of this lies in the traditions of our Imams, upon whom be peace, they are the other half of the book. Moreover, the recitation [of the surah al-fatiha] by the Prophet (S) in the first two cycles is

proven in all the 'Sihah' and 'Masanid' works in the hadith of Abu Qatada al-Hirth b. Rab`l, and others.

The rule is, what the Prophet (S) used to do is obligatory due to his saying: "Pray as you see me pray." If it is proven from him that [he would recite] the surah al-fatiha in the last two cycles, it has also been proven from him that he would [also] recite the dhikr in them. The form [of the dhikr] "Glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah, Allah is the greatest" has been transmitted from the Imams of his pure family.

This is attested to by the hadith of Sa`d b. Abi al-Waqqas available in the Sahih of al-Bukhari and other Sahih and Musnad works. The people of Kufa complained of him to `Umar to the point that they mentioned that he could not pray correctly. Sa`d said: "By God, I used to lead them in prayer the [way] of the Prophet of God (S), I did not distort it, I stand still and lengthen the standing by reciting the [surah al-] fatiha and the surah in the first two cycles.

Then I would reduce it in the last two cycles." That is, he hastened through them (the last two cycles) by shortening them to either the tasbih, or, the [surah al-] fatiha alone to [the exclusion of] everything else, and the Almighty God knows [best].

Takbirat al-Ihram

Following [the footsteps of] the Imams of the purified family, the 'Imamiyya' agree that the takbirat alihram is a pillar in ever obligatory, or, recommended [prayer]. Without it, no prayer can be offered. Its form, Allah is the greatest, is innate to it. So, if one begins his prayer by glorifying God (tasbih), or, by uttering there is no god, but God, or, by saying God is great (Allahu kabir), or, only God is the greatest (Allahu al-Akbar), or, God is most powerful etc., then the prayer is not valid. [Neither is] gibberish in any one of the foreign languages [allowed].

The proof that it is obligatory is adequately provided [by the fact] that the Prophet of God (S) never started any of his prayers except by this form. You have read recently that the original [form] which he used to perform his (S) prayer is the obligatory [way] as he said: "Pray the way you see me pray."

Moreover, its incumbency is established in the book, and the sunna, and the consensus of the community. The Almighty Allah has said: "And, Your Lord, so glorify Him." A consensus ('ijma') has been reached that this refers to the takbirat al-ihram since the command [of God] indicates incumbency. The 'ijma' also states that anything other than that is not compulsory.

The Prophet (S) has said: "The opening of the prayer [lies in] purification, its sacredness (tahrim) in the takbirat, and its dissolution in the sending of greetings." Abu Dawud has narrated this in his Sunan. The [School of] Hanafis have said that the tahrim is not a pillar of the prayer, rather, it is connected to the act of standing which, in fact, is the pillar. It is obligatory to face the qibla, and to hide the private parts and to be in the state of purity not due to it (the takbirat al-ihram); but, because of its connection with the

pillar.

They have [also] said that Arabic language is not a stipulation in it. They have deemed that a translation in any language which the one who offers the prayer wishes would suffice, whether he is able to recite it in Arabic, or, not. For them, the prayer can [also] be offered by saying, for example: Khuda buzurg (God is greatest in Persian) instead of Allahu Akbar.

They have [also] said that the ihram can be done by [reciting] the tasbih, or, tahlil (the utterance that there is no god but God), and by any name of the Almighty (Allah S.W.T.) even without anything else being added to it like starting [the prayer] by "Allah", or, "al-Rahman" or, [reciting] other such of His beautiful names by themselves, although this act is detested. This is their accord, and they agree on this. Their proof is based on 'istihsan' (doing that which is best) as you have read. "The answer" is the answer, and Allah is the guide to that which is correct.

1. The author refers to "Abu Hurayra", published in English by ANsariyan Pubblications and also available on line at: http://www.al-islam.org/abu-hurayra-abdul-husayn-sharafiddin-al-musawi [1] [D.I.L.P.]

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