

The Key to Salvation

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

“It is You we worship and You we ask for help.”¹

If we take the time to contemplate upon “Maliki Yaumi-Deen”, it is a verse that should truly shake us! Many when they stand in prayer pay no attention to the words they utter. Those words never reach their hearts, but are an unconscious recitation of what they’ve memorized. “Will they not seek to understand this Quran or are there locks upon their hearts?”² It is said that those focused and whose hearts are truly humbled in prayer are like a fish in water, and those who are not...are like a bird in a cage. So what will save us from the horrors of that terrifying day? The answer lies in the next verse, for the next verse summarizes Surah al-Fatihah - The greatest Surah in the Book! And al-Fatihah summarizes the Quran! “*Iyyaka na’budu wa Iyyaka nasta’een*” [You alone we worship, and unto You alone we turn for help] Every Prophet gave his people this key to salvation, “I have come to you with a plain warning, that you worship none but Allah; for verily, I fear for you the punishment of a grievous day!”³

So what should be our ultimate goal in this life? To worship Allah and nothing else. For this is the reason we were created. And what are our means to attaining this goal? It is through seeking Allah’s help. And what is the most important aspect of worship? It’s sincerity of heart! That all that we are and all that we do is for Allah alone and no one else. To seek His pleasure only. Without that sincerity of intention, it would be as if you are a traveller journeying with bags of sand - carrying a heavy load, but a completely useless load! Make Allah alone your focus, not people, for what they think and say is irrelevant and cannot harm nor benefit you.

So if you were to be asked why you did what you did for any given deed/task, you can firmly answer ‘for Allah!’ and if asked ‘Sure, and for what else?’ You will affirm with certainty, “for nothing else!” “Shall we tell you who are the

¹ Transliterated: “*Iyyaka na’budu wa iyyaka nasta’een.*”

² Surah Muhammad 47:24.

³ Surah Hud 11:26.

greatest losers in respect to their deeds? It is those whose labour has been wasted in this life while they thought they were doing good work...”⁴

Sincerity pure to Allah will change your life! The time has come to correct our intention in everything we do. The time has come to teach it to our children, so that every new thing they learn to do “is because *Allah* likes it!” and everything they are to refrain from doing “is because *Allah* doesn’t like it!” To learn that their rewards are with Allah alone, not with people. Indeed however, pure sincerity of intention is not easy to attain, but it is not impossible either because we have been taught the magic words “*wa Iyyaka nasta’een*” [and unto You alone we turn for help].

If Allah helps you, there is nothing you cannot do. It is all in His hands. Ask and He will grant you. After all, doesn’t He remind us that “*you are all astray save for whom I guide!*”⁵ “*Iyyaka na’budu wa Iyyaka nasta’een*” was a verse over which those who came before us would weep for hours. One of them was once praying in Makkah, his friend went ahead and did the tawaf and when he returned to him, he was still at this verse, repeating it and crying, till the sun came up.. “*Iyyaka na’budu wa Iyyaka nasta’een*”...let us pause and reflect on it for a while, let it cleanse any hypocrisy that has ever tainted our hearts.

The Greatest Dua [supplication] You Can Ever Make

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

“Guide us to the straight path”⁶

And now we come upon the greatest, wisest, most comprehensive Dua [supplication] we can ever make. If Allah guides us to the straight path, then He has helped us to worship Him like we should. [Recall the request for help that we made in the prior verse, “You alone we worship.. *and unto You alone we turn for help.*”]

⁴ Surah al-Kahf 18:103.

⁵ Sahih Muslim

⁶ Transliterated: “*Ihdinas siratal mustaqeem.*”

If you notice, Surah al-Fatihah teaches us the proper etiquette of *how to ask* Allah when we have a need. It teaches us the proper way to make Dua so He will listen to us and answer. As befits a Majesty, we begin with the glorification and praise due to our Lord. Then we make our request. Now the path we need to win Allah's pleasure is called the Siraat - the straight path. But this path is not so easy to follow without assistance:

- There are specifics to this path that we will know, and specifics which we may not know [What is halal, what is haram. What is right, what is wrong.] In fact, the specifics we don't have enough knowledge of far outnumber the specifics we know enough about.

- And of these specifics we do know, there will be some we are physically able to carry out, and some we will not. [Like Hajj, Fasting, etc...]

- And of those requirements which we are physically able to carry out, at times we will enjoy them, and at times we may find them quite burdensome [Like waking up for Fajr prayer.]

- And even when we do accomplish that ordained duty, at times we fulfill the sincerity requirement, and at times we may not. And at times we may perform it properly according to the Prophetic example necessary for its acceptance, and at times, we may not.

- And even if we fulfill all of the above: the knowledge, the ability, the right attitude, the sincerity, and the adherence to the Prophetic example, we will still need one more thing - *Steadfastness* - To perform it properly every time. Do you now see why we are so desperate for Allah's guidance to the straight path?

Do you see why we can't do it without His help? And do you now see how comprehensive this Dua is? Now as you know, there are 2 Siraats. One in this life: the one we spoke of above. The second one, is in the next life - described to be dangerously thin with a "sword's edge" sharpness! That is the one that spans over the fires of Hell, over which every one of us must pass if we are to reach Paradise.

"And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed. Then We will save those who feared Allah and leave the wrong-

وَأِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا
ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَنَذَرُ الظَّالِمِينَ فِيهَا جِثِيًّا

doers within it, on their knees.”⁷

If we are firm and steadfast on the first Siraat [the one in this life], then we will be firm on the second [in the next life]. So stability on the second is directly related to the degree of faith and good deeds earned in this life. Our strong faith and good deeds will be our guiding light on that dreadful bridge, amidst the darkness of Judgment Day.

*“The day you shall see the believing men and the believing women, their light running forward before them and on their right..”*⁸ And so accordingly, some will cross it with the quickness of lightning! Some the speed of a shooting star! Some like the wind, some like a speeding stallion, some at running speed, while others will crawl on it with hands and knees, and others...will fall and never make it.. And the Prophet will stand pleading in desperate prayer, *“My Lord, spare them. My Lord, save them...”* The Siraat of this life leads us to Allah. The Siraat of the next life leads us to Paradise. Do you now feel how serious this Dua is? *“Ihdina-Siraat Al-Mustaqeem”*- Our entire existence depends on it. The *“Ameen”* you’ll pronounce now, after knowing the above, will be much more heartfelt, won’t it? As a matter of fact, for any dua to be answered by Allah, the condition is that it must come from a focused, attentive heart for *“Allah does not answer a supplication that comes from an absent/preoccupied heart.”*

Concluding al-Fatihah

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

“The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.”⁹

As we bid farewell to Surah al-Fatihah, we conclude with its last remaining verses. We talked about the Siraat and how we must strive, with Allah’s help

⁷ Surah Maryam 19:71-72.

⁸ Surah al-Hadeed 57:12.

⁹ Transliterated: *“Ihdinas siratal mustaqeem.Siratal latheena an’amta alayhim.Ghayril maghdubi alayhim walad daalleen.”*

and guidance, to remain steadfast on this path in order to succeed in this life and the next. And since the right company makes all the difference in providing the support, reinforcement and good example to staying firm in faith and conduct, we specify that Allah guide us to “*the path of those on whom You bestowed Your Grace/ blessings..*” [*Siraat-al-latheena an’amta alaihim*]

This is a reminder of all the good men/women that have succeeded before us. These are the Prophets, the righteous, the companions, and foremost - our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. We are consoled when we remember them and the hardships they endured. It makes our trials bearable and we are relieved and comforted that insha’Allah we will be of their company in our next eternal life. “*Ghair-il-maghdhoobi alaihim*” [not of those whom upon them is wrath]. These are the people, who know very well the truth and what is right, but deliberately reject it and refuse to abide by it. So they have the knowledge but refuse to conform.

Example: Those who know they must pray, but choose not to. “*Wala-dhaalleen*” [nor of those who go astray]. These are the people who lack the knowledge of the truth and don’t search for it, so they conform but to the wrong path.

Example: Those who pray, but in an unacceptable way. Did you notice that the words relating to Grace/Blessings are specific to Allah [“*an’amta*”- “You bestowed”], while the words relating to wrath are not specific to Allah alone? This is because when it comes to granting favours and blessings, Allah is the sole provider of it all! But when evil is committed, this evokes the wrath of not only Allah, but the wrath of creation as well - The angels, the Prophets, the righteous, etc... And finally, “*Ameen*”. Ameen means “My Lord, grant/answer [my prayers].” With Ameen, we are pleading to the One whose in His hands is our guidance, success and salvation.

So express wholeheartedly, your need for Allah, just as if you have been sentenced to death and are pleading with the victim’s family for pardon. There would be a desperation and passion to the tone of your voice, as your heart begs for their forgiveness. And here’s another great reason for a wholehearted “*Ameen!*” The Prophet ﷺ tells us that if our “*Ameen*” coincides with the “*Ameen*” of the angels above, Allah will forgive all of our previous sins!

So this is no time to be drifting in our Salah, this is too good to miss! Our heart needs to be present and alive! As we mentioned earlier, Al-Fatihah is the

heart of Salah and is one of its major pillars. The Prophet tells us, “*He has not prayed, the one who has not recited The Opening Chapter [al-Fatihah].*” As we have seen, it is the greatest Surah. In it we talk directly to Allah and He answers back to us at every verse. What does He say to us?

Listen to this: Allah said, “I have divided the prayer [al-Fatihah] into two halves between Myself and My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for.”

- If he says, “All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds”, Allah says, “*My servant has praised Me.*”

- When the servant says, “The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”, Allah says, “*My servant has glorified Me.*”

- When he says, “The Master of the Day of Judgment”, Allah says, “*My servant has glorified Me*” or “*My servant has related all matters to Me.*”

- When he says, “You [alone] we worship, and You [alone] we ask for help”, Allah says, “*This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall be granted what he sought.*”

- When he says, “Guide us to the straight path. The way of those on whom You have granted Your grace, not [the way] of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray”, Allah says, “*This is for My servant, and My servant shall be granted what he asked for.*”

So the next time you are in prayer reciting al-Fatihah, remember to pause momentarily as the Prophet did after every verse, because His Majesty - with His beautiful face to yours, is responding to you... Feel it! What an honor it is to be *His* servant!

