# All Praise (al-Hamd)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Its positioning as regards what precedes it:

Since *“the Most Merciful (al-Rahmân)”* and *“the All-Compassionate (al-Rahim)”* indicate the [divine] bounties and favors, they necessitate praise. Furthermore, *“All praise be to Allâh (al-hamduli'llâh)”* is repeated in four suras in the Qur'an, each repetition referring to one of the principal bounties, which are the first creation and the continuation of it, and the last creation and its ensuing continuation. Its positioning here:

 *“All praise be to Allâh (al-hamduli'llâh)”* being put at the opening of the Fatiha of the Qur'an is like putting the conception of the Qur'an's ultimate purpose in the forefront of the brain. For praise is a concise form of worship, which is the result of creation, and of knowledge of Allâh, which is the purpose and aim of the universe. So to mention praise is to conceive of the Qur'an's ultimate purpose. Indeed, Allâh (May He be exalted and glorified) says:  *“I created not the jinn and men except that they might worship.” (51:57)*

Furthermore, there is the well-known meaning of praise: **the display of the attributes of perfection.**

How this is achieved: Allâh created man and made him a comprehensive summary of the universe and an index of the book of the world, which comprises eighteen thousand worlds, and lodged in his essence a sample from each, in which is manifested one of His names. If man spends all of what is bestowed on him in the way of that for which he was created, for the purpose of offering thanks, a sort of praise, and obeying the Shari'a, which removes the rust of nature, each of those samples becomes a map [illuminating] his world, and a mirror reflecting it and the attribute manifested in it and the name it displays. In this way, with both spirit and body, man becomes a summary of the worlds of the seen and unseen, and manifests what is manifested in them. Through offering praise he becomes both a place of demonstration and a demonstrator of the attributes of perfection. This is implied by what Muhyi al-Din al-'Arabi said in explanation of the Hadith: *“I was a hidden treasure, so I created creation that they might know Me.”* That is, I created creation to be a mirror in which I might observe My beauty.

# *[Be] to Allâh (li' llâh)*

That is, praise (hamd) is particular to and fitting only for the Most Pure and Holy Essence, who although specified is described by the concept of the Necessarily Existent One. For sometimes something specific may be thought of in general terms. The letter lâm (the li- of li-llah) here is dependent on the verb implied by its meaning, as though it had absorbed the verb's meaning. In the lâm is also a sign to sincerity and divine unity.

# *Lord and Sustainer (Rabb)*

That is, He who raises and sustains the universe with all its component parts, each of which is a world like the greater world, with all its atoms, like its stars dispersed, in motion, in order.

Know that Allâh (May His glory be exalted) appointed for everything a point of perfection and deposited in each an inclination towards it, as though commanding it through this inclination to set out for the point of perfection. In its journey each thing stands in need of what will help it and what will repulse the things that hinder it, and this is the sustaining of Allâh. If you study the universe, you will see that it resembles human groups and nations, with each individually and collectively employed in the duties its Maker has appointed for it, striving diligently, obeying the laws of its Creator. How surprising therefore is man, in his being an exception!

# *Of all the worlds (al-'âlâmîn)*

The yâ and nûn [that is, the two final letters] denote either a grammatical ending as in the numbers twenty ('ishrîn) and thirty (thalâthîn), or the [sound] plural. For the components of the worlds are worlds, or the world is not limited to the solar system. As the poet says:

Praise he to Allâh, how numerous are His celestial spheres!

Among them circulate the stars, and the sun and the moon.

The sound plural, [properly used] for rational beings, as in the verse *“Ra'aytuhum li sâjidîn (I saw them prostrate themselves before me),”* (12:4) indicates that [the science of] rhetoric conceives of all the components of the world as living and rational, speaking through the tongue of disposition. For the world ('âlam) is so-called because through it the Maker is known (yu'lam), and it bears witness to Him and points to Him. Thus, the raising and sustaining of beings and their making known their Maker indicate, like the prostration, that they are as though conscious.

# *The Most Merciful, the All-Compassionate (al-Rahmân al-Rahîm)*

Their positioning: they point to the two fundamentals in raising and nurturing. For in its meaning of Provider (al-Razzâq), Most Merciful infers the attraction of benefits, while in its meaning of Oft-Forgiving (al-Ghaffâr), All-Compassionate is conformable with the repulsion of harm, and these are the two basic principles of raising and sustaining.

# *Master of the Day [of Judgement] (Mâlik Yawm al-Din)*

That is, the day of resurrection and requital.

The positioning: it is as though it is the result of what precedes it, for mercy (rahma) is one of the proofs of resurrection and eternal felicity. For mercy can only be mercy, and bounty can only be bounty when the Resurrection arrives and eternal felicity comes about. Otherwise, on thinking of eternal separation, intelligence, which is one of the greatest bounties, would be a calamity for mankind, and affection and compassion, which are the most refined kinds of mercy, would be transformed into severe pain.

If you were to ask: Allâh is always the owner of everything, so why is the Day of Requital specified?

You would be told: It is specified in order to indicate that apparent causes, which Allâh has put in the world of change to demonstrate His sublimity - lest the direct functioning of the Hand of Power be seen by the mind's eye in matters that appear to be lowly in their outward (mulk) aspect, will be raised on that day, and their inner aspect (malakûtiyya) will be manifested clearly and transparently. Then all things will see and know their Lord and Maker without intermediary.

And in the term *“the Day (al-yawm)”* is an allusion to one of the conjectural signs of the resurrection, related to the evident correspondence between a day and a year, and the life of man and the cycle of the earth. So it is between the hands of a clock that count the seconds, the minutes, the hours, and the days. Thus, the person who sees that one hand has completed its revolution will surmise that the others will complete their revolutions too, even if with delay. Similarly, the person who sees the repeated resurrections of the species in the examples of the day and the year will surmise that the spring of eternal felicity will be born on the morning of the Day of Resurrection for mankind, one individual of which is like a species.

What is meant by *“al-Din”* is either requital, that is, the day of requital for good deeds and bad, or of the truths of religion; that is, the day they will rise and be totally manifested, and the sphere of belief will prevail over the sphere of causes. For by relating causes to effects, Allâh has deposited an order in the universe through His will, and obliged man through his nature, illusions, and imagination, to comply with the order and be bound to it. Moreover, He directed all things towards Himself and is far above the effect of the causes in His dominions (mulk). He charged man in belief and faith, to comply with this sphere with his conscience and his spirit, and be bound to it. For in this world, the sphere of causes predominates over the sphere of belief, while in the next world the truths of belief will be manifested as supreme over the sphere of causes.

Know too that each of the two spheres has its appointed position and particular rules, so each should be given its due. Thus, the person who looks from the position of the causal world with his nature, delusions, and imagination, and the criteria of causes towards the sphere of belief is forced to be Mu'tazilite, while a person who looks from the position of belief and its criteria with his spirit and conscience towards the sphere of causes will end up displaying a lazy sort of trust and obstinate opposition to the will of the Orderer.

# *You alone do we worship (Iyyâka na'budu)*

Two points may be made concerning the letter kâf [in the detached accusative pronoun iyyâka]:

The first of them is that by reason of the direct form of address [that is, the change to the second person after the use of the third], the pronominal suffix *“-ka - you”* implies the attributes of perfection mentioned previously. For the previous mention [of the attributes] one after the other stimulates the brain, preparing it, filling it with enthusiasm, and directing the attention to the One described. Thus, *“You alone (iyyâka)”* means *“O You Who is qualified by these attributes!”*

The second point: the use of the second person indicates that according to the science of rhetoric the meanings should be dwelt on, for then it will be read as it was revealed, and this will lead the person to make the address naturally and enthusiastically. Hence, *“You alone (iyyâka)”* implies compliance with [the Hadith] *“Worship your Lord as if you were seeing Him.”*

The use of the first person plural in *“do we worship (na'budu)”* has three aspects: firstly, we worship, all of us members and atoms of the microcosm that is myself, by offering the thanks expressed by all these members and atoms complying with that which they have been commanded. Secondly, all of us monotheists, we worship You through obedience to your Shari'a. And thirdly, all of us beings, we submit totally to your Supreme Shari'a of Creation, and we prostrate in bewilderment and love at the throne of your awesomeness and power.

**The positioning:**

*“Do we worship (na'budu)”* elucidates and expounds *“praise”* (al-hamd). [That is, it explains the form praise should take.] It is the result of *“Master of the Day of Judgement (mâlik al-yawm ad-din)”* and necessitates it. [That is, *“We worship Him alone because He is the Owner of all things.”*]

Know too that the precedence of *“You alone (iyyâka)”* infers sincerity, the essence of worship, while the use of the second person indicates the reason for worship, for the One qualified by these attributes, which call for direct address, is worthy of worship.

# *And from You alone do we seek help (wa iyyâka nasta'în)*

In respect of the three groups mentioned above, this is the same as *“You alone do we worship:”* all of us members of man the microcosm, and us monotheists, and us beings, we seek help and assistance from You for all our needs and aims, the most important of which is worship. *The “You alone (iyyâka)”* is repeated to increase the pleasure of the address and sense of presence; and because the station (maqâm) of meeting face to face is higher and more exalted than the station of proof [in the absence of the one addressed]; and because presence calls for truthfulness and not for lying; and because worship and the seeking of help are two different, independent aims.

The positioning of *“do we seek help”* and *“do we worship:”* you should understand that the relationship between them resembles the relationship of wages with service. For worship is Allâh's right over His bondsman [worship is a form of service], and the help is His bountiful bestowal [or reward].

In the exclusivity implied by the precedence of You alone is an indication to the fact that through the noble relation that is worship and the service of Allâh, the bondsman is raised up from subjection to causes and intermediaries; indeed, the causes become his servants, and since he recognizes the One alone, [for him] the sphere of belief and conscience will come to dominate, as mentioned. The person who is not truly Allâh's servant becomes a slave to causes and is abased by intermediaries. However, while in the sphere of causes the bondsman should not neglect causes altogether lest he comes to rebel against the order established by divine wisdom and will. For misplaced reliance on Allâh while in the sphere of causes is laziness, as discussed. This is like the relationship of the antecedent and the aim, for help and grace are the preliminaries of worship.

# *Guide us (Ihdinâ)*

The positioning: it is the bondsman's reply to Allah’s question, as if He asks: *“What aim is closest to your heart?”* and the bondsman replies: *“Guide us!”*

Know that because of its several levels of meaning, it is as if *“Guide us”* is derived from the four sources [or verbal nouns - masdar] of the act of guidance. For its recipients may be divided into those who are guided, those who seek guidance, and those who seek increase in guidance. So *“Guide us”* means: make us firm in guidance if we are a society; increase us in guidance if we are a community; make us successful in guidance if we are a tribe; give us guidance if we are a group.

Also, according to the verse, *“Who gives unto everything [that exists] its true nature and form, and thereupon guides it,”* (20:50) Allah guided us by giving us external and inner senses; then He guided us by placing evidences in the outside world and in ourselves; then He guided us by sending prophets and revealing books. And then He guided us with the greatest guidance, which was that by removing the veils from the truth, it appeared as truth and falsehood appeared as falsehood.

O Lord! Show us what is indeed the truth and empower us to follow it, and show us the false for what it is, and enable us to avoid it.

# *The Straight Path (al-sirât al-mustaqîm)*

Know that the Straight Path is justice, consisting of the blending and summary of wisdom (hikma), chastity (iffa), and courage (shajâ'a), which are the mean or middle way of the three degrees of man's three powers.

To explain: when Allâh (May He be exalted and glorified!) housed spirit (ruh) in man's body, which is changing, needy, and exposed to dangers, He deposited three powers in it to ensure its continued existence.

The First: the power of animal appetites to attract benefits.

The Second: the power of savage passion to repulse harmful and destructive things.

The Third: the power of angelic intellect to distinguish between benefit and harm.

However, since His wisdom necessitated that humanity should achieve perfection through the mystery of competition, Allâh placed no innate limitation on these powers, as He did on those of other living beings. He did however limit them through the Shari'a, for it prohibits excess (ifrât) and deficiency (tafrît) and enjoins the middle way (wasat). This is what is inferred by the verse *“Pursue then the right course as you have been bidden.”* (11:112) In the absence of any innate limitation, three degrees arise in the three powers: the degree of deficiency, which is negligence; the degree of superabundance, which is excess; and the middle way, which is justice.

Thus, deficiency in the power of intellect is stupidity and foolishness, and its excess, perfidious deception and over-meticulousness in trivialities, and its middle way is wisdom. *“He who has been given wisdom, has been given great good.”* (2:269)

Know that just as the power varies in these degrees, so does each of its branches vary. For example, in the question of the creation of actions, the middle way is that of the Sunni School between the Jabriyya and the Mu'tazila, and in the question of doctrine, the school of divine unity is the middle way between the denial of the divine attributes (ta'til) and anthropomorphism (tashbîh). You can make further examples in the same way.

Deficiency in the power of animal appetites is apathy and want of appetite, while its excess is profligacy, which is to desire whatever is encountered whether lawful or unlawful. Its middle way is uprightness, which is desiring what is licit and shunning what is illicit. You may apply the principle applied to this power to any of its branches, such as eating, drinking, dressing, and so on.

Deficiency in the power of savage passion is cowardice, that is, fear of what is not to be feared and delusive imagining. Its excess is uncontrolled anger, which is the progenitor of despotism, domination, and tyranny. And its middle way is courage, which is giving freely of oneself with love and eagerness for the defence of the laws of Islam and the upholding of the Word of divine unity. Apply this same principle to each of its branches.

The six extremes are thus tyranny and the three middle ways are justice, which is the Straight Path and is to act in act in accordance with *“Pursue then the right course as you have been bidden.”* (11:112) Whoever passes along this way will cross the bridge suspended over the Fire.

# *The path of those whom You have blessed (Sirât alladhîna an'amta 'alayhim)*

Consider this: the positioning of the Qur'an's words like pearls is not on one string, but in a multiplicity of embroideries resulting from the interweaving of lines of different relationships, close and distant, apparent and hidden. For the basis of the miraculousness after the conciseness is this embroidery.

For example, *“The way of those whom You have blessed (Sirât alladhîna an'amta 'alayhim)”* has a relationship with *“All praise be to God”* because bounty *(al-ni'ma)* is the corollary of *“praise”*

* and with *“Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds”* because perfect sustaining and raising is through the continual bestowal of bounties *(al-ni'am)*
* and with *“the Most Merciful, All-Compassionate,”* because the recipients of bounty - I mean the prophets, the martyrs who witness to the
* Truth, and the righteous - are a mercy to the worlds and evident exemplars of mercy;
* and with “*Owner of the Day of Judgement (mâlik al-yawm ad-din),”* because religion *(din)* is the perfect bounty;
* and with “*do we worship,”* because they are foremost in worship;
* and with “*do we seek help,”* because they have been graced with success in response to their request for help;
* and with “*Guide us,”* because according to the meaning of “*Follow then their guidance,*”(6:90) they are the finest models;
* and with *“the Straight Path”* because clearly the straight path is confined to their way. This is an example, so carry on in the same way.

In the word “*path (al-sirât)”* is an indication that their way is passable, and has restricted sides so that those who travel down it will not stray from it.

In *“those whom (alladhîna)”* - since it is a relative pronoun and it is the function of the relative pronoun to describe things known to the listener -is an indication to the exaltedness of their rank, and their refulgent shining in the darkness of mankind, as if they are obvious to all listeners even if they do not search or enquire. While its being plural indicates the possibility of following their way, and corroborated by the constant consensus concerning it, its Tightness, since *“Allâh's power is with the community.”*

In the use of the perfect tense for “*You have blessed (an'amta)”* is a hint to the means of requesting further bounty. And its use of the second person, addressing Allâh directly, indicates that it is an intercessor, as though one is saying: *“O my God! You are the bestower of bounty and in Your grace have bestowed it before; so bestow it on me again, even though I am not worthy.”*

And in *“on them ('alayhim)”* is an indication to the heavy burden that is divine messengership and the bearing of the Trust, and a sign that the Messengers are like high mountains on which pour down torrents of rain so that the plains may be flooded. As one part of the Qur'an expounds another, how beautifully “*Those whom You have blessed*” is expounded by *“[they] are in the company of those on whom is the grace of Allâh - of the prophets, the veracious, the witnesses, and the righteous” (*4:69)!

*If you were to ask:* The outlooks of the prophets are all different and their ways of worship are diverse. What is the reason for this?

*You would be told:* The prophets are all followed in the principles of faith and fundamental rules, for these are constant and fixed; unlike secondary matters, the nature of which is to change in the course of time. Just as the four seasons and the stages in a person's life warrant different remedies and clothing - what is a cure at one time may cause illness at another - so the stages of the life of humanity necessitate differences in rules of secondary importance, which are healing for spirits and nourishment for hearts.

# *Not of those who earn Your anger (ghayri' l-maghdûbi 'alayhim)*

The positioning: know that in being a 'station' of fear and flight, this station has a relationship with those preceding it. For a person looks in bewilderment and terror towards the station of dominicality signified by Glory and Beauty; he looks seeking refuge towards the station of worship in “do we worship;” in his impotence he looks towards the station of reliance in *“do we seek help,”* and seeking consolation he looks towards its constant companion; that is, the station of hope and relief. For what occurs first to the heart of one who sees something terrifying is a sense of bewilderment, then he wants to flee, then having realized his impotence it occurs to him to rely on Allâh, and then he receives solace.

If you were to ask: Allâh (May He be exalted) is All-Wise and Self-Sufficient, so what is the wisdom in the creation of evil, ugliness, and misguidance in the world?

You would be told: Know that perfection, good, and beauty are essentially what are intended in the universe, and are in the majority. Relatively, defects, evil, and ugliness are in the minority, and are insignificant, secondary, and trivial. Their Creator created them interspersed among good and perfection not for their own sakes, but as preliminaries and units of measurement for the appearance, or existence, of the relative truths of good and perfection.

If you were to ask: So what is the importance of the relative truths for the sake of which partial evil is approved?

You would be told: Relative truths are the ties between beings and the threads with which their order is woven. They are the rays from which is reflected each unique being of the species in the universe. Relative truths are thousands of times more numerous than real truths, for if the real attributes of a person were sevenfold, the relative truths would be seven hundred. A lesser evil may therefore be forgiven, approved even, for the sake of the greater good. For to abandon the greater good because it contains some lesser evil, is a greater evil. And in the view of wisdom, if the lesser evil encounters the greater evil, the lesser evil becomes a relative good, as has been established in principle in zakât and jihâd, for example. As is well-known, *“things are known through their opposites,”* which means that the existence of a thing's opposite causes the manifestation and existence of its relative truths. For example, if there were no ugliness and it did not permeate beauty, the existence of beauty with its infinite degrees would not be apparent.

If you were to ask: What is the reason for the different forms of the following three words: *“an'amta - You have blessed”* being a verb, *“al-maghdûb - earn [Your] anger”* being a passive participle, and *“ad-dâllin -those who go astray”* being an active participle? Also, what is the reason for the following differences being mentioned: the attribute of the third group, the outcome of the second, which is the result of its attributes, and the exact terms of the first?

You would be told: The term bounty (or blessings) is chosen because bounty is a delight to which the spirit inclines, and it is in the past tense because this intimates that it is the mark of the Absolutely Generous One not to take back what He gives. By drawing attention to this practice of the Bestower of Bounty, it also suggests a way of reaching what is requested, as if one was saying: *“Since it is Your practice to bestow bounties and You have bestowed them previously, bestow them on me too.”*

As for *“Not of those who earn Your anger,”* by it is meant those who exceed the limits of the power of passion, and have committed injustice and depravity by abandoning the rules. Since there is in the essence of depravity and injustice an evil pleasure and vicious pride that do not sicken the soul, the Qur'an mentions a consequence that does sicken it, and that is the descent of divine wrath. The fact that a passive participle has been chosen implies continuation and this is an indication that rebelliousness and evil become ineradicable characteristics if they are not halted by repentance and forgiveness.

# *Nor of those who go astray (wa lâ dâllin)*

This refers to those who have strayed from the path because delusion and passion have overridden the intellect and conscience, and they have fallen into hypocrisy through false belief. The Qur'an has chosen to describe it thus because misguidance is itself pain; the soul is sickened by it, and the spirit avoids it even it has not seen its result. And the active participle has been chosen because misguidance will be misguidance so long as it is not halted.

Know too that all pain lies in misguidance and all pleasure is found in belief. If you wish, consider the state of a person whom the Hand of Power has taken out of the darkness of non-existence and flung into the world, that vast and frightening desert. When he opens his eyes seeking compassion, he sees afflictions and calamities besetting him like enemies. Seeking mercy, he looks to the elements and natural causes, and finds them stonyhearted and relentless, baring their teeth at him. Seeking help he raises his gaze to the celestial bodies and sees them awesome and bewildering; threatening him as though they were projectiles of fire issuing from huge mouths and encircling him. In bewilderment he lowers his head, and shielding it, starts to ponder. Then he hears the thousand screams of his needs and the moaning of his wants. Fearfully, he looks to his conscience seeking relief, and is met with thousands of vast and overwhelming hopes which cannot be satisfied in this world. For God's sake, what is the state of this person if he does not believe in the first creation and the resurrection of the dead, and in the Creator and Last Judgment? Do you imagine the sufferings of Hell would be severer for him, searing his soul more terribly? For his state is one of compounded anxiety, terror, impotence, trembling, fear-fullness, orphan hood, and despair. If he considers his power, he will see himself to be impotent and weak. If he tries to quieten his needs, he will realize that they cannot be quietened. If he shouts and calls for help, he will not be heard and he will not be helped. He supposes everything to be hostile. He imagines everything to be strange, so feels no familiarity. He does not look to the revolutions of the celestial bodies except with fear, bewilderment, and fright, which disturbs his conscience.

Now consider the state of this person if he is on the Straight Path and his conscience and spirit are illuminated with the light of belief: you will see that when he enters this world, opens his eyes, and beholds the assaults of all the things around him, he discerns a support on which to lean in the face of these onslaughts, and this is recognition of the Creator, so he will find rest.

Then if he examines his innate disposition, potentialities, and hopes, which extend to eternity, he will perceive a source of assistance. He seeks help from it for his hopes, for from it is drawn the water of life, which is knowledge of eternal felicity. And if he raises his head and looks at the universe, he will feel a familiarity with everything; he will sense familiarity and affection coming from every flower. He will see in the motions of the heavenly bodies the wisdom of their Creator, and he will receive pleasure from their progress. Gazing on them, he will take a lesson and reflect. It is as if the sun is beckoning to him, saying: *“My brother! Don't be frightened of me, I welcome your arrival. Both of us are servants of the One Being, obedient to His command.”* The moon, the stars, the sea, and their sisters will call each with her particular tongue. Waving to him, they will say: *“Welcome! Don't you know us? We are all busy in the service of your Owner. Do not feel dismay or fright, nor be distressed by the threat of the calamities with their bared teeth, for the reins of all things are in your Creator's hand.”*

Thus, in the first situation, the person feels a terrible distress in the depths of his conscience. He will be compelled to rid himself of it and to soothe and deaden his senses through diversions, feigning unawareness and busying himself with trivia, so to deceive his conscience and numb his spirit. He will otherwise feel an acute pain in the depths of his conscience, and its effect will be apparent to the degree he is distant from the true path. As for the second situation, there the person feels in the depths of his spirit a great delight and immediate happiness. Whenever his heart awakens and his conscience stirs and his spirit is moved, his happiness will increase and he will receive the good news that the doors of a spiritual paradise are being flung open to him.

1. From Ishârât al-I'jâz, BSN [↑](#footnote-ref-1)