# **The First Word: Bismillah**

إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

“It is from Solomon, and it is: ‘In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All- Compassionate. (Neml surah 27/30)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرٰيهَا

“Noah said, “Board it!” (and all the people and the pairs of creatures God willed should be saved were settled in the Ark). “In God’s Name be its course and its mooring. Surely my Lord is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.” (Hud surah 11/41)

اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذٖي خَلَقَۚ

“Read in and with the Name of your Lord, Who has created-” (Alak surah, 96/1)

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كُلُّ كَلَامٍ أَوْ أَمْرٍ ذِي بَالٍ لَا يُفْتَحُ بِذِكْرِ اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَهُوَ أَبْتَرُ أَوْ قَالَ أَقْطَعُ

Ebu Hurayra reported God's Messenger as saying, "Every important matter which is not begun by an expression of remembrance of God is maimed.” (İbn Hanbel, II, 360)

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ قَالَتْ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم إِذَا أَكَلَ أَحَدُكُمْ طَعَامًا فَلْيَقُلْ بِسْمِ اللهِ فَإِنْ نَسِىَ فِى أَوَّلِهِ فَلْيَقُلْ بِسْمِ اللهِ فِى أَوَّلِهِ وَآخِرِهِ

From 'Aishah that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "When one of you eats food, then let him say: 'Bismillah.' If he forgets in the beginning, then let him say: 'Bismillah Fi Awwalihi Wa Akhirih (In the Name of Allah in its beginning and its end.)" (Jami’ Tirmidhi Book 25 Hadith 75)

عَنْ جَابِرٍ عَنِ النَّبِىِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « أَغْلِقْ بَابَكَ وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللهِ فَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لاَ يَفْتَحُ بَابًا مُغْلَقًا وَأَطْفِ مِصْبَاحَكَ وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللهِ وَخَمِّرْ إِنَاءَكَ وَلَوْ بِعُودٍ تَعْرُضُهُ عَلَيْهِ وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللهِ وَأَوْكِ سِقَاءَكَ وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ اللهِ »

**Jabir reported the Prophet (PBUH) as saying:** Shut your door and make mention of Allah's name, for the devil does not open a door which has been shut; extinguish your lamp and make mention of Allah's name, cover up your vessel even by a piece of wood that you just put on it and make mention of Allah's name, and tie up your water-skin mentioning Allah's name. (Sunan Abi Dawud 3731 Book 27 Hadith 63)

It must be a common principle inherited from generation to generation through the prophets to say basmala (In the Name of Allah) before every legitimate and meaningful action. In Islam, it is recommended to start every important and legitimate work with basmala, whether it is about the worldly matters or the hereafter. It is also known that it is necessary to say basmala during certain worship and animal slaughter.

**By saying basmala before starting any work, a Muslim wants to say**,

"I am starting in the name of Allah, for His sake and with His permission, not on behalf of my soul or any other being";

**He states that** he expects God’s names The Compassionate and The Merciful to manifest.

So that he wishes happiness both in this world and in the hereafter.

He wishes that the power necessary to be able to cope with the work he undertakes will be bestowed by Almighty Allah, and that he is constantly in need of His help. That way he will get God’s help.

**The Worth and Meaning of Bismillah**

Bismillah, “In the Name of Allah,” is the **start of all things good**. We too start with it. Know, o my soul! This word is continuously spoken by all beings. If you want to know what **an endless strength,** what **an unending source of richness is Bismillah**, listen to the following **story**:

Someone who travels in the deserts of Arabia has to take the name of a tribal chief and enter under his protection. Because in this way he may be saved from the attacks of thieves and get his needs. On his own he will be destroyed against many enemies and needs. And so, two men went on such a journey and entered the desert. One of them was humble, the other arrogant. The humble man took the name of a tribal chief, but the arrogant man did not. The first traveled safely wherever he went. When he met thieves, he said: “I am traveling in the name of such-and-such tribal leader,” and they did not do any harm to him. When he entered a tent, he was respected because of the name. But the proud man had a lot of difficulties during his journey. He was afraid of everything and begged for his every need. He was humiliated and shamed.

My arrogant soul! **You are the traveler, and this world is a desert.** **Your weakness and poverty are endless, and your enemies and needs are too many.** Therefore, take the name of the real owner of this world and be saved from begging and fear for everything.

**Bismillah is like a treasure that transforms your weakness and poverty into an infinite power and mercy; it makes your weakness and poverty a most acceptable thing before Allah.** The person who says “Bismillah” is like someone who joins the army. He acts in the name of the government, he doesn't fear anyone, and he does everything in the name of the government. If you see that a man came and made the people of a city do some work, you will understand that he is acting in the name of a king or a ruler, not on his own.

**In the same way, all things act in the name of Allah.** Small things like seeds carry huge trees on their heads. That means all trees say “Bismillah”, fill their hands with fruits from the treasury of Allah, and give them to us. All animals like cows, camels and sheep say “Bismillah” and make milk with the permission of Allah. The soft roots of plants say “Bismillah” and pass through hard rock. The thin leaves say the verse of Qur'an: "*O fire, be cool and peaceful* " against the heat of the Sun and stay fresh. By saying the name of Allah, everything becomes servant to them.

Since all things say “Bismillah” and give us the things that Allah created in the name of Allah, we too should say “Bismillah.” We should give in the name of Allah and take in the name of Allah.

***Question:* We pay people who sell things. But Allah is the real owner of everything, so what price does Allah want?**

***Answer:* The price Allah wants for those valuable gifts is three things:** one is ***remembrance***, another is ***thanks***, and the other is ***consideration (thinking)***.

Saying “**Bismillah**” at the start is remembrance, and “***Elhamdulillah***” at the end is thanks. And understanding and accepting that these valuable gifts are beautiful pieces of art of Allah and a generosity of His mercy, is **consideration (thinking, reflection, tefekkur)**. Kissing the hands of a man who brings you a precious gift from king, but forgetting the sender would be a great foolishness. So, thanking the fruit seller for the apple that we buy, but forgetting the creator of these apples is a far worse foolishness.

O my soul! If you do not want to be foolish in that way, give in the name of Allah, take in the name of Allah, begin in the name of Allah, and act in the name of Allah. That's the whole point.

(From the Risale-i Nur Collection by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi – a thematic tafseer)

**AL-FATIHA- PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE**

**In the name of Allah-the Most Kind, Most Merciful, the All-Compassionate**

All praise is for Allah-Lord of the whole universe, the Most Kind, Most Merciful, Master of Judgment Day. You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help. Guide us along the Straight Path, the Way of those You have blessed-not those who deserve Your anger, or those who lost their way.

**Seyyidu’l-istigfar**

O Allah! You are my Lord, there is no god but You. You have created me, and I am Your servant. I try my best to keep my covenant with You. I seek refuge in You from the evil of what I have done. I acknowledge Your favors upon me and I acknowledge my sins. So, forgive me, for truly no one forgives sins except You.

**Further readings**

**The Fourteenth Gleam, Second station**

**It states that Bismillahirrahmanirrahim is the essence, catalogue, and key of the Qur'an, as well as a luminous and sacred bond extending from the Throne to the earth, a key that opens the door to eternal bliss, and a source of light that gives abundance and blessings to every blessed thing.**

**In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.**

***[The Queen] said: “Chieftains, here delivered to me is a letter worthy of respect. It is from Solomon, and is: In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.”***(27:29–30)

**First mystery**

**Three stamps of Lordship are impressed upon the face of the universe, the earth, and humanity. They are one within the other, and each carries a pattern of the others:**

*Divinity*: We see this in how all entities in **the universe** help and cooperate with one another, and how they have a general interconnectedness and reciprocity. The referent is *In the Name of God*.

*Divine Mercifulness*: We see this in the resemblance, proportion, orderliness, harmony, grace and mercy in the disposition, raising, and administering of **plants and animals.** The referent is the All-Merciful, in *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful*.

*Divine Compassion*: We see this in the subtleties of kindness, fine points of affection, and rays of compassion on the face of **the human comprehensive nature**. The referent is the All-Compassionate, in *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*.

**Thus, the *Basmala* is the sacred** title of the three seals of the Divine Absolute Oneness, which form a luminous line on the page of the universe, and a powerful ray and golden thread of that Oneness. Revealed from above us, the tip rests upon humanity, a miniature of the universe and its fruit. The *Basmala* links the world to the Divine Throne, and is a stairway for us to rise to the throne of true humanity.

**Second mystery**

**Divine Unity (which demonstrates Itself through the manifestation of the Divine Names throughout the universe) is evident in the boundless multiplicity of individualized creatures.** So as not to overwhelm our minds in the all-encompassing manifestation of these Names, the Qur’an, being a miracle of exposition, constantly reiterates the manifestation of Divine Absolute Oneness within Unity—the concentrated manifestation of certain Divine Names on beings individually.

Consider this analogy: The sun encompasses innumerable things in its light. But to hold the totality of its light in our minds, we would need a vast conceptual and perceptual power. So, lest the sun be forgotten, all shining objects reflect its properties (light and heat) as best they can and so manifest themselves as the sun, and those properties (heat, light, and the color spectrum) encompass the objects that the sun faces.

Similarly—*to God applies the most sublime attribute[[1]](#footnote-1)*—just as God’s Oneness, His being Eternally Besought, and His Divine Names are manifested in everything, particularly in living things and especially in our mirror-like nature, each Divine Name related to creatures encompasses all creatures through Divine Unity. Thus, the Qur’an constantly draws our attention to the seal of Divine Oneness within Divine Unity, lest our minds be overwhelmed by Unity and our hearts become heedless of the Pure and Holy Essence. So, it is the *Basmala* which indicates the three important aspects of the stamp of Divine Absolute Oneness or Uniqueness.

**Third mystery**

**Divine Mercy causes the universe to rejoice.** It gives the spark of light and life to dark entities, and nurtures and raises up creatures struggling to attain their endless needs. It causes the universe to be directed towards humanity, just as a tree is directed towards its fruit, and to hasten to our assistance. It fills and lights up boundless space, an otherwise void and empty world, making it rejoice. For transient humanity, Divine Mercy also appoints eternity and the rank of the creature addressed and beloved of the One, Eternal before and after eternity. **Since Divine Mercy is so powerful a truth, so inviting, mild, helpful, and worthy of love, say: *In the Name of God, the All- Merciful, the All-Compassionate*,** **and cling to this truth, and be saved from endless desolation and need.** **Draw near to the Eternal Monarch, and become the one He addresses, befriends, and loves through the rays and intercession of that Mercy.**

Why do all entities gather around humanity with purpose and foresight, and hasten to meet our needs with perfect orderliness and grace? Do they recognize us and so run to help us—as irrational as it is, in many respects, impossible, for it requires that we, who have no power, should have the power of the mightiest, absolute sovereign? Or does this help reach us via the recognition of One Absolutely Powerful behind the veil of the visible universe? In other words, the One, All-Knowing and All-Compassionate, knows and has mercy on us, and puts all the entities of the universe at our service.

**Consider this: How could the All-Majestic One, Who causes all entities to turn towards you with their hands outstretched to help you, not know and see you?** He knows you and teaches you through His Mercy that He knows you. So, know Him, and reverently show that you do. Understand with conviction that Divine Mercy, which exists together with Wisdom, Knowledge, Grace, and Power, subjects the universe to your service, even though you are a slight, transient, wholly feeble, powerless, and needy creature. Most certainly, such Mercy requires total and sincere gratitude as well as honest and ardent reverence. So, say, *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, as this expresses and interprets such feelings. Make it the means of admission to His Mercy, and an intercessor at the Court of the All-Merciful.

The presence and actuality of Divine Mercy is as obvious as the sun. Just as a center-patterned tapestry is woven by positioning and sequencing the warp and weft to the center, so also the luminous threads extending from the manifestations of Divine Names throughout the universe weave a seal of such compassion, a tapestry of such kindness, a pattern of such grace within the stamp of Mercy, being impressed upon the mind more brilliantly than the sun.

The Gracious All-Merciful One, Who causes everything to serve life; Who demonstrates His Compassion in self-sacrifice, the extraordinary sweetness of this compassion, of motherhood in plants and animals; He Who subjects animate life to humanity and thereby displays our importance and status as the finest and loveliest weave of the Divine Lordship as well as the brilliance of His Mercy—this One has, due to His absolute lack of need, made His Mercy an acceptable intercessor for His animate creatures and humanity. So, if you are truly human, say, *In the Name of God, the All- Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, and find this intercessor.

Nothing but Divine Mercy brings to life, nurtures, or administers all plant and animal species. Divine Mercy neither overlooks nor confuses one with another, but raises each at the right time and with perfect order, wisdom, and grace. It impresses the seal of Divine Oneness upon the earth’s surface. In the same way that the existence of this Mercy is as certain as the existence of the creatures of the earth, so too are the creatures proofs of the actual manifestations or reality of this Mercy.

The seal of Mercy and Divine Oneness is impressed upon the earth and upon humanity’s nature. The mercy stamped upon us is not less than the compassion and mercy stamped upon the universe. Our nature is comprehensive, as we are at the center of the weave and we are the focal point of the Divine Names.

**How could the One Who gives you this face, Who impresses upon it the stamp of Mercy and the seal of Oneness, leave you to your own devices?** **How could He consider you of no account, have no regard for your actions, and so make all of creation, which is directed towards you, futile and wasteful?** How could He make the Tree of Creation worthless and rotten with decayed fruit? Would He cause His perfect, indisputable Mercy to be denied when it is as obvious as the sun, and His Wisdom, which is as clear as light?

**You can ascend to the throne of that Mercy by *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*.** Grasp its importance by looking at the beginning of each Qur’anic *sura*, all worthwhile books and good actions. A most decisive argument for this phrase’s worth is the comment of leading Islamic scholars, like Imam Shafi‘i[[2]](#footnote-2): “Although the *Basmala* is a single verse, it was revealed 114 times in the Qur’an.”

**Fourth mystery**

**In the face of Divine Unity that is manifested within the boundless multiplicity of individualized creatures, declaring, *You alone do we worship* (1:5) is not enough for everyone—our minds wander from reality.** We would have to possess a heart as comprehensive as the earth to observe the One in His Oneness behind the unity that lies within the totality of individualized entities so that we could say, *You alone do We worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5). Thus, the seal of Divine Oneness must be apparent on each individualized entity and species, and a seal of Divine Oneness should exist within the stamp of Divine Mercy, so that everyone at every level can turn to the Pure and Holy One and, by saying, *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help* (1:5), address Him directly.

It is because of this mighty truth that the wise Qur’an abruptly juxtaposes the individual detail with the totality, the small with the large, the particular with the general. To prevent the mind from wandering and the heart from drowning, to allow the spirit to find its True Object of Worship directly, the Qur’an mentions our creation and speech, and the fine details of the favors and wisdom in our features, while mentioning the creation of the heavens and the earth. This truth is miraculously shown in *And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the varieties in your languages and in your colors* (30:22).

There are stamps of various kinds and degrees in the universe that show that it is God Almighty Who has created, sustains, and directs us. Although these stamps, existing in concentric circles of different sizes, display a unity behind the multiplicity of innumerable creatures, it is still a unity within multiplicity and, therefore, cannot enable worshippers to address God directly. Thus the stamp of Divine Oneness must be on everything; that is, through the concentrated manifestation of God’s Names on it, each thing and species should display that it is God Who has created, sustains, and directs it, so that multiplicity may not detract minds from seeing the Pure and Holy One in everything in the universe, and so that a way can be opened up to the hearts to enable them to turn to and address Him directly.

Also, a most entrancing design, a radiant light, an agreeable sweetness, a pleasing beauty, and a powerful truth have been placed upon the stamp of Divine Oneness to draw our attention and hearts to it. Mercy’s vigor and power draw sentient beings’ attention to It, and enable them to attain the seal of Oneness, to concentrate on the One of Absolute Oneness, and thereby to address Him directly, declaring, *You alone do we worship, and from You alone do We seek help* (1:5).

Thus, *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, being the index of the Chapter of Opening (*Surat al-Fatiha*) and an epitome of the Qur’an, is the sign and interpreter of this mighty truth. Whoever equips himself or herself with this can travel through the levels of Divine Mercy; whoever causes it to speak can learn the mysteries of Divine Mercy and see the lights of Divine Compassion and Pity.

**Fifth mystery**

There is a Tradition to the effect that God has created humanity in the form of the All-Merciful One. Its extravagant interpretation by some Sufis does not accord with the fundamentals of belief. Some ecstatic Sufis assert that our spiritual nature is “in the form of the All-Merciful.” Immersed in their contemplative and spiritual trances, they might be excused for expressing mistaken views. If others consider such views acceptable, they are in error.

The Pure and Holy God, Who orders and administers the universe as easily as if it were a palace or a house, Who treats galaxies as if they were particles and sends them traveling through space with wisdom and grace, Who dispatches the minutest particles as if they were obedient officials, has no equal or match, no partner or opposite. According to, *There is nothing like to Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing* (42:11), He has no form, like, or peer. Nothing resembles Him or is similar to Him. On the other hand, according to, *And to Him applies the most sublime attribute in the heavens and the earth, and He is Exalted in Might, the All-Wise* (30:27), humanity can conceive of His acts, Attributes, and Names via allegory and comparison. Thus, the Tradition’s intended meaning is, “Humanity’s form, in its totality, reflects the Divine Name the All-Merciful.”

This Divine Name is evident via the lights of all the Names manifested in the universe and on the earth through innumerable proofs of God’s absolute Lordship. In the same way, the All-Merciful is also manifested fully in our comprehensive form, which is a miniature form of the universe.

A further indication may be derived from the following analogy: Animate creation and humanity are loci of evidence of the Necessarily Existent One, proofs and mirrors to the All-Merciful, All-Compassionate. These proofs are so certain, clear, and evident that just as we might say that a mirror reflecting the sun “has the form of (or is like) the sun” (emphasizing the brilliant evidence of the sun’s light), we also might say, “Humanity has the All-Merciful One’s form,” stressing our being a clear evidence of, and perfect connection with, the All-Merciful. Therefore, the more moderate and balanced believers in the Unity of Being said, “There is no existent but He,” expressing the evidence’s clarity and the connection’s perfection.

O God, O All-Merciful, All-Compassionate. Through the truth of *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, have mercy on us as befits Your being the All-Compassionate. Open to our understanding the mysteries of this phrase, as befits Your being the All-Merciful. Amen.

**Sixth mystery**

O unhappy humanity, laboring under infinite impotence and never-ending need! Understand the value of Mercy as a means and an intercessor. It is the means to a Majestic Sovereign in Whose army vast galaxies and minute particles serve together in perfect obedience and harmony. That Majestic Sovereign of Eternity is the Absolutely Wealthy and Self-Sufficient One, having no need and being in need of nothing and no one at all. Everything is under His authority and direction, obedient before His Glory and Grandeur, awed and prostrate before His Majesty. O human! Mercy uplifts you to the Presence of that Absolutely Wealthy, Independent, and Eternal Sovereign Who befriends you and addresses you as His beloved servant.

Yet, just as the light of the sun provides you with its reflection through your mirror although you cannot draw close to it, so too does the Light of His Mercy make the Pure and Holy One, the Sun of Eternity, close to us, although we are infinitely far from Him. So, O human! Whoever finds this Mercy finds an eternal treasure of unfailing light. This Mercy can be reached through the Sunna of the noblest Prophet, its most brilliant exemplar and representative, its most eloquent voice and herald, whom the Qur’an hails as *a mercy for all the worlds*, He can be reached by calling the blessings of God upon him, for the intent of this prayer is mercy. As a prayer of mercy for the living embodiment of Divine Mercy, it reaches the *mercy for all the worlds*. So, use this prayer to reach him, and make him the means by which you can reach the Mercy of the All-Merciful. All Muslims repeatedly say this prayer for the *mercy for all the worlds*, which is synonymous with Mercy. Doing so is a dazzling demonstration of how precious is the gift of Mercy, and how broad is its sphere.

In conclusion, the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, is both the most precious jewel in Mercy’s treasury and Its doorkeeper. The first and foremost key to Mercy is *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, and the easiest key to use is praying for or calling for God’s blessings and peace to be bestowed on the Prophet.

O God! For the sake of the mysteries of *In the Name of God, the All- Merciful, the All-Compassionate*, bestow blessings and peace on the one You sent as a mercy for all the worlds as befits Your Mercy and the honor due to him, and on his Family and Companions. Grant us mercy so that we are free of the need for mercy from any among your creatures, other than You. Amen.

All-Glorified are You! We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

1. The Qur’an, 16: 60. This verse is mentioned although we sometimes need comparisons to explain abstract truths for the Divine Being, He is, in fact, beyond all comparisons. In addition, the most sublime comparisons should be made to explain Divine truths. (Tr.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Al-Shafi‘i, Muhammad ibn Idris (d. 820): Muslim legal scholar, founder of the Shafi‘I legal school. He developed a new synthesis of Islamic legal thought. He mainly dealt with what the sources of Islamic law were and how they could be applied by the law to contemporary events. His *ar-Risala* entitles him to be called the “father of Muslim juris- prudence.” (Tr.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)