**A Journey from Darkness to Light in the Illumination of Al-Fatiha’s Straight Path**

**Below, you will find an original exegesis of the three paths presented in Surah Al-Fatiha from Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's work, \*Lemaat\*. This work may be titled as follows:**

**Rising Above the Condemned and the Misguided to Behold the Straight Path**

**Beyond the Shadows of Misguidance: A Contemplative View of the Straight Path**

**Transending the Darkness of Wrath and Misguidance: A Gaze upon the Path of Truth**

**Departing from the Realms of Wrath to Witness the Straight Path**

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**GLEAMS OF TRUTH**

**All true pain is in misguidance, and all true pleasure in belief: a mighty truth dressed in imagination**

Sensible fellow-traveler! O beloved friend! If you want to clearly perceive the differences between the luminous way of *the Straight Path* and *the dark path of those who have incurred God’s wrath* and *those who are astray*,

Come, take your fancy and mount your imagination, together we will go into the darkness of non-existence. We will visit that vast grave, that city full of the dead.

An Eternal All-Powerful One took us out of the darkness of non-exis- tence with His hand of Power, mounted us on existence, and sent us to this world, this city without pleasures.

Now we have come to the world of existence, this fearful desert. Our

eyes have opened and we have looked in the six directions.

Firstly, we look before us seeking mercy and help, but tribulations and

pain attack us like enemies. We take fright at this and retreat.

We look to left and right to the natural elements, seeking help. But we see their hearts are hard and merciless. They grind their teeth, looking at us angrily and threateningly. They heed neither plea nor plaint.

Like helpless creatures, we despairingly lift our gazes upwards. Seeking

help, we look to the heavenly bodies, but see them to be threatening.

As though each was a bomb; having shot from of their housings they

are speeding through space. But somehow they do not touch one another.

If one confused its way accidentally, this visible, corporeal world would be blown to pieces; God forbid! They move dependent on chance; no good can come of them.

In despair we turn back our gaze from that direction, overcome by painful bewilderment. We bow our heads, bent over our breasts; we look to ourselves, pondering and studying our own selves.

Now we hear the shouts of myriad needs coming from our wretched selves. The cries of thousands of desires issue forth. While hoping for sol- ace, we take fright.

No good comes from that either. Seeking refuge, we consult our con- science or conscious nature; we look into it seeking a means and seeking help. Alas, again we are left unaided; we have to help our conscience or conscious nature.

For in it are thousands of aspirations, seething desires, wild emotions, all extending throughout the universe. We tremble with all of them, and cannot offer help.

Left unaided between existence and non-existence, these aspirations extend to eternity in the past on one side and eternity in the future on the other. They are so extensive. Even if the conscious nature were to swallow the world, it would still not be satisfied.

Whatever we have had recourse to on this painful path, we have encountered calamities. For the *paths of those who have incurred God’s wrath* and *those who are astray* are thus. It is chance and misguidance which lead us on these paths.

It is we who have allowed chance and misguidance to lead us, and so we have fallen into our present state. We are in such a state that we have forgotten the beginning of existence and the end of the world, as well as the Maker and the resurrection of the dead.

We are in a state that is worse than Hell; it scorches more terribly and it crushes our spirits. We had recourse to these six directions, but the result was this state.

It is a merciless state, comprising fear and terror, impotence and trem-

bling, alarm and isolation, being orphaned and despair.

Now we will take up fronts opposite each of the directions (from where we had sought mercy and help, only to fall into a merciless state) and try to repulse them. Firstly, we have recourse to our own strength, but alas! We are powerless, weak.

Secondly, we turn to our souls, hoping their needs can be silenced. But alas! We see that they cry out unceasingly.

Thirdly, we cry out for help, seeking a savior; but there is no one to hear and respond. We think everything is hostile, everything strange. Nothing consoles our hearts; nothing gives a sense of security or true pleasure.

Fourthly, the more we look at the celestial bodies, the more they fill us with fear and awe. A feeling of terrifying loneliness, which vexes the con- science, appears; it torments the mind and fills us with delusions.

Brother! That is the path of misguidance! On it we experienced all the darkness of unbelief. Come, now, my brother, we will turn again to non-exis- tence.

Again we will come. This time our way is the Straight Path and the way of belief. Our guide and leader are Divine Grace and the Qur’an, the Falcon that flies over the centuries.

At one time, the Eternal Sovereign’s Mercy and Grace willed our exis- tence, His Power brought us forth, graciously mounting us on the law of His Will, completing us stage after stage.

Then It compassionately clothed us in the garment of existence, bestowing on us the rank of undertaking the Supreme Trust,207 whose dec- orations are supplication and the obligatory Prayers.

All of these stages are mansions of bestowal on our long road. To make our journey easy, the Divine Destiny has inscribed a decree on the parch- ment of our foreheads;

Wherever we go, with whichever group we are guests, we are wel- comed in truly brotherly fashion. We give of our belongings, and we receive from theirs: a delightful trade.

They nourish us, adorn us with gifts, then see us off on our way. Now

at last we have come to the door of the world. We hear a noise.

See, we have arrived on the earth. We have set foot in the visible world. Here is a promenade and festival, organized by the All-Merciful for the clamorous habitation of humankind.

We know nothing at all, our guide and leader is the Will of the All- Merciful. Our delicate eyes are the deputy of this guide. We open our eyes and look around. Do we recall the former time from where we came?

We were strangers, orphans, we had many enemies. We did not know who our protector was. Now, with the light of belief, which is a strong pillar, we find in us a point of support and a point of help against those enemies.

Our protector, belief in God, repulses our enemies. It is the light of our spirits, the light of our lives, and the spirit of our spirits. Now our hearts are easy and we disregard the enemies, not even recognizing them as such.

The Supreme Trust is the human selfhood or being human or human nature as the focus of

the manifestations of God’s Names that are manifested throughout the universe. (Tr.)

When on our former journey we consulted our conscious nature, we

heard innumerable cries, laments, and complaints.

And so we were overcome by calamities. Now, our aspirations and desires, our capacity and senses, constantly desire eternity. But we did not know how to obtain it. We were ignorant of how to obtain it and our con- scious nature lamented and cried.

However, all praise and gratitude be to God, this time we have found a point of help; it constantly gives life to our capacity and aspirations, mak- ing them take flight for eternity.

It shows them the way, and from that encouraging, mysterious point— belief in God—our capacity receives help, drinks the water of life, and races to its perfection.

The second pole of belief is affirmation of the Resurrection, the resur- rection of the dead and eternal happiness. Belief is the pearl of this shell and the Qur’an is its proof. Human conscience is a mystery indicating it.

Now raise your head and take a look at the universe. Speak to it. On our former way how awesome it appeared. Now it is smiling on every side, gracefully winking and speaking.

Do you not see—our eyes have become like bees? They fly everywhere in the garden of the universe, around the multitude of flowers; each flower offers these bees delicious nectar.

Each flower also offers friendliness, solace, and love. Our eyes collect them and bring back the pollen of testimony. They make the most delicious honey flow forth.

As our gaze alights on the movements of the heavenly bodies—the stars, or suns—they give the Creator’s wisdom in its hands. Learning impor- tant lessons and the manifestation of His Mercy, it takes flight.

It is as though the sun is speaking to us, saying: “My brothers and sis- ters! Do not feel lonely or frightened. You are welcome, how good of you to have come! This dwelling place is yours; I am but a candle-holder.

“I am like you, naught but a pure, absolutely obedient servant. Out of His utter mercy, the Unique and Eternally Besought One has made me a servant of light for you. Light and heat are from me, supplication and Prayer from you!”

Now look at the moon! And the stars and the seas; each says in its own

tongue: “Welcome! It’s good of you to have come! Do you not recognize us?”

Look through the mystery of cooperation, lend an ear to the signs of the order. Each says: “We are all servants, mirrors of the All-Majestic One’s Mercy; do not worry, do not become weary or fearful of us!

“Let not the roars of the thunder and cries of events rouse in you fear or suspicion, for within them reverberate Divine recitations, glorifications, supplications, and entreaties.

“The All-Majestic One, Who sent you to us, holds their reins in His hands. The eye of belief reveals the signs of Mercy on their faces; each pro- claims It.”

O believer with a wakeful heart! Let our eyes rest a little; now in their place we will hand over our sensitive ears to the blessed hands of belief. We will send them to the world to listen to its delightful tune.

The voices and sounds that we thought were universal mourning and lamentations of death on our former way are in fact supplications and prayers, cries of glorification.

Listen to the murmuring of the air, the twittering of birds, the patter- ing of the rain, the splashing of the seas, the crashing of thunder, the crack- ling of stones; all are meaningful sounds of prayer and glorification.

The melodies of the air, the roars of the thunder, the strains of the waves are all recitations of Divine Grandeur. The chanting of the rain, the chirruping of the birds are all glorifications of Mercy—indications of truth is uttered in their languages.

The sounds of things are all sounds of existence: “I too exist,” they say. The silent-seeming universe speaks uninterruptedly: “Do not suppose us to be lifeless, O chattering fellow!”

It is either the pleasure of bounty or the descent of mercy that makes the birds sing. With their different voices, their songs, they applaud mercy, alight on bounties, and take flight with thanks.

Implicitly they say: “Beings of the universe, O brothers and sisters! What fine conditions we live in; we are tenderly nourished, we are happy with our lot!” With beaks pointed to the heavens they send their cheerful songs through the air.

The universe is a lofty orchestra in its entirety; its recitations are heard through the light of belief. For wisdom rejects the existence of chance and the order in existence banishes any formation or event from being attribut- able to random coincidence.

Fellow-traveler! We are now leaving this world of representations, stepping down from the realm of images. We will stop in the field of rea- son, follow the ways we have traveled that lie before our eyes and com- pare them.

Our first, painful way is that of *those who have incurred God’s wrath*, and *those who are astray*. It inflicts suffering on the conscience, in its innermost part; suffering and severe pain. Consciousness shows this; we traveled that way in opposition to our conscience.

We must be saved from it, we need to be—either the pain must be alle- viated, or human feeling numbed—we cannot endure it otherwise, for our cries for help are not heeded.

Guidance is healing, but carnal tendencies and fancies block out the feelings. Submission to carnal tendencies and fancies requires solace, and solace requires forgetfulness, distraction, occupation, and entertainment

So that those elements of deception can fool the conscience and put the spirit to sleep, stopping it from feeling any pain. Otherwise, that griev- ous suffering scorches the conscience, the lamentation is unendurable and the anguish of despair cannot be borne.

This means, the farther one deviates from the Straight Path, the more one is stricken by this state, and the conscience cries out. Within every pleasure is a pain, which is a trace of this state.

This means that the glitter of civilization, which is a mixture of fancy, lust, amusement and dissipation, is a deceptive cure for the terrible distress that arises from misguidance; the glitter is a poisonous narcotic.

My dear friend! On our second way, that light-filled road, we perceived a state of mind in which life becomes a source of pleasure, and pain joy.

We understood that the second way imbues the spirit with a state that has various degrees according to the strength of belief. The body receives pleasure through the spirit and the spirit receives pleasure through the con- science.

An immediate pleasure is felt in the conscience; a spiritual paradise is present in the heart. Reflective thought opens up that pleasure only to increase it, while consciousness unveils secrets.

The more the heart is aroused, the more the conscience is stimulated and the spirit stirred, the greater the pleasure; fire is transformed into light and winter into summer.

The doors of paradises open up in the conscience and the world becomes a paradise. Within it our spirits take flight, soaring like falcons and kites, entreating, praying.

Dear fellow-traveler! Farewell for now. Let us offer a prayer together

and then we will part to meet again!

O God! Guide us to the Straight Path. Amen.

**An explanation of the three ways indicated at the end of Suratu’l-Fatiha**

O brother full of aspirations! Taking your imagination with you, come with me. See, we are in a land, we look around. There is no one to see us.

A layer of black clouds has settled on the high mountains, which are like tent-posts. The clouds have also overshadowed the part of the earth where we are.

They form a solid ceiling over us, but some say its six sides are open and the sun is shining there. However, we are under the cloud and the darkness oppresses us.

The distress is suffocating; the lack of fresh air is killing us. Now three ways are open to us. One is an illuminated realm; I looked upon it once. I also came here once before; I have been to the third realm as well.

*The first way* extending before us is this: most people take it and it is

the way through the world, inviting us to travel it.

See, we are on our way, going on foot. See the boiling sands of this

desert, how they are scorching us with their anger, threatening us!

Look at the mountainous waves in that sea; they are furious with us too.

Now thank God, we have reached the other side, we can see the sunlight.

But only we know the difficulties we have suffered. Alas! We have returned to this same wasteland, the dark ceiling of cloud hovering over us. What we need is a wonderful light-filled realm,

Which will brighten the eye of the heart; if you have the courage, we

will enter this extremely risky way together to reach this destination.

*Our second way*: we will plunge through “nature,” and pass to the other

side. Or we will go trembling through a natural tunnel.

I traveled this way once before, full of entreaties and prayers, without feigning reluctance before God. But on that occasion I had with me a sub- stance to smelt and rend “nature.”

The Qur’an, the miraculous guide of the third way, gave it to me.

Brother, stick close behind me, and have no fear!

See, here await tunnel-like caves and underground torrents. They will let us pass. Let neither nature nor these awesome lifeless beings frighten you in any way!

For behind its sour face the smiling Face of its All-Compassionate Owner—I perceived It through the light of that radium-like substance of the Qur’an.

How happy you are! Now we have come out into the light-filled world;

see this graceful earth, this pleasant and lovely heaven.

Raise your head! See, this *Touba*-tree invites us—it grows high into

the heavens, has rent the clouds, leaving them far below.

It is the Qur’an. It has spread its branches everywhere. We must hold

onto this branch which is trailing down, so that it can raise us up.

One of the manifestations of that heavenly tree on earth is the Illustrious Shari‘a. This means we ascend to this world of light in that way without difficulty; we will not be shaken by distress.

As we have gone wrong, we will now return to our former place and

find the right way.

See, *our third way*! Over the mountains hovers a Royal Falcon, recit-

ing the adhan to the whole world.

See, the supreme *muadhdhin* (the caller to Prayer), Muhammadu’l-Ha- shimi, upon him be peace and blessings, is calling humankind to the lumi- nous world of light. He enjoins supplication and obligatory Prayers.

Look at those mountains of guidance! They have rent the clouds and have reached as high as the heavens. See those mountains of the Shari‘a, how they have adorned the face and eye of the earth!

Now we must take off from here in lofty aspiration and endeavor. For the light and breeze are up there; the radiant face of grace is there. Ah, now here is the Uhud of Divine Unity203, that mighty, beloved mountain.

Here is the Judi of Islam204, that mountain of salvation and safety. Here is the Mountain of the Moon205, which is the bright Qur’an; the “Nile,” the pure water of life and mercy, flows from that sublime source. Take a drink of its sweet water!

*So Blessed and Supreme is God, the Creator Who creates in the best and most appropriate form!* (33:14)

*And their final call is “All praise and gratitude are for God, the Lord of the worlds!”* (10:10)

Friend! Now cast away your imagination and don your reason! The first two ways are those of “*those who have incurred Your wrath*” and “*those who are astray*.”

Their perils are numerous. With these is perpetual winter, their whole

year is winter. Only one out of a hundred is saved, like Plato and Socrates.

The third way is easy, and direct and straight. Weak and strong are equal. Everyone may take it. The easiest and safest is this: to be either a martyr or a “ghazi.”206

203 Mt. Uhud is a mountain in Madina, five kilometers north from the Prophet’s Mosque. A fierce battle took place before it between the Muslim army and the Makkan polytheists dur- ing the Prophet’s time, in 624. Once God’s Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, said: “Uhud – it loves us much and we love it much too.” (*al-Bukhari*, “Fadailu’l-Madina” 6; *Muslim*, “Hajj” 462) (Tr.)

204 Mt. Judi is the mountain where the Ark of the Prophet Noah settled following the Flood. See,

the Qur’an, 11:44. (Tr.)

205 The Mountains of the Moon are the mountain ranges in Ethiopia that were once believed to be the source of the White Nile. The writer likens belief, Islamic belief and life, and the Qur’an to certain mountains. (Tr.)

206 “Ghazi” is an Arabic term which means one who has warred in God’s cause. (Tr.)

Now we come to the conclusion: the first two ways are the path and school of scientific materialism and philosophy. As for the guidance of the Qur’an, the third way is its straight path; it will take us to our destination.

O God! Guide us to the straight path. The path of those whom You have favored (with the blessing of guidance), not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who are astray.