

## Analysis of the Qur'an's Bismillah Verse

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### Abstract

*The Qur'an's Bismillah Verse is the most repeated verse in the Qur'an; however, it is argued in this article that the current understanding of this verse in the nominal Muslim world is certainly not the way it was understood by the Prophets over the ages. This article focuses on the internal Qur'anic evidence to support its proper meaning, which, if understood correctly, has vast implications for the resurgence of Muslim society that has tragically strayed away from the Qur'an, which advocates reason and evidence.*

**Key Words:** *ba, bismillah, Qur'an, Hadith, rahm, rahman, raheem, God, Allah, qudrat, shaan, reason, evidence, Sulaiman (Solomon), Nuh (Noah), Sheba, canonization, Trinitarianism, missionaries, priesthood, ulema, ism, din.*

### Analysing the Bismillah Verse

One of the most well-known features of the Qur'an is that its chapters start with the Bismillah Verse. It will be shown in this article, in detail, that the first verse, which is the Bismillah Verse, encompasses, remarkably, the entire Islamic paradigm! This verse is commonly accepted as an invocation, normally translated as: "In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful". Also, many Muslims have traditionally been using it as if it were a spell to invoke blessings. In this article, we shall be investigating this verse both philologically and by discovering incidental circumstances of its use in the Qur'an. We shall show how this verse is a slogan for the movement of the purest form of monotheism, and is central to the Islamic worldview. We shall present Qur'anic evidence of the history of the use of the Bismillah Verse, and how it pre-existed the Qur'an. A detailed analysis of its linguistic structure and semantics, and how it forms the central axis and slogan for those subscribing to that ideological perspective, will be conducted.

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Let us breakdown the the Bismillah Verse, which comprises 19 letters in Arabic, and analyse its components in depth, so that we can gain a true understanding of the words. The entire verse/sentence: *bismillahi rahmani raheem* can be broken into five main components:

- i. Ba
- ii. Ism
- iii. Allah
- iv. Al-Rahman
- v. Al-Raheem

We shall now examine these words in detail:

## **Ba**

i. *Ba*: This word can be used as meaning: "With the help of". As for example the sentence: "I wrote with the help of a pen".

ii. *Ba* can also be used as an oath by which one swears. The *Ba* method of swearing an oath is ubiquitous in the Qur'an: "I swear by your Lord" – *Bi-rabbika*, or "No! I swear by the Lord of the East" – *Fala al qasm birabik al-mashriq*. *Ba* in the Qur'an 26:44, means: "By the might of Pharaoh we shall be victors". Another example is where Satan said: "Then, by Your might, I shall mislead them all together." (Qur'an 38:82) Western scholars have acknowledged that *ba* here is better considered as an oath: In the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* it is stated that: "Grammatically bi-smi llāhi has the form of an oath"<sup>1</sup>

## **(ii) Ism**

This can mean:

1. Name
2. Deed, action or work.

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, William A. (2001). "Basmala", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. pp. 208, 207-212.

*Ism* is really the work and action of God, and whenever in the Qur'an it speaks of "God's *ism*", it frequently follows by a list showing God's power, action, and works. For example:

*Magnify the works of your Sustainer, the most High, Who created and proportioned, and who measured/determined and guided. Who brings forth the pasturage, then turns it to dark stubble.*<sup>2</sup>

The word اسم (*ism*) here means: Realization of God's power, etc. Magnifying an attribute that is only a name is meaningless, because as an attribute it could have a neutral quality, being neither good nor bad. For example, if an attribute is "the Originator", how are we to understand that attribute unless it is related to an activity? Being an "Originator" could mean that the attribute of entity "X" is harmful, as for example, the entity X could be the Originator of injustice; hence, why should we praise the Originator of injustice! We never praise the name *per se*. If a person's attribute is "Ingenious", we do not praise the attribute of Ingeniousness of the individual, but him or her doing something that exhibits ingeniousness, in terms of some works, by which there is also proof of ingeniousness.

Even more direct names such as *al-Haq* (the Truth) for God are not meaningful, unless we know that the one that holds this attribute is so, by the actions manifested, that is, the 'works' of the entity being named as such. "Ism" therefore refers to the action attributed to the attributes of God, through the known works of God, and it is the actions or works that we magnify or praise and not the attribute. In this way we become thankful to God. Indeed, it is through this root that God is praised. Therefore, when 'ism' equals works, then it makes perfect sense to: "Magnify the works of your Lord (Sustainer)....".

This of course has other implications beyond the Bismillah Verse: For example, the first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad, normally translated as: "Read: In the name of your Lord who created man from a thing which clings.." really means: "Understand the following: Evident is the work/power of your Sustainer who created/shaped the human being from a thing which clings [the zygote clinging to the wall of the uterus]..." where "read" equals to understand, as the word read in the Qur'an *always* means to

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<sup>2</sup> Qur'an: 87:1-5

understand, and not mere robotic recitation without understanding (see the Qur'an: 96:1-2).

To recapitulate, in reality, the verse means: "Increase your realization of the power of your Sustainer who is the most High by reflecting on the fact that He created and shaped things and who determined and guided." In Arabic, Persian and Urdu, this power is called *qudrat* and can, in a general way, be encompassed by the expression: "Works of God" and the word *shaan* or glory reflected through his Works. Therefore, given these facts, it is easy to see that oaths with respect to the Creator are entirely different than oaths as applied to human beings, as for example, in the Qur'an it states that: "And do not obey every mean/habitual swearer."<sup>3</sup> The contextual nature of the oath as referenced to in this verse is entirely different than that which is applied to "Bism" in relation to God.

### iii. Allah

This is a singular God with no partners or associates as described in Surah Ikhlas in the Qur'an – the independent Creator of all existence (Allah is a contraction of al-ilah in Arabic which means *the god*). A simple way to translate the Bismillah Verse, up to this point, is: Evident is the *qudrat* (power, works, glory (or, more accurately subhan-allah means the negation of all unbecoming attributes ascribed to God)) of Al-Rahman and Al-Raheem. What, however, do Al-Rahman and Al-Raheem stand for?

### iv. Al-Rahman and Al-Raheem

Rehman and Raheem are complementary to each other – in fact, they describe the two facets of the root word: *Rahm* that has connotations of nurturing and development, the root being 'womb'. Rehman refers to graciousness with promptness, quickness, burst, agitation and Raheem refers to the ever-merciful, indefinite, long-term, permanent and steadiness. Combining these two, we get the meaning that the Rahm of Allah (God) is perennial and consistent, whilst exhibiting graciousness with spontaneity. These two facets of Rahm are used as appropriate in the Qur'an, one emphasizing more of one aspect than the other, depending on the lesson God wants us to learn. Bismillah, therefore, confirms the idea of a cosmological originator-creator the cosmos – the God

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<sup>3</sup> Qur'an 68:10

of Nature. Many Deists and Unitarians throughout the ages have recognized this both in the East and the West. Although a proper translation of the Qur'an is impossible due to the richness of the words, we will translate the Bismillah Verse based on our research; it can be best translated into other languages as:

*By the works of the One and Only God, which are proofs of His spontaneous beneficence and unending mercy.*

Our relation with God is only that we are at the receiving end of *rahm*. In fact, we have no obligatory relation with Him, in that, He was not obliged to give us life or status. *Rahm* is therefore the fundamental attribute of God in His dealings with His creation; the gift of life and then the concomitant *rahm* shown.

### **Bismillah, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) and Prophet Nuh (Noah)**

In the Qur'an itself, events that occurred centuries before its revelation have been recounted, that shed light on the actual usage of the Bismillah Verse. For example, in *Sura Naml* (chapter 27), verses 29-31, we read:

*She [the Queen of Sheba] said, "O Council! See an honourable letter has been sent to me. It is from Sulaiman, and it states: "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Rise not up against me, but come to me in a state of submission [to God]."*

Properly translated, from our findings, it should read:

*It is from Sulaiman (Solomon), and it states: "Evident are the works (or the power) of the One and Only God [Allah], which are proofs of His spontaneous beneficence and unending mercy". [Therefore,] don't revolt/rebel against me [i.e. against my invitation to submit to God], but, instead, come to me in a state of submission [to God]." (In other words: submit to God because of the evidence shown through His works!)*

Prophet Sulaiman's use of Bismillah Verse was to convey the fundamentals of the *din* or *the way of life of submission to God*, which was that of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). The purpose of Prophet Sulaiman's response is wholly geared towards the objective of convincing someone with a cogent and relevant point, because it consists of the the

Bismillah Verse. He reminds the Queen of Sheba, through the Bismillah Verse, that evidence in the universe is replete about the Creator and His attributes. This statement discombobulates her haughtiness, which is the source of retrogressive characteristics. It instructs her to embrace Islam (peaceful voluntary submission to God), which encompasses all sources of virtues. The invitation to submit to God can only be the result of evidence of God's works, and not force or blind faith. Indeed, there is no question of compulsion, since the letter is sent to persuasively convince her to change her ways by providing a reason to mend her errant stance, by pointing unequivocally to the evidence of the works of God. Here we witness that the Bismillah Verse as a slogan was well-known in the world contemporary to Prophet Sulaiman. It can also be seen that the Queen seems to be educated, and was happy to receive the message, because she introduced the letter to her council as an "honourable letter".

It is to be noted that prior to the letter being sent to the Queen, the Hoopoe bird had conveyed to Prophet Suleiman, who had been taught the language of the birds, by God<sup>4</sup>, that the Queen of Sheba and her people were worshipping the Sun instead of God, and that they were denying the *qudrat* (power, works and glory) of God, in terms of God's knowledge of all things. Indeed, it is as a result of the signs shown to the Queen, through her almost instantaneously transported throne<sup>5</sup>, and then the analogical argument concerning the illusions in life versus reality, by using the smooth, glass floor, which she thought was a pool of water, that she submitted with Prophet Sulaiman to God.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we can see that the Bismillah Verse is sandwiched between the denial of the *qudrat* and the practical arguments Prophet Sulaiman devises to disclose the reality and the *qudrat* of God. But the whole argument commences from the Bismillah Verse, which is like a thesis or axiomatic statement, or slogan, meant to open her thinking and disclose to her the delusion and irrationality of not worshipping one God, the subsequent actions by Prophet Sulaiman being proofs of that statement.

More evidence that Bismillah is not just a blind-faith statement, but rather, just the opposite, is clear from the statement Prophet Noah makes as it is revealed in the Qur'an, where he says:

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<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 27:16

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an 27:38-40

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an 27:22-24 and 27:29-44

*And he [Noah] said: "Embark in it, I swear by the **qudrat (power) of God** is its sailing and its anchoring; most surely, my Sustainer is forgiving and merciful."*<sup>7</sup>

The letters rendered in bold, in the above passage, are "Bismillah", in Arabic. We see that the sailing of the ark is directly under the navigation of God, for in a flood of such ferocity and magnitude the ark cannot be directed by any human being. The instruction to build the ark and its design was directly guided by God, and so too would its plying through the humanly un-navigable waters. In other words, the ark was *marine engineered*, in terms of dimensions, shape and materials, under divine instruction to be able to optimally withstand the flow characteristics of the flood which itself was designed by God. Thus, the Bismillah Verse shows divine actionality (the *qudrat* of God) and is not a religious blessing of someone who is casually entering his craft on a peaceful day, like someone about to embark on a vacation to the Bahamas in his luxurious yacht! His statement was made under the duress of an impending flood, and in the midst of his fight against those disbelievers who were against his intrepid project. This verse, when understood properly, unequivocally supports the thesis of the rationalistic and evidentiary nature of the Bismillah Verse. It must be noted that the flood of Noah, described in the Qur'an, was a regional one and not global.

### **The Bismillah Verse as an Exclamation**

With respect to evidence the Bismillah Verse, it also serves as an exclamation, in the form of slogan and a terse statement, declaring the conclusion and concept that:

*No doubt/I swear by the works of God that it is the Omnipotence of the Al-Rahman and Al-Raheem.*

You cannot have doubt if there is evidence, and this is how the swearing is connected to evidence discussed previously.

### **The Bismillah Verse and gratitude connection**

Surah (Chapter) Fatihah of the Qur'an, begins with *al-hamd* (the gratitude and praise) because the Bismillah Verse stipulates what we should be grateful for. After the

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'an 11:41

realization of God's works, we are thankful and grateful, that is, we show gratitude. This indirectly proves the meaning of the Bismillah Verse. Therefore, we can clearly see from this, that if the Bismillah Verse is a distillation of the essence of each Surah, then the word *al-hamd* (an expression of gratefulness/praise) is a distillation of the essence one feels after realizing the intent and meaning of the Bismillah Verse. In essence, one can then say that the whole Qur'an and the whole universe were created to see if we would show gratitude towards God, and that if humankind is to trek back to the correct path in the maze of confusion, the slogan or rallying point is the Bismillah Verse. For if one realizes by reason and evidence the works of God and His mercy and beneficence, one is perforce grateful and behaves in accordance with God-consciousness, by praising Him, and if one does this, one is at true peace.

### **The Qur'anic Thematic Structure and Bismillah**

Each chapter which starts with the Bismillah Verse has to prove the validity of the Bismillah Verse itself. In other words, the Bismillah Verse becomes the thesis or postulate. The surah proves the postulate. At the same time, the rest of the surah revolves around the axis of Bismillah, no matter what the thematic structure of each surah is. This is like planets revolving, or that are kept in orbit, around the sun, the Bismillah Verse serving the function of the sun, (i.e. analogically, as the centre of gravity of a complex of objects) and the planets, representing the thematic structure of each Qur'anic chapter. Each Qur'anic chapter, therefore, revolves around the Bismillah Verse because each chapter speaks, in various contexts or themes, of the inimitable works of God, His favours upon humankind, the sustenance He provides, the gratefulness of those who believe and trust in Him, the mercy He showed by bringing revelation, the mercy He shows to those who repent and mend their wayward ways, and, lastly, the fate of those who are antithetical to the core philosophy imparted by the Bismillah Verse. In this vein, if we generalize it further, the whole Qur'an has to live up to this thesis as indeed it does, and since the Qur'an does, so does the all creation – visible, hidden and to come – which is being reflected upon in the Qur'an.

The Bismillah Verse, therefore, implies four main things which are embedded in all the Qur'anic surahs:

1. The Creator indubitably Exists.

2. 'He' is the Creator of this Universe, and is the best of Creators.
3. 'He' is active in this universe at all times and not asleep or uncaring.
4. 'He' has this all-encompassing mercy through sustaining provisions and through forgiveness if we should stray, if we repent with a view to make amends sincerely and not keep repeating the offences.

'He' does not imply a male anthropomorphic deity.

The First word after the Bismillah Verse is *al-hamd* – the gratefulness and thanks that lies behind the need to praise, because if we truly think objectively about these four points, how can we be unthankful and ungrateful and not praise (due to sincere gratitude felt) the source of all that exists? Indeed, all gratitude is for Allah who is the guardian, creator, sustainer, guide and controller of all worlds!

### **The Primacy of Reason and the Bismillah Verse**

We want the reader to now compare the standard translation of the Bismillah Verse with the actual meaning:

**Standard translation:** *In the Name of God the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.*

**Revised translation:** *I swear by the works of the One and Only God, that are proofs of the spontaneity of His beneficence and unending mercy.*

The standard translation above, does not convey the dynamic nature of God and the concomitant thought that it tries to instill within the human being. Indeed, gratitude based on certainty, cannot occur if reason is not the paramount mode of operation in the human psyche. What has been worse in the decaying of the Muslim societies over the centuries, after they have strayed away from the Qur'an, is that aside from a superficial understanding of the verse, through superstition and mysticism, they will even use this verse like an incantation and magic potion, depriving the use of reason and proof for the individual and society that the Qur'an *demand*s. Indeed, the whole of Islam itself is predicated on reason, as the salvation verse states:

*If only we had listened or used reason, we would not be among the companions of the hellfire.*<sup>8</sup>

and, among innumerable other verses, here is one more:

*Verily, the vilest of all creatures in the sight of God are those who choose to be deaf, dumb, and those who do not use their reason.*<sup>9</sup>

The import of this Qur'anic verse, if generalized, is that the human being is disunited within himself/herself and suffering, families are disunited and suffering, mankind is disunited and suffering and the environment that sustains us is being disunited, torn apart and being depleted because of humans and *jinn* not using reason (connecting things integrally, from the root of the Arabic word *aql*). That is because if you do not listen or use your reason (connect things properly), you will suffer and create suffering.

It is proof that brings about unity and therefore the lack of suffering. To draw upon an analogy: If we were to prove that  $1+1=2$ , if all people believed this, there would be true unity, with no disagreement. Disagreement would only occur due to desires or an agenda, or if the person was truly insane. This is the natural unity based on proof, and this is what the Qur'an is striving and aiming for – for all of us to realize. However, if one operated with the false notion that  $1+1=3$ , then it would lead to all sorts of problems in life, as it does not match-up with cause and effect. Indeed, we can only commence our understanding of this, if we reflect upon the fact or reality, cogently and concisely captured in the microcosmic verse:

*By the inimitable works of the One and Only God, that are proofs of His spontaneous beneficence and unending mercy.*

By opening life with the slogan of recognizing that the works of the Creator are proofs of His beneficence, or making this attitude the centrality of one's life, one praises/shows gratitude towards God in daily life, sincerely; but in recognizing this, one must be objective, listen and use reason, thereby uniting with others who come to the same conclusion, through reason, logic and the incontrovertible evidence. Conversely, by failing to commence with this rationalistic slogan, or motto for *pure* monotheism, we will

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<sup>8</sup> Qur'an 67:10

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an 8:22

continue to suffer and not bring about natural unity. In other words, we will not achieve the much needed state of peace and grace for humanity and all other species.

### **The Bismillah Verse as the Negation of Atheism**

A profound contradiction arises in contemporary philosophical thought: Nature on one hand is taken to be unintelligent and incapable of comprehension, or thinking of any kind. On the other hand, all the unimaginably complex decisive selections from cosmological to infinitesimal scale are attributed to it, as if it were conscious. Its success in developing amazing products is simply unrivalled. The products include planets with complex ecosystems that continuously evolve creatures, including one with human consciousness. The Bismillah Verse negates associating nature to some Blind Mother Nature, but the Qur'an sees this as a form of pagan idol worship. Al-Rahman, which is one of the focal points of the Bismillah Verse, is seen in the Qur'an as the benevolence of God for our existence as a gift to us, which is not a result of some mindless random accident. Therefore, the Bismillah Verse negates atheism or agnosticism.

The root word of Rahman/Raheem, Rahm is the antithesis of Blind Chance, for sheer, cold, mindless chance could never result in our system, where everything was best set-up precisely to serve us, like a stage ready to receive us like chief guests. Familiarization should not desensitize us to this; if we were to take a trip to the biologically dead planets in this solar system, we would truly value the miracle of life. Even the most ardent of atheists, returning from such a trip, would realize God in his/her heart of hearts. *Rahm* suggests to us that creation is not a chance product of mindlessness, for with chance most occurrences are manifest failures. *Rahm* makes us reflect why we always see breathtaking beauty everywhere: in the air, on land and under the sea and in space beyond our earth. As such, we are bathed in the pure light of *rahm*. Indeed, the Bismillah Verse is repeated in the Qur'an to remind us continuously, and in different contexts, that the origin and continuation of our wonderful life on this jewel-like planet, and the privileged status of the human being in the universe, are signs for us to appreciate countless mercies.

The Bismillah Verse itself focuses on God's existence through providence (i.e. God's

continual beneficence) rather than proving God's existence by other means. This is because the Qur'an is a book that is already for those who are conscious of God, as stated at the beginning of the Qur'an, and it therefore serves as a reminder of God's central attributes through the immediacy of nature in front of us, not a formal proof of His existence, such as the formal structure of the teleological and cosmological proofs. Not that such proofs should not be formulated *properly* to counter certain obstacles placed in front of people as distractive mechanisms over the last two hundred years; these have their crucial, and vital place as fundamental projects in today's reformation of human society.

Those who read the Qur'an sincerely are the ones who will benefit from it and they already acknowledge God's existence, by logical means<sup>10</sup>, in which the process of elimination is used<sup>11</sup>: there cannot be many gods because then the universe would be in chaos, but we see order and unity and therefore one God exists<sup>12</sup>; if the universe could not have been created by beings that depend on, and are created within the universe, plus if the universe could not have been created if there was once nothing<sup>13</sup> it means that there was 'something' that started this universe, that was not dependent on this universe, i.e. God.

All this is to show that the Bismillah Verse is structured to negate atheistic diversions by focusing on divine providence. In fact, when one studies the Qur'an, it then becomes an added proof that it is from God because of the remarkable nature of the book itself, and one appreciates the mercy of God for having sent a perfect guide and motivator, for our temporary struggles in this universe.

In summation then, we have seen, that by going deeper into the proper use of the Bismillah Verse, it is indeed a slogan to remind people of a unique belief, and is not a miraculous spell that confers blessings. We have also illustrated that the Bismillah Verse summarizes the attributes of God. It is because the question about God is a question about the world that the Bismillah Verse directs our attention to understand whether the world is running automatically, or with a conscious controller, with the semblance

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<sup>10</sup> Qur'an 2:2 (where the word *iman*, which means 'belief', is not blind faith but is based on the root *amana*, which means confirmation and security that arises therefrom).

<sup>11</sup> Qur'an 6:75-78

<sup>12</sup> Qur'an 21:22 and 23:91.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an 52:35

of automaticity (the highest manifestation of intelligent design, without the irrational Trinitarian baggage). Therefore, the Bismillah Verse beckons us to focus on answering an existential question about the world. And since everyone has had direct observations and experience about the world, the Qur'an proposes that we ought to look at the world to discover the answers. The Bismillah Verse is also *repeatedly stated* before each Surah (except one) to defamiliarize us from the familiar and to make us realize the wonder of creation. In this vein – this position is reminiscent of the earlier *Hanifs* (in Arabic, those who are upright and always swerve away from harmful actions), or Unitarians; unknowingly echoing the Bismillah Verse – Thomas Paine stated:

The wonderful structure of the universe, and everything we behold in the system of the creation, prove to us, far better than books can do, the existence of a God, and at the same time proclaim His attributes.

It is by the exercise of our reason that we are enabled to contemplate God in His works, and imitate Him in His ways. When we see His care and goodness extended over all His creatures, it teaches us our duty toward each other, while it calls forth our gratitude to Him. It is by forgetting God in His works, and running after the books of pretended revelation, that man has wandered from the straight path of duty and happiness, and become by turns the victim of doubt and the dupe of delusion.<sup>14</sup>

## Deep Reflection

This article, through the example of the Bismillah Verse alone, shows that if internal Qur'anic resources are focused on an independent interpretation of the Qur'an, it provides fresh insights into the past and reveals not only the power that the Qur'an displayed in the initial Islamic formative times, but that it is so configured as to inspire us towards a most promising future, as a peaceful and just planetary civilization, worthy of the term 'civilization'. In the next few sections we shall reflect on the implication of the historical deviancy of the so-called Muslim world from the Qur'anic message of the Bismillah Verse, and therefore indeed from the Qur'an itself, with a view to impart a greater understanding towards returning to the straight path.

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<sup>14</sup> Paine, Thomas. (1804). *Of the Religion of Deism Compared with the Christian Religion and the Superiority of the Former over the Latter*.

As is well known, the Prophet Muhammad, the recipient of the claimed revelation, remained a deeply contemplative person, whose prime directive was to liberate humanity from mental and physical bondage. After the onset of what Muslims claim is the revelation from the Creator of the universe, he turned into remarkable leader with a complete societal reformation package: a true justice-oriented civilization. In the wake of the ideas of the Qur'an, a global resurgence of human activity for development in all areas of thought and life, was witnessed, where rationality became the 'tradition'. The accelerated developments witnessed in all spheres of life, right after its advent, stand in stark contrast to the abysmal situation of present day 'Muslims'.

'Muslim' societies today, lack in both direction and confidence to chart the optimal path for them, based on intellectual self-determination. To find a satisfactory answer for this invidious situation, it is necessary to be able to look into the past objectively. What we see is not a pretty sight: The glaring truth is that the 'Muslim' world has deviated enormously from the Qur'an. Even a perfunctory look into the text of the Qur'an is enough to convince us that many of the practices nominal Muslims are engaged in today are at variance with this scripture. In fact, in the Qur'an, it was predicted that this would transpire in the future, in the lamentation of the Prophet Muhammad:

*The messenger will say, "My Sustainer, my people deserted the Qur'an."*<sup>15</sup>

In the Qur'an, it is stated repeatedly that it is understandable<sup>16</sup>, clear<sup>17</sup>, a light<sup>18</sup>, a testimony to all, completely preserved and that it is safe from adulteration<sup>19</sup>. It confidently challenges us to find in it any inconsistencies, and none to date have been found, though the challenge remains open<sup>20</sup>. It fosters peace and justice among human beings<sup>21</sup> and environmental equilibrium<sup>22</sup>. It also pre-empts scientific and historical

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<sup>15</sup> Qur'an 25:30.

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an 43:3.

<sup>17</sup> Qur'an 5:15.

<sup>18</sup> Qur'an 4:174.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an 15:9.

<sup>20</sup> Qur'an: 4:82: "Have they not pondered about the Qur'an; if it were from other than One God, they would surely find in it many inconsistencies.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Qur'an 55:7-9. and Qur'an 16:90.

<sup>22</sup> Banaei, Mehran, and Haque, Nadeem. (1995). *From Facts to Values: Certainty, Order, Balance and their Universal Implications*.

factual discoveries<sup>23</sup>. As a result of these and many other confirmable reasons, should not the Qur'an be accepted as the supreme source for undivided attention?

## Understanding the Past

Tragically, when we do not understand the past, we cannot understand the present, and when we cannot understand the present, we cannot realize the cause and extent of our gap and develop a proper vision to close the gap. Rather, we are trapped in the abysmal sinkhole of the omnipresent Now. Here are few important exhaustive works with this same conclusion about the ignorance of our past, and worthy of scrutiny to realize the actuality of what transpired.

An extensive research on Muslim historical records relating to transmission of the Qur'an "The Collection of The Qur'an", was published in 1979 by John Burton, by Cambridge University Press. Burton concluded: "What we have today in our hands is the Mushaf [copy] of Muhammad" (pp. 239-240). In other words, Burton concludes from the evidence that: the Qur'an we have today is *exactly* as the Prophet left it (i.e. Pre-Caliph Uthmanic texts). Furthermore, today we have the original unchanged Qur'an through modern checks and corrections, based on comparing oldest extant manuscripts with living memorizations of the entire Quran, that have generationally remained alive to this very day, and an internal divinely crafted mathematical mechanism for verification/tamper-protection, to expel remaining minor textual errors. In fact, just as we now see diacritical marks on the letters, so too was it during Prophet's time. This means that reports of conflicting pronunciation of words and so on, is a blatant invention of Muslim reporters interested in stretching the meanings of the Qur'an, to help support their sectorial beliefs, deviating from the widely used common version of the Prophet's written complete compilation, *in book form*.

The second such forensic research is: "The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: the formation and function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon" by Jonathan A. C. Brown published by Brill, in 2007. This is a 431 pages book that investigates the origins, development and functions of the core of the Sunni Hadith canon. In this very important book, Brown details that in the generations immediately after the death of

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<sup>23</sup> Qur'an 4:82. For instance, refer to: Qur'an 21:30; 51:47; 41:11; 21:33. Mostly, such passages are not highlighted by Western media/universities, or inaccurately reported and/or translated. Also, many Muslims remain ignorant about such verses and their import.

both Bukhari and Muslim, there were many other scholars who were known to be the best in the science of Hadith. Brown names several of those scholars, their works and the topmost reception they received from scholars of their time. This evidence shows that Bukhari and Muslim did not receive any outstanding special attention and were not even mentioned. In the conclusion of Chapter 3, page 98, Brown states: "We have seen, however, that during their lives and in the immediate wake of their deaths, Bukhari's and Muslim's Sahihs met with rejection and scorn among important elements of the hadith scholar community." Let's tackle this issue further.

The Sahih ('Authentic') Hadith began to be *methodologically* collected and classified about 200 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Why 200 years; what was the delay? Obviously, the earlier generations (the closest to the message) were more focused on the Qur'an. In fact, contrary to what many Muslims have been indoctrinated into accepting, the irrational *canonization* and problems of collecting Hadith a few centuries after the Prophet's death has been divisive. In fact, the canonization of Hadith has been a retrograding factor in the nominal Muslim world<sup>24</sup>, as the Qur'an was not taken as the core and foundation of the belief system, and many questionable, scientifically inaccurate and contradictory Hadith (contradictions between the Qur'an and Hadith, and contradictions between various *Sahih* (designated as 'Authentic') Hadith) have come to exist, let alone those Hadith which are outright sectarian. On matters of belief this writer does not believe that the Prophet was contradictory; rather, it is the purported sayings that have either been misunderstood, distorted through transmissions, or have been outright fabricated.

To reform itself, the 'Muslim world' needs to realize that: The Qur'an explains itself on *all* major issues and principles upon which we ought to base our lives and global society, for all times and places. The Hadith are to occupy a historical position and that too, with the proviso that any Hadith, even that which has been hitherto classified as Sahih, must pass the test of corroboration with the Qur'an, and the blatant facts of nature and history. Failing this, the Muslims are actually deviating from the Qur'an, its methodology and its stipulations. This view neither rejects all Hadith (many being instructional and wonderfully inspirational), nor artificially canonizes them, but puts them where they belong, where they have to pass the stringent sieve of logic and evidence and common human decency, let alone the *highest* standards of justice and

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<sup>24</sup> Ahmed, Kassim. (1997). *Hadith: A re-evaluation*.

morality the Qur'an says the Prophet had, in all matters<sup>25</sup>. Muslims must be circumspect and critically vigilant about individual Hadith (including the presently classified Sahih), and not accept that which contradicts the Qur'anic principles. They must never go beyond, in the name of 'tradition' or 'our ancestors', trying to validate Hadith that are invalidated by the standards of basic logic, historical and scientific *facts* and non-relativistic morality based on cause and effect.

### **Muslim Priesthood: An Oxymoron?**

Related to the Hadith issue is a huge problem in the nominal 'Muslim' world with respect to 'knowledge', and who the 'knowledgeable ones' are. 'Ulema', currently misperceived in the Muslim world as a class of 'religious scholars', Sheikhs, Muftis, Maulanas, etc. is, according to God's own definition in the Qur'an, supposed to be, not an institution but a personal constitution! In fact, in the Qur'an, it is defined exactly who the *ulema* (meaning 'knowledgable ones' in Arabic) are: "Only those who humble themselves before God, among his servants, are the knowledgeable ones."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the "ulema" are not a 'religious class'. With the collapse of reason and an integrated view of creation in the Muslim world, as the passages preceding 'the ulema verse' allude to, society devolved into developing a class of quasi-priests, who, like their counterparts in other world belief systems, have instructed the masses that they cannot or should not use their reason to determine ultimate truth, or solve difficult doctrinal and ethical/moral issues. Mysticism (and here it is meant a belief system founded on irrationality, and is not a reference to this word if it means the feeling of One God's presence), cultism, regionalism, sectarianism, fanaticism, terrorism etc., are encouraged by many of such 'priests'.

The 'priesthood's' unreflective diatribe against rationality expostulates that belief is not based on reason, and further, that only those who have special titles or permission can teach the masses what the truth is. If this is not problematic enough, many of the 'Islamic priests' are, in many nominal Muslim countries, agents of the government whose primary function is to keep an odious order that protects the ruling class, with the 'priests' serving as their gatekeepers to prevent the rise of individual critical thinking based on logic and evidence. This is not to say that they are all like this, for many are valiantly exerting themselves to bring about a true picture of Islam; however,

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<sup>25</sup> Qur'an 33:21

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an 35:28

the general trend is away from the rationality that the Qur'an teaches humanity. This whole dismal situation has not only created apocalyptic disunity among the Muslims, but has also conveyed a wrong perception of what Islam is, towards non-Muslims. Indeed, this has, through cause and effect, led to, and enabled: economic backwardness and environmental devastation. The result: the beautiful gem of the Qur'an, lies strewn in a dilapidated street gutter, fully covered with mud; the passers-by are oblivious of its existence.

Many Muslims will avoid the Qur'an like the plague, because it directly affects their behaviour, but instead may quote some strange favourite Qur'an or logic contradicting Hadith that matches their misplaced desires or wrong thinking, or follow precepts from a story of their Sufi master, that contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an, to justify their behaviours. In fact, many Muslims are deeply into what Christian Missionaries – who have desperately tried to convert Muslims to accept Trinitarianism using 'new strategies' – call "Folk Islam"<sup>27</sup>, that is, Islam infected with Sufism; these missionaries estimate that 70% of Muslims follow some brand of 'Folk Islam'. Without exaggeration: The spread of both Sufism and irrational/de-contextualized traditionalism over the centuries, in the collective body of the 'Muslim world', has been deadlier than a possible viral contagion that could spread among humanity. As a result, such missionaries seek to capitalize on this, by presenting Jesus in the light of a Sufi Sheikh, thereby using this subtle tactic as a bridge to make Muslims convert, hoping to make the Muslims 'creep' into Trinitarianism, by doctrinal osmosis.

It is high time, therefore, for *every* Muslim to focus on the Qur'an itself. In order to understand the Qur'an and dispel all falsehoods about this belief system, what better place to illustrate its primacy and unmatched guidance than the very beginning and the most repeated verse in it: *The Bismillah Verse*. And if a single verse of 19 Arabic letters such as this, sets this rational and compassionate thematic tone, and microcosmically instils the essence of the Qur'an and hence Islam, imagine how profound the rest of the Qur'an is! All it requires is honest reading and reflection.

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<sup>27</sup> Parshall, Phil. (2007). *Bridges to Islam*.

## Conclusion

In this article we have established the origins of the Bismillah Verse and the rationalistic and gratitude-based meanings that it possesses from both a linguistic, historical and textual basis. To affect societal change that is positive, one needs a slogan that encapsulates a whole paradigm, and at the same time is motivational. In this day and age when human conflict, individual psychological trauma and ecological devastation are rampant, when we do not see the light at the end of the tunnel, and when we are not sure why we exist in the first place, humanity certainly needs an effective slogan that leads us out of the abyss, like a powerful flashlight.

Mysticism, because of its authoritarianism and complacency, and its disconnection with the practicalities of science and technology that are required as we move forward into the 21st Century, cannot be a panacea for humanity, but is rather, a bane. At the same time, from the other end, Atheism leaves us with a purposeless and relativistic vision, devoid of the gratitude for our existence, for gratitude is logically speaking, a *relational* concept. To whom is the atheist being ultimately thankful to? The Bismillah Verse, as a slogan and rallying point for all questioning, thinking, objective and rational people, however, serves as both the flashlight and the light at the end of the tunnel, as it did when it initially served that function to raise humanity out of the Dark Ages, with the Qur'anic advent. It is hoped that in becoming aware of such facts, the cognizance of the Bismillah Verse's real profound meaning may help us towards realizing the true message of the Qur'an, to pull us out of the New Dark Ages, as a seamlessly combined ultra-scientific and spiritual paradigm, for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond.

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