

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

21722 - The meaning of the Basmalah, and the ruling on staring with it when one reads Qur'aan

the question

What is the meaning of the Basmalah [the Arabic words Bismillaah il-Rahmaan il-Raheem (In the name of Allaah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful)]?

And what is meant by the words "Iqra' bismi Rabbika" (Read (or recite) in the name of your Lord - [al-'Alaq 96:1 - interpretation of the meaning])?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

When one says "Bismillaah" when starting to do anything, what that means is, "I start this action accompanied by the name of Allaah or seeking help through the name of Allaah, seeking blessing thereby. Allaah is God, the beloved and worshipped, to Whom hearts turn in love, veneration and obedience (worship). He is al-Rahmaan (the Most Gracious) Whose attribute is vast mercy; and al-Raheem (the Most Merciful) Who causes that mercy to reach His creation.

It was said that what this means is: I start this action by mentioning the name of Allaah. Ibn Jareer (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "Allaaah, may He be exalted and His name sanctified, taught His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) proper manners by teaching him to mention His most beautiful names before all his actions. He commanded him to mention these attributes before starting to do anything, and made what He taught him a way for all people to follow before starting anything, words to be written at the beginning of their letters and books. The apparent meaning of these words indicates exactly what is meant by them, and it

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

does not need to be spelled out.”

There is something omitted in the phrase “Bismillaah” when it said before starting to do something, which may be “I begin my action in the name of Allaah,” such as saying, “In the name of Allaah I read”, “In the name of Allaah I write”, “In the name of Allaah I ride”, and so on. Or, “My starting is in the name of Allaah”, “My riding is in the name of Allaah”, “My reading is in the name of Allaah”, and so on. It may be that blessing comes by saying the name of Allaah first, and that also conveys the meaning of starting only in the name of Allaah and not in the name of anyone else.

The name of Allaah is the greatest name and is so well known as to need no explanation; this is a name that belongs exclusively to the Creator and no one else. The correct view is that it is derived from the root aliha. He is God (ilaah) which means that He is worshipped and is divine.

Al-Rahmaan is one of the names of Allaah that belong exclusively to Him. It means the One Who possesses vast mercy, because this form (fa’laan) is indicative of fullness and abundance. It is the most exclusive name of Allaah after His name Allaah, just as mercy is His most exclusive attribute. Hence this name (al-Rahmaan) often appears after the name Allaah, as in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say (O Muhammad): Invoke Allaah or invoke the Most Gracious [al-Rahmaan] (Allaah)” [al-Isra’ 17:110]

Al-Raheem is also one of the names of Allaah, and means the One Who causes His mercy to reach those whom He wills among His slaves.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “Al-Rahmaan refers to an attribute that is connected to Allaah and is part of His Essence, and al-Raheem refers to a connection with the one to whom mercy is shown. The former is adjectival (referring to what He is) and the latter is verbal

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

(referring to what He does). The former indicates that mercy is His attribute, and the latter indicates that He bestows His mercy upon His creation. If you want to understand this then ponder the meaning of these verses (interpretation of the meanings):

“And He is Ever Most Merciful (Raheem) to the believers”[al-Ahzaab 33:43]

“Certainly, He is unto them full of kindness, Most Merciful (Raheem)” [al-Tawbah 9:117]

The word al-Rahmaan is never used in this context. So we know that the word Rahmaan means the One Whose attribute is mercy (rahmah), and al-Raheem is the One Who bestows His mercy.”

(Badaa'i' al-Fawaa'id, 1/24).

Secondly:

The ruling on saying the Basmalah before reading Qur'aan depends on the situation:

1 - If it is at the beginning of a soorah - apart from Soorat Baraa'ah (al-Tawbah) - then the majority of imams have stated that “it is mustahabb to recite the Basmalah at the beginning of each soorah, in prayer or otherwise. This should be done as a regular practice, and some of them considered that a reading of the whole Qur'aan is incomplete if the Basmalah was not recited at the beginning of every soorah apart from Baraa'ah (al-Tawbah).” When Imam Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about reciting it at the beginning of every soorah, he said, “Do not neglect it.”

2 - If one is starting in the middle of a soorah - which is the case asked about in the question - then the majority of scholars and Qur'aan readers say that there is no reason why one should not start with it. It was said to Imam Ahmad, after he had said that it should not be omitted at the beginning of the soorah, “What if a person starts reading partway through a soorah?” He said, “There is nothing wrong [with saying the Basmalah].” Al-'Abaadi narrated that al-Shaafa'i (may

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

Allaah have mercy on him) regarded it as mustahabb (to say the Basmalah, when starting to recite) partway through a soorah.

The Qur'aan readers said: It is certain that one should say the Basmalah if the aayah which will be read after saying it contains a pronoun that refers to Allaah, such as the verses (interpretation of the meanings):

“To Him (Alone) is referred the knowledge of the Hour”

[Fussilat 41:47]

“And it is He Who produces gardens”[al-An'aam 6:141]

because otherwise, if one recites these verses after seeking refuge with Allaah from the Shaytaan, the pronoun may appear to refer to the Shaytaan which would convey an abhorrent meaning.

3 - Reciting the Basmalah at the beginning of Soorat Baraa'ah (al-Tawbah); there is hardly any dispute among the scholars that doing this is makrooh (disliked).

Saalih said concerning some issues that he narrated from his father Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him): “I asked him about Soorat al-Anfaal and Soorat al-Tawbah, whether it is permissible for a man to separate them by saying Bismillaah il-Rahmaan il-Raheem. My father said: ‘With regard to the Qur'aan, reference should be made to what the companions of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) were agreed on; nothing should be added to or taken away from that.’”

4 - Reciting it partway through Soorat al-Baraa'ah (al-Tawbah). The Qur'aan readers differed concerning that, as was narrated by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami in al-Fataawa al-Fiqhiyyah (1/52), and he said: “Among the leading Qur'aan readers, al-Sakhaawi said that there is no dispute that it is Sunnah to start with the Basmalah when one starts reading partway through this soorah [al-

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:

Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

Tawbah], as he differentiated between starting at the beginning and starting in the middle, but his explanation was facile and was refuted by al-Ja'bari from among the Qur'aan readers. This is more likely (i.e., the view that it is makrooh is more likely to be correct), because the reason why the Basmalah should not be recited at the beginning (of al-Tawbah) is that it came with the sword (i.e., the command to fight the kuffaar) and it exposes the hypocrites and their foul deeds in a manner that is not unlike any other soorah, and this theme is repeated throughout Soorat al-Tawbah. Therefore it is not prescribed to recite the Basmalah even if one starts reciting partway through this soorah, just as it is not prescribed at the beginning, for the reasons we have established."

See al-Adaab al-Shar'iyyah by Ibn Muflih, 2/325; al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah, 13/253; al-Fataawa al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kubra, 1/52

Thirdly:

With regard to the meaning of the words, "Iqra' bismi Rabbika" (Read (or recite) in the name of your Lord - [al-'Alaq 96:1 - interpretation of the meaning]), Imam Ibn Jareer (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "The interpretation of the words 'Iqra' bismi Rabbika' is that they were addressed to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), in other words, Read, O Muhammad, by mentioning the name of your Lord (Who created)." And Allaah knows best.