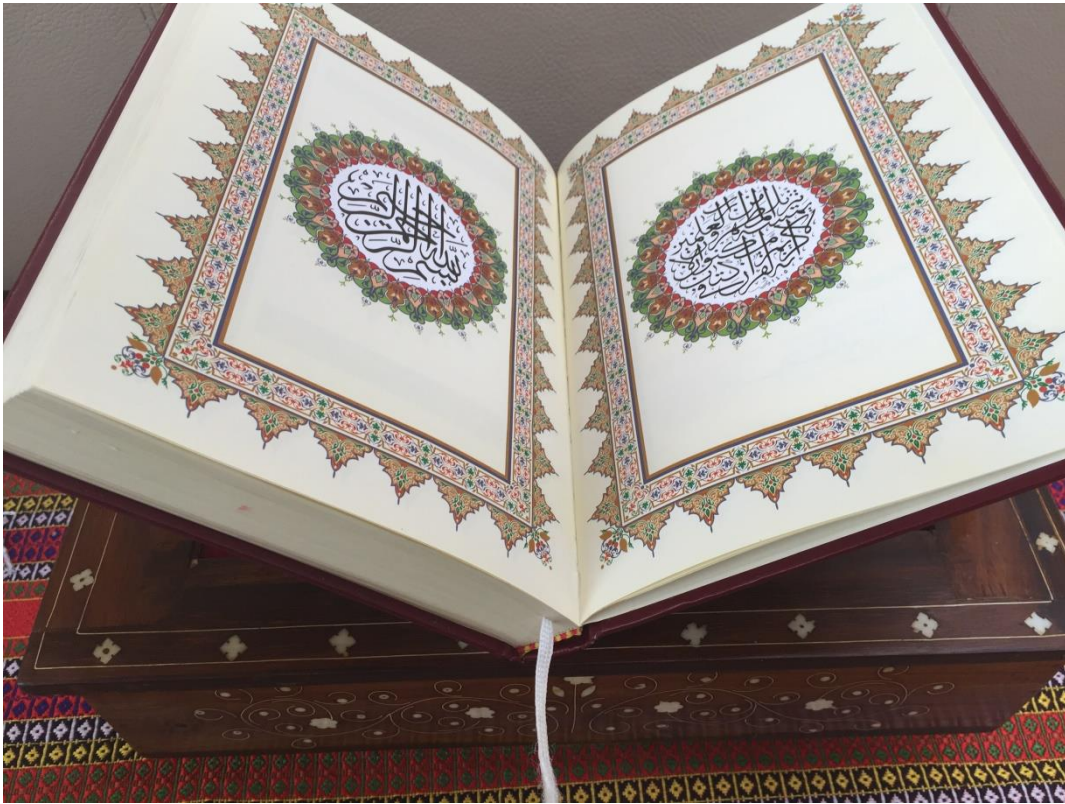


Getting off to a good start

The benefits of *bismillah* and *isti'adha*



Traditionally we say *bismillah* before many things. But why is it just cultural or is there more to it? And what happens if we don't say it?

In need of protection

Let's face it. As accomplished as we think we are as a species, it just takes a mere glance from a plane to remind us just how tiny we are. A speck in the world, let alone in our grand, expanding universe.

Not just small, we are utterly powerless. After-all, life is a fatal condition. Unlike other species, who have wider vision, we can only see ahead of us and even then we are blind to the angels, *jinn* and *shayateen* that inhabit the space around us.

The bottom line is: We need protection.

So, just as a baby seeks refuge with its mother, we reach out to the One who provides safety and protection – Allah Almighty. As we turn to Allah Almighty, we turn away from *shaytan* who is ready to cause us trouble, until we actively banish him by calling on Allah's name against him. This pronouncement is known as *isti'adha*.

Safety is one of the essential elements of our faith. Muslims are people of peace. We need to be able to worship without distraction. We need to form a strong connection with Allah Almighty as he is the

source of peace and tranquility. Hence by saying '*audhu billah*' (Oh Allah, I seek protection with You), we turn back to Allah Almighty as His servants, and acknowledge that our security depends on Him. Without His protection we are open to any harm. He Himself says 'So let them worship the Lord of the House, the One who fed them when hungry and gave them security and protection (*aman*) from great fear.' (Chapter 106: Verses 3-4)

If we seek refuge in Him, He will never turn us down. Even when we are not aware, and though we may not comprehend His wisdom, He is responding.

Opening to blessings

'*Bismillah*' literally means that we start our action seeking help and blessings through the name of Allah.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Every important action started without *bismillah* is cut off,' meaning cut off from *barakah*, or blessings. Thus many narrations abound regarding the importance of starting with Allah Almighty's name.

Clearing our head

Saying the *bismillah* gives us the opportunity to clarify our intention so that our act is preceded with a clear idea of why we are doing it. If we want to maximise our reward for any act, no matter how small, we need to think through our purpose.

Actions are only rewarded based on the intention. So saying *bismillah* out of habit is not the same as actually meaning it.

Why the name Allah?

Allah Almighty has instructed in the very first verse of the Quran to be revealed 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who created, created man from a clot.' (Chapter 96: Verses 1-2). We should therefore read the Quran by His name.

He also said 'To Allah belong the Most beautiful Names, so call Him with them' (Chapter 7: Verse 180)

Though we may call upon Allah through His many names, He has a Supreme Name. And He has promised to respond to us whenever we call Him by that name. Which name is it? *Ar Rahman*, *Ar Raheem* and *Al Hayyul Qayyum* are considered by some to be that name, but the overriding majority opinion, is that Allah is the Supreme Name. Indeed we swear oaths by it. 'By Allah!...'

'Allah' means the One whom we should worship truly and alone. It is specific, unlike 'God', which is generic. It is the One who is necessarily existent, and deserving of all praise.

In the Arabic, every letter of the word Allah points to Allah Almighty Himself:

Allah: Himself

Allah (minus *alif*): *La Hu* – for Him,

Allah (minus *lam* and *ha*): *Hu* – Him

Glorified be His name; everything in creation is pointing to Him and the point of all return. He is our Creator, Provider and Sustainer.

Whatever we do without mentioning Allah Almighty's name, such as eating, is left open to *shaytan's* sabotage, exploitation and corruption. Who is *shaytan*?

Blocking out *Shaytan*

Linguistically, every rebellious one from amongst mankind or *Jinn* is called *Shaytan*, Satan. In fact, the *Shayateen al Ins*, are the Satans from amongst mankind, and are more powerful than those from the world of Spirits, the *Shayateen al Jinn*, as the former will often deploy the latter. Furthermore, the *isti'adha* will not eliminate the human *Shayateen*.

He is described as '*Ar Rajeem*' – the Outcast. This is derived from the root word *rajama*, to stone. It refers to driving out or firing from the Mercy of Allah Almighty.

Saying *bismillah* keeps connecting us back to Allah Almighty and if we make it part of our life, saying it before commencing any act it not just keeps us mindful of Him, but should prevent us from doing something disliked or forbidden.

It is worth noting that saying *bismillah* before doing a haram act, such as consuming alcohol is wrong. Some opinions would consider this an act of *kufur*, disbelief, as the implications are of making the *haram halal*.

Though we may have heard our mothers and grandmothers say *bismillah* frequently, knowing the power of *bismillah* changes our perception of this phrase and follows not only in their footsteps but in the immaculate example of our Prophet (peace be upon him). Doing so, blocks *shaytan* out of our acts, bringing us peace of mind, as well as body and soul.