

Striving for God's Guidance

Description: So many people reach a level where they cease to improve. They think they have attained everything that it means to be guided. This article sheds light on the fact that we need guidance in every affair, whether big or small.

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Published on 17 Nov 2014 - Last modified on 15 May 2019

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I was thinking about how rich in meaning *Surah al-Fatihah*[\[1\]](#) is. Take verse six, for instance, where we say "**Guide us to the straight way.**"



Here we are offering a supplication, not for our individual selves, but for everyone else who offers the supplication. By doing so, we are putting aside our egotistical tendencies.

The supplicant who utters this supplication is not looking to expose the errors of others and show himself to be the only one with the truth. When we offer this supplication, we are asking for the guidance of others as well as for ourselves. This supplication in the plural form "we" is a collective call for guidance; all of us make this humble petition together.

This verse of the Quran emphasizes that guidance is not merely a personal matter. It is not a private concern. It matters to everyone: the individual, the family, and the community. On the individual level, guidance is focused primarily on personal beliefs, worship, and ethical conduct towards others. On the societal level, it is concerned with social justice and human rights, with spreading understanding and building civilization.

When we ask God to guide us to the straight path, we are asking God to supplement our efforts to attain guidance with His help. We make our efforts to think, learn and contemplate. As we read in the Quran: "**Now those who submit their wills " they have sought out (the path) of right conduct" (Quran 72:14)**

However, we then follow our efforts up with supplication, beseeching God's help to remedy the deficiencies in our efforts to attain the "**straight way**".

We understand that this is the path to salvation in the Hereafter. However, its meaning in this world is to attain correct objectives in the easiest and best manner possible. This encompasses all of the pressing questions that we face in our lives. Whenever a person faces many options and does not know what to decide, there is always

an option that is the most straight and on the other hand, there may be options that are downright crooked.

When we face a decision regarding our studies, marriage, a business deal, a project we are thinking of undertaking, a trip abroad, or some other major decision, we will have many options, some better than others. Our supplication: "**Guide us to the straight way**" covers all of these matters. We are beseeching God to guide us to the best way. Likewise, our supplication pertains to the realm of ideas, viewpoints, and opinions.

The "**straight way**" is described as being "finer than a hair and sharper than a blade." Is this meant to frustrate us, to make us think we will never be able to navigate such a path? Not at all! Rather it is an invitation for us to always strive for improvement, to attain what is better and closer to perfection. We can attain this by God's grace, by continuing to beseech Him humbly for guidance, which we do by reading this verse of the Quran, by reading *Surah al-Fatihah*, and by reading the Quran in general. We can come to this by everything we read that is beneficial and every effort we make to perfect our conduct, while being cautious not to fall into the conceit of self-satisfaction thinking we have "arrived". Guidance is a lifelong process. God says: "**And worship your Lord until there come unto you the Hour that is certain.**" (Quran 15:99)

So many people reach a level where they cease to improve. They think they have attained everything that it means to be guided. They turn from improving themselves to the preoccupation of judging others, heedless of their own shortcomings. We come to know by way of experience that attaining a proper level of religious adherence does not happen overnight. It does not come from a mere profession on the lips, or even by sincere desire that is not followed by action. It takes continued effort and repeated attempts. It takes always looking to improve oneself.

The issue at hand is not merely to move from error to what is correct. It is to move from one point of equilibrium to another that is even more precise. This requires continuous critical self-appraisal, and willingness to always beseech God for His help.

We see that God says: "**Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it: those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endowed with understanding.**" (Quran 39:18)

And He says: "**And follow the best of (the courses) revealed to you from your Lord**" (Quran 39:55)

And He says: "**And We ordained for him (Moses) in the tablets admonition of every kind and clear explanation of all things; so take hold of them with firmness and enjoin your people to take hold of what is best thereof...**" (Quran 7:145)

In matters of faith, our concern is to do the best we can in making the right choices, and in worldly matters our concern is to achieve our worldly welfare. In all matters, we need to be objective, sincere, and free from base motives. We need to aspire to excellence.

Endnotes:

[1] *Surah* = Chapter. The complete chapter with its brief commentary can be found here:
<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10190/>

The web address of this article:

<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10711>

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