The Fatihah

**Reading One: The Fatihah – Opening Verses of the Quran (Surah 1)**

The opening verses of the Quran are very important for Muslims because they give a description of how God is understood in Islam and set down the most important themes in Muslim theology.  The first words of the Fatihah, “in the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful” is important because it centers all of the Muslim tradition around God (Allah is simply the Arabic word for God) and every single Surah of the Quran also starts with this short phrase.  It also mentions the “Day of Judgment” which is an important theme throughout the Quran, and refers to the Muslim belief that at some point in the future, Jesus (Isa in the Quran) will return to earth to complete his mission and usher in the end of the world.  At this time, everyone will be judged by God based on whether or not they submitted (Islam means ‘submission’ in Arabic) to God in this life.  The opening also refers to the “straight path,” which is a common metaphor in Islam for the life of submission to God.

**Al-Fatihah (The Opening)**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Master of the Day of Judgment.

It is You we worship, and upon You we call for help.

Guide us to the straight path.

The path of those You have blessed, not of those against whom there is anger, nor of those who are misguided.

# The Cow (Al-Baqara) Surah

**Reading Two: The Quran (Surah 2:1-9)**

This passage discusses the importance of the “Book,” which is the Quran itself.  One unique aspect of the Quran is that it is very self-reflexive, meaning that the Quran often talks about itself. This passage discusses the idea that the Quran gives “guidance,”  touching on the belief in Islam that the Quran is God’s directions to humanity for how to submit to God.  It also mentions that people should “believe” what was “revealed before you” which refers to the Muslim belief that there have been earlier revelations before the Quran – namely the Torah and the Gospel.  Muslims believe that God also revealed guidance to the Jewish prophets and Jesus, and that guidance was recorded in the Torah and the New Testament.  Errors, however, entered into those texts through the recording and transmission process.  But it’s important to note that part of being Muslim means that you also believe in the Jewish prophets (like Abraham, David, Moses, etc) and Jesus (though not as divine, just as a prophet).

The passage emphasizes that those who believe in God and follow God’s guidance will be successful – most likely referring to enjoying Paradise, or eternity with God.  It also states that those who don’t believe will “have a severe torment,”  a reference to hell or an eternal punishment.  So we can see that the “Last Day” or “Judgment Day” is a main theme in the Quran.

**Al-Baqara (The Cow)**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

Alif, Lam, Meem.

This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guide for the righteous.

Those who believe in the unseen, and perform the prayers, and give from what We have provided for them.

And those who believe in what was revealed to you, and in what was revealed before you, and are certain of the Hereafter.

These are upon guidance from their Lord. These are the successful.

As for those who disbelieve—it is the same for them, whether you have warned them, or have not warned them—they do not believe.

Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. They will have a severe torment.

Among the people are those who say, “We believe in Allah and in the Last Day,” but they are not believers.

They seek to deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive none but themselves, though they are not aware.

# The Clot Surah

**Reading Three: Surah 96: The Clot (96:1-5)**

This short passage consists of the very first words that were revealed to Muhammad in the cave outside of Mecca.  When Muhammad was forty years old, he went to Mt. Hira, outside of Mecca, to have a spiritual retreat by himself.  During the night, the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and spoke these words to him.  In the Hadiths, which collect stories about Muhammad, he told others that he heard the words but also felt like the words were being seared into him and that it was a physically and mentally difficult process to receive the revelation.  After Muhammad received this revelation, he raced home to his wife Khadija and told her what had happened.  She believed his story and suggested he speak to her cousin, Waraqa, who was a Christian.  When Waraqa heard the story, he told Muhammad that there had been other revelations in the past, and it sounded like God wanted him to be a prophet to the Arab people.

The angel Gabriel told Muhammad to “read,” which is important for Muslims, because Muhammad was illiterate and told Gabriel that he could not read, but Gabriel pressed on with the second line, commanding him to “read” again.  Muhammad’s illiteracy is also important to Muslims because they insist that Muhammad did not have the education to be able to come up with the Quran himself.  This passage also states that God “taught by the pen,” which is another reference to the previous revelations that God gave and were recorded in the Jewish and Christian sacred texts.

This passage also showcases another feature of the Quran, which is that it is not ordered chronologically.  As you can see, this is from Surah 96, and there are only 114 surahs in the entire Quran.  So the very first revelation is placed almost at the end of the Quran.  The order of the Quran is believed to have been a revelation in itself that Muhammad received from God near the end of his life after all the revelations had been given.  So the ordering is believed to be perfect.  Additionally, there are multiple revelations in each Surah – this Surah, Surah 96, contains this revelation, but it also continues with other messages about following God.  So each Surah can contain multiple independent revelations that were given to Muhammad at various times.

**Surah 96: The Clot**

Read: In the Name of your Lord who created.

Created man from a clot.

Read: And your Lord is the Most Generous.

He who taught by the pen.

Taught man what he never knew.

# Hadith on Modesty

**Reading Four: Hadith Abu-Dawud (Book 34, Hadith 1535)**

This hadith relates a story of something that Muhammad said concerning a certain situation – i.e. the way a woman should dress around men she is not related to.  This shows us how hadith functions in Islam.  While the Quran is the basis of Islam and gives “guidance” about how to worship and live a life of submission to God, there are many areas that can be quite vague and can be interpreted in multiple ways.  One of those areas concerns modesty in dress, especially for women.  The Quran says that women should “guard their privates” and “protect their beauty” (Surah 24:31);  these instructions could be interpreted in many ways – what exactly constitutes a woman’s beauty?  What parts of a woman's body are "private"?  So that’s where Hadith comes in.  Muslims look to teachings that Muhammad gave to help them interpret the Quran.  So if a Muslim woman has questions about how to dress, she can look at this Hadith to see that Muhammad said a woman should wear clothing that covers everything except her face and hands.  There is, of course, still room to interpret that differently, and Muslim women have – some may take this teaching to mean simply long-sleeve shirts and long pants or skirt, while others have worn a very loose outer garment over their clothes to ensure that their figure is not on “display” either.

At the bottom of this Hadith you can see the “isma,” or the chain of transmission.  There are thousands and thousands of individual hadith, but not all hadith are created equally!  Some hadith are considered more reliable than others, meaning that they are more likely to go all the way back to Muhammad.  Every hadith comes with a written chain of transmission – this chain of transmission is supposed to lead from the collector all the way back to Muhammad.  This particular hadith is rated as “mursal,” which means that one of the narrators in the chain of transmission is missing.  In this case, the person who heard it from Aisha and told it to Khalid b. Duraik is unknown.  This means that this hadith is considered authentic by some Muslims but not authentic by others.

This hadith also showcases another important aspect of hadith collection, which is the importance of Aisha.  Aisha was the last wife of Muhammad and is a very beloved figure among Muslims.  She played a central role in the collection of hadith - she narrated over 2000 hadiths!  These hadiths consisted of stories about Muhammad as well as his teachings regarding prayer, Quran recitation, and pilgrimage.

**Sunnah Abu Dawud: Women's Clothing**

Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Messenger of Allah wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah turned his attention from her. He said: O Asma', when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to his face and hands.

Abu Dawud said: This is a mursal tradition (i.e. the narrator who transmitted it from 'Aishah is missing) Khalid b. Duraik did not see 'Aishah.

# Quran Video Lectures

Please watch the following video lectures on the Quran:

**Please see the pictures**