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See also: ANGELS; BADR; BELIEF; DEATH; GRAVE; MANIFEST AND HIDDEN; MARTYRS; NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENSION; PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS; RESURRECTION; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT; RIVERS AND SPRINGS; WATER.

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BASMALA

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definition and Usage; ii. Linguistic Construction and Meaning of *bi-sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*; iii. History of Revelation and Use of the *Basmala*; iv. The *Basmala* in Q 27:30; v. The *Basmala* in Q 11:41; vi. Issues related to the *Basmala* (*Masʿala fī-l-basmala*); vii. The *Basmala* in Hadiths; viii. Legal Rulings (*al-aḥkām al-fiqhiyya*); ix. Merits of the *Basmala*; x. Scholarly Literature; xi. Writing the *Basmala*; xii. Bibliography.

Definition and Usage

The theonymic invocation *bi-sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (“In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful”) appears in its complete form in Q 27:30, in the letter of Prophet Sulaymān (*q.v.*), upon him peace, to the Queen of Sabaʾ (Sheba) (see SABAʾ; ANONYMOUS MENTIONS); in shorter form—without the two Names of Mercy (al-Raḥmān and al-Raḥīm; see BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH and discussion below)—in Q 11:41, in the invocation of Prophet Nūḥ (*q.v.*), upon him peace, when commencing his voyage in the Ark (*q.v.*); and at the head of every sura (*q.v.*) except the ninth, al-Tawba (“Repentance”) (see below for the various reasons adduced for this absence, as well as the extensive scholarly discussion on the mode in which the *basmala* occurs at the head of every sura). Altogether, the *basmala* is found 114 times in the Qurʿān in its complete form and once in the aforementioned

shorter form. The *basmala* is also known as the *tasmiya* (“invoking the name [of Allah]”) (Ṭabarī, *sub Q basmala*), based on the view that a name (*ism*) is distinct from its referent (*musammā*) (see more on this below) (see THE NAME, THE NAMING, THE NAMED).

The term *basmala* is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of the quadrilateral root *b-s-m-l* (patterned on the form *fāʿlala*). Grammarians explain that one usage of this form is the construction (through a process called *naḥṭ*) of abbreviations from compound phrases by drawing letters from each constituent word (Ibn ʿAqīl, *Sharḥ* 4:262; Azharī, *Tahdhīb* 13:108; also Ibn ʿĀshūr, *sub Q basmala*). Al-Azharī (d. 369/980) quotes al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) as saying that he had not heard any verbal nouns based on this morphological pattern other than *basmala=bi-sm Allāh* (“in the name of Allah”); *sabḥala=subḥān Allāh* (“glorified be Allah”); *ḥaylala=lā ilāha illā-llāh* (“[there is] no god but Allah”); and *ḥawlaqa* (variant *ḥawqala*)=*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāh* (“[there is] no ability and no power but with Allah”). Al-Azharī himself, however, cites other such abbreviations, as mentioned by Abū al-ʿAbbās: *ḥamdala=al-ḥamd li-llāh* (“all praise is to Allah”); *jaʿfala=juʿiltu fidāka* (“may I be a ransom for you”); and *ḥayʿala=ḥayya ʿalā al-ṣalāt* (“come to prayer”) (*Tahdhīb* 3:240). Ibn ʿĀshūr (1296-1393/1879-1972) notes that the word *basmala* originally signified the act of saying or writing the phrase *bi-sm Allāh* (“In the name of Allah”), but popular usage extended its conventional meaning to denote saying or writing the entire phrase *bi-sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*—even though the abbreviated form does not contain the letters *ḥāʾ* and *rāʾ* from the last two words of the entire phrase (*sub Q basmala*; al-Ṣabbān, *al-Risālat al-kubrā*, p. 156).

Linguistic Construction and Meaning of *bi-sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*

Bi-smi

Bi-smi is formed by adding the preposition *bi-* to the elliptic form of *ism* (contracted by omitting the *ḥamzat al-waṣl*). The preposition *bi-* is variously regarded as indicating companionship (*muṣāḥaba*) or supplication (*istiʿāna*, seeking aid). In the former sense, it would mean, “I seek the company of...” and in the latter, “I seek the help of...” Al-Ālūsī (1217-1270/1802-1854) preferred the latter reading when speaking of the Divine name as it expresses humility and servitude in contrast to the claim of company (*Rūḥ*, *sub basmala*). It indicates one’s poverty and need (*iftiqār*) while seeking Divine help to accomplish the act one