**The `colour` of God**

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| THE Quran is a book of great wisdom. It is also a book of unsurpassable beauty, eloquence and majesty, unparalleled in its brevity and the vastness of meaning.Every verse is a sea in itself and a human would have to delve in its depths to unearth even a small f raction of the pearls it has to offer to the discerning mind.The first surah of the Quran, Al Fateha, which comprises seven short lines, is said to be one fourth of the book in its meaning, influence and power. Each word encompasses boundless richness, pondering over which will bring a Muslim closer to the spirituality of Islam. It begins with gratitude to the one God whose mercy and compassion knows no bounds and who is the Lord of the Day of Retribution; we worship none but Him. We turn to Him for help, and we pray to Him for guidance, to put us on the way of those who took the right path, and whom He rewarded; not those who went astray and were recipients of His wrath.What does the sentence `we worship none but Him` here mean? Is this a reference to the five daily prayers, fasting, Haj and zakat, obligations that all Muslims are familiar with and which many perform almost mechanically? The sentence is structured by negating all other worship, except that which is directed towards Him. This means that any form of submission to anyone or anything else would be unacceptable to God.Such submission may range from formal worship of deities to blind following and beliefs in statements that may be made by self-claimed religious men and that do not possess a rational basis in the Quran.Equally, such submission could mean giving in to our desires, whims, wishes, temptations, even though we are aware that these are likely to veer us away from the right path.Dr Farhad Shafti, an Iranian Quran scholar, proposes a beautifulexplanation of the real meaning of exclusive worship in this verse and elsewhere in the Quran.He suggests that the best definition of this worship is given in verse 2:138. `(Our religion is) the Baptism of Allah. And who can baptise better than Allah. And it is He Whom we worship` (2:138).This is the translation of Yusuf Ali, who uses the word religion as the meaning of `sabagha` here. However, the word actually means `colour` or `dye`. In other words, the verse would mean `our colour is the colour of God, and who can dye (colour) better than God...The dyeing would mean the purification that God causes in our souls as a result ofHis mercy whenever we make a sincere effort to be dyed in His `colour`. Another related explanation of `sabagha` is the primordial nature (fitrah) of human beings, which they possess just as a cloth bears its original colour. This original colour would be the faith of Hazrat Ibrahim who was focused on and answerable only to His Creator.The colour of God is not a physical or visual phenomenon. It is a rainbow of all the qualities and attributes that God possesses and would like to see reflected, in His proclaimed vicegerent on earth.The fitrah of human beings is built on kindness, mercy, honesty, piety and compassion towards the rest of God`s creation and this is the colour they must constantly strive to be dyed in and revert to. The worship is aimed at making the effort and being desirous of adopting this colour.God `dyes` Muslims and all humans too, in His colour, provided we make ourselves ready and available to Him by making sin-cere efforts to take the right path.The last verse of Surah Fateha is a heartfelt prayer, an imploration to God to not include us among those who went astray.This means that many people in the past adopted what was right, but either delib-erately or through ignorance, left their fitrah and adulterated their faith with superstitions, ambiguous and irrational beliefs and illogical rituals. When the latter assume large proportions, they take on strong hues that destroy the original colour and distort the purity of one`s soul.Despite Islam`s acceptance and tolerance of all other creeds, Muslims at times denounce others` beliefs. However, they must think about whether a person who is a non-Muslim but has adopted the above qualities as best as s/he can, is more eligible for the colour of God, or is a Muslim who has made no such ef forts to adopt this colour more so? The colour of God knows no distinction, because God has promised it to all of His creations, subject to their ability to earn it.  The writer is a freelance contributor with an interest in religion.nikhat\_sattar@yahoo.com  |