

The Tafsīr of Sūrah Iqra’ (Sūrat Al-‘Alaq) (Chapter - 96)

Which was revealed in Makkah

This was the First of the Qur’ān revealed

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

﴿أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿۱﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿۲﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿۳﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿۴﴾

- ﴿1. Read! In the Name of your Lord Who created.﴾
- ﴿2. He has created man from a clot.﴾
- ﴿3. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.﴾
- ﴿4. Who has taught by the pen.﴾
- ﴿5. He has taught man that which he knew not.﴾

The Beginning of the Prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ and the First of the Qur’ān revealed

Imām Aḥmad recorded that ‘Ā’ishah said: The first thing that began happening with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ from the revelation was dreams that he would see in his sleep that would come true. He would not see any dream except that it would come true just like the (clearness of) the daybreak in the morning. Then seclusion became beloved to him. So, he used to go to the cave of Ḥirā’ and devote himself to worship there for a number of nights, and he would bring provisions for that. Then he would return to Khadijah and replenish his provisions for a similar number of nights. This continued until the revelation suddenly came to him while he was in the cave of Ḥirā’.

سُورَةُ الْاِنْشَاءِ

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالَّذِينَ وَالزَّانِتُونَ ۝ (١) وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ۝ (٢) وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ ۝ (٣)
لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ۝ (٤) ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ۝ (٥)
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ۝ (٦)
فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدَ بِالذِّينِ ۝ (٧) أَيْسَرَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ الْحَاكِمِينَ ۝ (٨)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَا يَأْمُرُكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ (٢) أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَا يَأْمُرُكَ
الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ (٣) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝ (٤) عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝ (٥) كَلَّا إِنَّ
الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَافٍ ۝ (٦) أَنزَلْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ۝ (٧) إِلَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرَّجْعُ ۝ (٨) أَرَأَيْتَ
الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ ۝ (٩) عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ ۝ (١٠) أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ الْهَدْيِ ۝ (١١) أَوْ أَمَرَ
بِالتَّقْوَىٰ ۝ (١٢) أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ۝ (١٣) أَتَوَعَّلَمُ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ ۝ (١٤) كَلَّا لَئِنْ
لَمْ يَنْهَ لَنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ ۝ (١٥) نَاصِيَةٍ كَذِبَةٍ خَاطِفَةٍ ۝ (١٦) فَيَذَرُكَ نَادِيَهُ ۝ (١٧)
سَدِيدٌ ۝ (١٨) كَلَّا لَا تُطِيعُهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ۝ (١٩)

The angel came to him while he was in the cave and said, "Read!" The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

«قُلْتُ: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ»

«I replied: "I am not one who reads.»

Then he said, "So he (the angel) seized me and pressed me until I could no longer bear it. Then he released me and said: 'Read!' So I replied: 'I am not one who reads.' So, he pressed me a second time until I could no longer bear it. Then he released me and said: 'Read!' So I replied: 'I am not one who reads.' So, he pressed me a third time until I could no

longer bear it. Then he released me and said:

«أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَا يَأْمُرُكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ (١)»

«Read in the Name of your Lord who has created.»

until he reached the Āyah,

«مَا لَوْ يَعْلَمُ ۝ (٥)»

«That which he knew not.»

So he returned with them (those Āyāt) and with his heart trembling until he came (home) to Khadījah, and he said,

«زَمِّلُونِي زَمِّلُونِي»

«Wrap me up, wrap me up!»

So they wrapped him up until his fear went away. After that

he told Khadījah everything that had happened (and said),

«قَدْ خَشِيتُ عَلَى نَفْسِي»

«I fear that something may happen to me.»

Khadījah replied, "Never! By Allāh, Allāh will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your relatives, you speak the truth, you help the poor and the destitute, you serve your guests generously, and you help the deserving, calamity afflicted people." Khadījah then accompanied him to her cousin Waraqah bin Nawfal bin Asad bin 'Abdul-'Uzzā bin Quṣay, who, during the period of ignorance became a Christian and used to scribe the Scriptures in Arabic. He would write from the Injīl in Hebrew as much as Allāh willed for him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight. Khadījah said to him, "O my cousin! Listen to the story of your nephew." Waraqah asked, "O my nephew! What have you seen?" Allāh's Messenger ﷺ described what he saw. Waraqah said, "This is *An-Namūs*^[1] whom Allāh had sent to Mūsā. I wish I was young and could live until the time when your people would drive you out." Allāh's Messenger ﷺ asked,

«أَوْ مُخْرِجِي هُمْ؟»

«Will they drive me out?»

Waraqah replied in the affirmative and said, "Anyone who came with something similar to what you have brought, was treated with hostility and enmity; and if I should remain alive till that day then I would firmly support you."

But Waraqah did not remain. He died and the revelation paused^[2] until Allāh's Messenger ﷺ became sad according to what we were told. Due to this grief he set out a number of times with the intent of throwing himself from the mountain tops. However, every time he would reach the peak of a mountain to throw himself from it, Jibrīl would appear to him and say, "O Muḥammad! You are truly the Messenger of Allāh!" Therefore, his worry would be eased, his soul would be

[1] The keeper of the secrets, meaning Jibrīl.

[2] From this part to the end of the narration is from Az-Zuhri as narrated by Ma'mar, as explained at length by Ibn Ḥajar in *Fatḥh Al-Bāri* no. 6982.

settled and he would return (down from the mountain). Then, when the revelation did not come again for a long time, he set out as he had done before. So when he reached the peak of the mountain, Jibrīl appeared to him again and said to him the same as he had said before."^[1]

This Ḥadīth has been recorded in the Two Ṣaḥīḥs by way of Az-Zuhri.^[2] We have already discussed this Ḥadīth's chain of narration, its text and its meanings at length in the beginning of our explanation of Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī. Therefore, whoever would like to read it, it is researched there, and all praise and blessings are due to Allāh.

So the first thing that was revealed of the Qur'ān were these noble and blessed Āyāt. They are the first mercy that Allāh bestowed upon His servants and the first bounty that Allāh favored them with.

The Honor and Nobility of Man is in His Knowledge

These Āyāt inform of the beginning of man's creation from a dangling clot, and that out of Allāh's generosity He taught man that which he did not know. Thus, Allāh exalted him and honored him by giving him knowledge, and it is the dignity that the Father of Humanity, Ādam, was distinguished with over the angels. Knowledge sometimes is in the mind, sometimes on the tongue, and sometimes in writing with the fingers. Thus, it may be intellectual, spoken and written. And while the last (written) necessitates the first two (intellectual and spoken), the reverse is not true. For this reason Allāh says,

﴿أَتَرَأَىٰ الْإِنسَانَ إِذَا خَرَجَ مِنَ بَيْتِهِ ۖ إِلَىٰ عَلَمٍ بِالْقَلَمِ ۚ عَلَّمَ الْإِنسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ﴾

﴿Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not.﴾

There is a narration that states, "Record knowledge by writing."^[3] There is also a saying which states, "Whoever acts

^[1] Aḥmad 6:232.

^[2] Faṭḥ Al-Bārī 12:368, and Muslim 1:139.

^[3] This "narration" is an unauthentic Ḥadīth. See Al-Ḥākim 1:106. It is also attributed to a saying of 'Umar with a weak chain of narration with Ibn Abi Shaybah (26418) and others.

﴿Surely, unto your Lord is the return.﴾ meaning, 'unto Allāh is the final destination and return, and He will hold you accountable for your wealth, as to where you obtained it from and how did you spend it.'

Scolding of Abu Jahl and the Threat of seizing Him

Then Allāh says,

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى﴾

﴿Have you seen him who prevents. A servant when he prays?﴾

This was revealed about Abu Jahl, may Allāh curse him. He threatened the Prophet ﷺ for performing Ṣalāh at the Ka'bah. Thus, Allāh firstly admonished him with that which was better by saying,

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى﴾

﴿Have you seen if he is on the guidance.﴾ meaning, 'do you think this man whom you are preventing is upon the straight path in his action, or

﴿أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى﴾

﴿Or enjoins Taqwā?﴾ in his statements? Yet, you rebuke him and threaten him due to his prayer.' Thus, Allāh says,

﴿أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ﴾

﴿Knows he not that Allāh sees?﴾

meaning, doesn't this person who is preventing this man who is following correct guidance know that Allāh sees him and hears his words, and He will compensate him in full for what he has done? Then Allāh says by way of warning and threatening,

﴿كَأَن لَّهُ لَرَبْرَبًا﴾

﴿Nay! If he ceases not,﴾

meaning, if he does not recant from his discord and obstinacy,

﴿تَسْفَهُا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ﴾

﴿We will scorch his forehead.﴾ meaning, 'indeed We will make it extremely black on the Day of Judgement.' Then He says,

﴿نَاصِرٌ كَذِبٌ غَاطِقٌ﴾

«A lying, sinful forehead!» meaning, the forehead of Abu Jahl is lying in its statements and sinful in its actions.

﴿فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ﴾

«Then let him call upon his council.» meaning, his people and his tribe. In other words, let him call them in order to seek help from them.

﴿سَنَدْعُ الزَّانِيَةَ﴾

«We will call out the guards of Hell!» ‘And they are the angels of torment. This is so that he may know who will win – Our group or his group?’

Al-Bukhārī recorded that Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Abu Jahl said, ‘If I see Muḥammad praying at the Ka’bah, I will stomp on his neck.’ So this reached the Prophet ﷺ, who said,

«لَنْ نَقَلَ لِأَخَذَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ»

«If he does, he will be seized by the angels.»^[1]

This Hīdūth was also recorded by At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasā’ī in their Books of Tafsir.^[2] Likewise, it has been recorded by Ibn Jarīr.^[3] Aḥmad, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasā’ī and Ibn Jarīr, all recorded it from Ibn ‘Abbās with the following wording: “The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ was praying at the Maqām (prayer station of Ibrāhīm) when Abu Jahl bin Hishām passed by him and said, ‘O Muḥammad! Haven’t I prevented you from this?’ He threatened the Prophet ﷺ and thus, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ became angry with him and reprimanded him. Then he said, ‘O Muḥammad! What can you threaten me with? By Allāh, I have the most kinsmen of this valley with me in the large.’ Then Allāh revealed,

﴿فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ سَنَدْعُ الزَّانِيَةَ﴾

«Then let him call upon his council. We will call out the guards of Hell!»”

[1] Fath Al-Bāri 8:595.

[2] Tuhfat Al-Aḥwadhī 9:277, and An-Nasā’ī in Al-Kubrā 6:518.

[3] Aṭ-Ṭabari 12:649.

Ibn 'Abbās then said, "If he had called his people, the angels of torment would have seized him at that very instant." At-Tirmidhi said, "*Ḥasan Ṣaḥīḥ*."^[1]

Ibn Jarīr recorded from Abu Hurayrah that Abu Jahl said, "Does Muḥammad cover his face with dust (i.e., from prostration) while he is among you all?" They (the people) replied, "Yes." Then he said, "By Al-Lat and Al-'Uzzā, if I see him praying like this, I will stomp on his neck, and I will certainly put his face in the dust." So the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ came and he began praying, which made it possible for Abu Jahl to stomp on his neck. Then the people became surprised at him (Abu Jahl) because he began retreating on his heels and covering himself with his hands. Then it was said to him, "What's the matter with you?" He replied, "Verily, between me and him is a ditch of fire, monsters and wings." Then the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

«لَوْ دَنَا مِنِّي لَا خُطِفْتُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ عُضْرًا عُضْرًا»

"If he had come near me, the angels would have snatched him limb by limb."

The narrator added; "Allāh revealed an *Āyah*, but I do not know whether it is concerning the *Ḥadīth* of Abu Hurayrah or not:

﴿كَذَٰلِكَ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ﴾

﴿Nay! Verily, man does transgress.﴾

to the end of the Sūrah."^[2]

Imām Aḥmad bin Hanbal, Muslim, An-Nasā'ī and Ibn Abi Ḥātim all recorded this *Ḥadīth*.^[3]

Amusement for the Prophet ﷺ

Then Allāh says,

﴿كَذَٰلِكَ لَا تُطِيعُ﴾

﴿Nay! Do not obey him.﴾ meaning, 'O Muḥammad! Do not obey

^[1] Aḥmad 1:329, At-Tirmidhi 3349, An-Nasā'ī in *Al-Kubrā* 11684, and Aṭ-Ṭabari 12:648.

^[2] Aṭ-Ṭabari 12:649.

^[3] Aḥmad 2:370, Muslim :2797, and An-Nasā'ī in *Al-Kubrā* 11683.

him in what he is forbidding from such as steadfastness in worship and performing worship in abundance. Pray wherever you wish and do not worry about him. For indeed Allāh will protect you and help you, and He will defend you against the people.'

﴿وَأَسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ﴾

﴿Fall prostrate and draw near (to Allāh)!﴾ This is just like what has been confirmed in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim on the authority of Abu Ṣāliḥ who reported from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said,

«أَقْرَبُ مَا يَكُونُ الْعَبْدُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَهُوَ سَاجِدٌ، فَأَكْثِرُوا الدُّعَاءَ»

«The closest that a servant can be to his Lord is when he is in prostration. Therefore, make abundant supplications (i.e., while prostrating).»^[1]

It has also been mentioned previously that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ used to prostrate when he recited

﴿إِنَّا السَّمَاءَ أَنْشَقْنَاهُ﴾

﴿When the heaven is split asunder.﴾ (84:1) and

﴿اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ﴾

﴿Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created.﴾^[2] (96:1)

This is the end of the Tafsīr of Sūrah Iqra' (Sūrat Al-'Alaq). Unto Allāh is due all praise and thanks, and He is the Giver of success and protection against error.

^[1] Muslim 1:350.

^[2] Muslim 1:406.