

**INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Iqraa*, or *Al-'Alaq* 96.**

Verses 1-5 of this Sūra were the first direct Revelation to the holy Prophet.

After that there was an interval or break (*Fatra*), extending over some months or perhaps over a year. S. lxviii. is usually considered to have been the next revelation in point of time. But the remainder of this Sūra (xcvi. 6-19) came soon after the *Fatra*, and that portion is joined on to the first five verses containing the command to preach, because it explains the chief obstacle to the delivery of the message to man, viz.: man's own obstinacy, vanity, and insolence.

*Iqraa, or Read! or Proclaim!*

*Or Al-'Alaq, or The leech-like clot.*

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

1. Proclaim! (or Read!)<sup>6203</sup>

In the name<sup>6204</sup>

Of thy Lord and Cherisher,  
Who created—

2. Created man, out of

A leech-like clot:<sup>6205</sup>

3. Proclaim! And thy Lord

Is Most Bountiful,—



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾

أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾

6203. *Iqraa* may mean “read”, or “recite or rehearse”, or “proclaim aloud”, the object understood being Allah’s Message. In worldly letters he was unversed, but with spiritual knowledge his mind and soul were filled, and now had come the time when he must stand forth to the world and declare his mission.

6204. The declaration or proclamation was to be in the name of Allah the Creator. It was not for any personal benefit to the Prophet: to him there was to come bitter persecution, sorrow, and suffering. It was the call of Allah for the benefit of erring humanity. Allah is mentioned by his title of “thy Lord and Cherisher”, to establish a direct nexus between the source of the Message and the one addressed. The Message was not merely an abstract proposition of philosophy, but the direct concrete message of a personal Allah to the creatures whom He loves and cherishes. “Thy” addressed to the Prophet is appropriate in two ways: (1) he was in direct contact with the divine Messenger (Gabriel) and Him Who sent the Messenger; (2) he represented the whole of humanity, in a fuller sense than that in which Christ Jesus is the “Son of Man”.

6205. Cf. xxiii. 14. The lowly origin of the animal in man is contrasted with the high destiny offered to him in his intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature by his “most bountiful” Creator. No knowledge is withheld from man. On the contrary, through the faculties freely given to him, he acquires it in such measure as outstrips his immediate understanding, and leads him ever to strive for newer and newer meaning.

4. He Who taught  
(The use of) the Pen,<sup>6206</sup>

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿١﴾

5. Taught man that  
Which he knew not.<sup>6207</sup>

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٢﴾

6. Nay, but man doth  
Transgress all bounds,<sup>6208</sup>

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ ﴿٣﴾

7. In that he looketh  
Upon himself as self-sufficient.

أَن رَّاهُ أَتَسْتَقْبِرُ ﴿٤﴾

8. Verily, to thy Lord  
Is the return (of all).<sup>6209</sup>

إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرَّجِعُ ﴿٥﴾

6206. See n. 5593 to lxviii. 1.

The Arabic words for "teach" and "knowledge" are from the same root. It is impossible to produce in a Translation the complete orchestral harmony of the words for "read", "teach", "pen" (which implies reading, writing, books, study, research), "knowledge" (including science, self knowledge, spiritual understanding), and "proclaim", an alternative meaning of the word for "to read". This proclaiming or reading implies not only the duty of blazoning forth Allah's message, as going, with the prophetic office, but also the duty of promulgation and wide dissemination of the Truth by all who read and understand it. The comprehensive meaning of *qaraa* refers not only to a particular person and occasion but also gives a universal direction. And this kind of comprehensive meaning, as we have seen, runs throughout the Qur-ān—for those who will understand.

6207. Allah teaches us new knowledge at every given moment. Individuals learn more and more day by day; nations and humanity at large learn fresh knowledge at every stage. This is even more noticeable and important in the spiritual world.

6208. All our knowledge and capacities come as gifts from Allah. But man, in his inordinate vanity and insolence, mistakes Allah's gifts for his own achievements. The gifts may be strength or beauty, wealth, position, or power, or the more subtle gifts of knowledge or talents in individuals,—or Science, or Art, or Government, or Organisation for mankind in general.

6209. Man is not self-sufficient, either as an individual, or in his collective capacity. If he arrogates Allah's gifts to himself, he is reminded—backwards, of his lowly physical origin (from a drop of animal matter), and forwards, of his responsibility and final return to Allah.

9. Seest thou one  
Who forbids—<sup>6210</sup>

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى<sup>(٩٦)</sup>

10. A votary when he  
(Turns) to pray?

عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى<sup>(٩٧)</sup>

11. Seest thou if<sup>6211</sup>  
He is on (the road  
Of) Guidance?—

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى<sup>(٩٨)</sup>

12. Or enjoins Righteousness?

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى<sup>(٩٩)</sup>

13. Seest thou if he<sup>6212</sup>  
Denies (Truth) and turns away?

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى<sup>(١٠٠)</sup>

14. Knoweth he not  
That Allah doth see?

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى<sup>(١٠١)</sup>

15. Let him beware! If he  
Desist not, We will  
Drag him by the forelock,—<sup>6213</sup>

كَلَّا لِنْ لَنَنْزِعَهُنَّ لِنَنْفَعًا أَلَا نَصِيدُ<sup>(١٠٢)</sup>

16. A lying, sinful forelock!

نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ<sup>(١٠٣)</sup>

6210. The words, may be applied generally to perverse humanity, which seeks not only to rebel against Allah's Law, but also to prevent others from following it. There may however be a reference here to Abū Jahl, an inveterate enemy of Islam, who used in its early days to insult and persecute the holy Prophet and those who followed his teaching. He used, in particular, to use shameful methods to prevent the Prophet from going to the Ka'ba for devotions, and forbid any who came under his influence, from offering prayers or performing devotions. He was arrogant and purse-proud and met his end in the battle of Badr.

6211. Man's insolence leads to two results: (1) self-destruction through self-misleading; (2) a false example or false guidance to others. The righteous man must therefore test human example or human guidance by the question, "Is there Allah's guidance behind it?" And visible light would be thrown on it by the question, "Does it lead to righteousness?" A flouting of Allah and Allah's truth answers the first question in the negative, and conduct which turns back from the eternal principles of Right answers the second.

6212. The usual trick of the ungodly is to refuse to face Truth. If they are placed in a corner, they deny what is obvious to reasonable men, and turn their backs.

6213. Cf. xi. 56, and n. 1551. The forelock is on the forehead, and is thus symbolical of the summit and crown of the man's power or dignity. To be dragged by it is to suffer the lowest dregs of humiliation. *Nasfa'an* is a syncopated form of the emphatic first person plural.

17. Then, let him call  
(For help) to his council<sup>6214</sup>  
(Of comrades):

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ ﴿١٧﴾

18. We will call  
On the angels of punishment  
(To deal with him)!<sup>6215</sup>

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ ﴿١٨﴾

19. Nay, heed him not:  
But prostrate in adoration,  
And bring thyself  
The closer (to Allah)!<sup>6216</sup>

كَلَّا لَا تُطِعْهُ وَأَسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ﴿١٩﴾

6214. The Pagan Quraish, who formed an oppressive junta or council to manage the Ka'ba were in sympathy with Abū Jahl, though they did not go to the unbridled lengths to which Abū Jahl went. But they could not, all combined, resist the onward march of the divine mission, though they did all they could to check it.

6215. All the combined forces of evil, though they may have worldly appearances in their favour, and though they may seem to be successful for a time, cannot stand against Allah. He has but to command His forces of punishment to exert themselves, and they will subdue evil, protect Allah's votaries and justify the faith for which the votaries suffer.

6216. The righteous man has no fear. He can disregard all the forces of evil that are brought against him. But he must learn humility: that is his defence. He will bow down in adoration to Allah. He must have the will to bring *himself* closer to Allah. For Allah is always close to him,—closer to him than his life blood in the jugular vein (l. 16). Man's humility and adoration remove him from being an insolent rebel on the one hand and, on the other, prepare his will to realise his nearness to Allah.