

أَلْعَلَقَ Al-Alaq

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Name

The Surah is so entitled after the word *alaq* in the second verse.

Period of Revelation

This Surah has two parts: the first part consists of verses 1-5, and the second of verses 6-19. About the first part a great majority of the Islamic scholars agree that it forms the very first Revelation to be sent down to the Prophet (peace be upon him). In this regard, the *Hadith* from Aishah, which Imam Ahmad, Bukhari, Muslim, and other traditionists have related with several chains of authorities, is one of the most authentic *Ahadith* on the subject. In it Aishah has narrated the full story of the beginning of revelation as she herself heard it from the Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah. Besides, Ibn Abbas, Abu Musa al-Ashari and a group of the companions are also reported to have stated that these were the very first verses of the Quran to be revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him). The second part was sent down afterwards when the Prophet (peace be upon him) began to perform the prescribed Prayer in the

precincts of the Kabah and Abu Jahl tried to prevent him from this with threats.

Beginning of Revelation

The traditionists have related on the strength of their respective authorities the story of the beginning of revelation from Imam Az-Zuhri, who had it from Urwah bin Zubair, who had it from Aishah, his aunt. She states that revelations to the Prophet (peace be upon him) began in the form of true (according to other traditions, good) visions. Whichever vision he saw it seemed as though he saw it in broad daylight. Afterwards solitude became dear to him and he would go to the Cave of Hira to engage in worship there for several days and nights (Aishah has used the word *tahannuth*, which Imam Zuhri has explained as *taabbud* meaning devotional exercises. This was some kind of worship which he performed, for until then he had not been taught the method of performing the Prayer by Allah). He would take provisions with him and stay there for several days, then he would return to Khadijah who would again provide for him for a few more days. One day when he was in the Cave of Hira, Revelation came down to him unexpectedly and the Angel said, to him: Read.

After this Aishah reports the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself, to the effect, I said: I cannot read! There upon the Angel took me and pressed me until I could bear it no more. Then he left me and said: Read. I said: I cannot read! He pressed me a second time until I could bear it no more. Then he left me and said: Read. I again said: I cannot read! He pressed me for the third time until I

could bear it no more. Then he left me and said: *Iqra bismi Rabbi kal-ladhi khalaqa*: (Read in the name of your Lord Who created) till he reached *ma lam ya lam* (what he did not know).

Then the Messenger (peace be upon him) returned home to Khadijah trembling with fear, and said to her: Cover me, cover me, and he was covered. When fear left him, he said: O Khadijah, what has happened to me? Then he narrated to her whatever had happened, and said: I fear for my life. She said: No never! Be of good cheer. By God, never will God debase you; you treat the kindred well, you speak the truth, (one tradition adds: you restore what is entrusted to you), you bear the burden of the helpless, you help the poor, you entertain the guests, and you cooperate in good works.

Then she took him to Waraqah bin Naufal, who was her cousin. He had become a Christian in pre-Islamic days and had translated the Gospel in Arabic and Hebrew, and had become very old and blind. Khadijah said: Brother, listen to the son of your brother. Waraqah said to the Prophet (peace be upon him): What have you seen, nephew? The Prophet (peace be upon him) described what he had seen. Waraqah said: This is the same Gabriel (the Angel of Revelation) which Allah had sent down to Moses (peace be upon him). Would that I were a young man during your Prophethood! Would that I were alive when your tribe would expel you! The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Will they expel me? Waraqah said: Yes, never has it so happened that a person brought what you have brought

and was not treated as an enemy. If I live till then I would help you with all the power at my command. But not very long after this Waraqah died.

This narrative is explicit that even until a moment before the coming of the Angel the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was without any expectation that he was going to be appointed a Prophet. Nothing to say of any such wish or expectation, he did not even have any idea that he would meet with such an experience. Coming down of the Revelation and appearing of the Angel face to face was an unexpected incident for him the first effect of which on him was precisely the same as could naturally be on a person meeting with such a tremendous experience, in the absence of any preparation. That is why when he proclaimed the message of Islam, the people of Makkah raised all sorts of objections, but no one said that they were already apprehending that he would make a claim, for he had been making preparations since long to become a Prophet.

From this narrative another thing which also becomes obvious is how pure was the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life and how sublime was his character before Prophethood. Khadijah was no young lady: she was 55 years old at the time this event took place and had been the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life companion for 15 years. No weakness of the husband can remain hidden from the wife. She had during this long period of married life found him to be such a generous and noble man that when he told her of his experience in the Cave of Hira, she admitted without the least hesitation that it was indeed Allah's own

Angel who had come to him with Revelation. Likewise, Waraqah bin Naufal was also an old inhabitant of Makkah, who had seen the Prophet (peace be upon him) grow up from childhood. Particularly, for the past 15 years because of the close relationship he was even more intimately aware of his life, his affairs and dealings. When he also heard of his experience, he did not regard it as an evil suggestion, but immediately said that it was the same Gabriel who had descended on Moses (peace be upon him). This meant that even according to him the Prophet (peace be upon him) was such a sublime person that there was nothing surprising in his being elevated to the office of Prophethood.

Occasion of Revelation of verses 6-19

This second part of the Surah was revealed when the Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah began to perform the Prayer in the Islamic way in the Kabah and Abu Jahl threatened and tried to prevent him from this. It so happened that after his appointment to Prophethood even before he could start preaching Islam openly, he began to perform the Prayer in the precincts of the Kabah in the way Allah taught him; and from this the Quraish felt for the first time that he had adopted a new religion. The other people were watching it with curiosity, but Abu Jahl in his arrogance and pride threatened the Prophet (peace be upon him) and forbade him to worship in that way in the Kabah. In this connection, quite a number of the *Ahadith* have been related from Abdullah bin Abbas and Abu Huraira, which mention the foolish behavior of Abu Jahl.

Abu Huraira says that Abu Jahl asked the people of

Quraish: Does Muhammad (peace be upon him) set his face on the ground before you? When they replied in the affirmative, he said: By Lat and Uzza, if I ever catch him in that act of worship, I would set my foot on his neck and rub his face in the dust. Then it so happened that he saw the Messenger (peace be upon him) in that posture and came forward to set his foot on his neck, but suddenly turned back as if in a fright and being asked what was the matter, he said there was a ditch of fire and a terrible apparition between himself and Muhammad (peace be upon him) and some wings. On hearing this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) remarked: Had he come near me, the angels would have smitten and torn him to pieces. (Ahmad, Muslim, Nasai, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Marduyah, Abu Nuaim Isfahani, Baihaqi).

According to Ibn Abbas, Abu Jahl said: If I caught Muhammad (peace be upon him) performing his Prayer by the Kabah, I would trample his neck down. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) heard of it, he said: If he acted so, the angels would seize him there and then? (Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Jarir, Abdur Razzaq, Abd bin Humaid, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Marduyah).

According to another tradition from Ibn Abbas, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was performing his Prayer at the *Maqam Ibrahim*. Abu Jahl passed that way and said: O Muhammad, did I not forbid you this, and then he started to threaten him. In reply the Prophet (peace be upon him) rebuked him severely. There upon he said: O Muhammad, on what strength do you rebuke me? By God, my followers

in this valley far exceed yours in number." (Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Shaibah, Ibn al-Mundhir, Tabarani, Ibn Marduyah).

Because of these very incidents the portion of this Surah beginning with *Kalla inn al-insana layatgha* was sent down. Naturally the place of this part should be the same as assigned to it in this Surah of the Quran, for after the coming down of the first Revelation the Prophet (peace be upon him) had given expression to Islam first of all by the act of Prayer, and his conflict with the pagans.

1. Read^{*1} (O Prophet), in the name of your Lord;^{*2} Who created.^{*3}

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

*1 As we have explained in the Introduction, when the Angel said to the Prophet (peace be upon him): Read, the latter replied: I cannot read! This indicates that the Angel had presented these words of the revelation before him in the written form and had asked him to read them. For if the Angel had meant that he should repeat what he recited, he should not have replied, saying: I cannot read!

*2 Read in the name of your Lord: Say *Bismillah* and read. This shows that the Prophet (peace be upon him) even before the coming down of this revelation regarded and acknowledged Allah alone as his Lord. That is why there was no need to ask who his Lord was, but it was said: Read in the name of your Lord.

*3 Only the word *khalafa* (created) has been used absolutely, and the object of creation has not been mentioned. This automatically gives the meaning: Read in

the name of the Lord, Who is the Creator, Who created the whole universe and everything in it.

2. Created man from a clot of congealed blood.*4

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

*4 After making mention generally of the creation of the universe, mention has been made of man in particular, saying how Allah made him a perfect man starting his creation from an insignificant and humble state. *Alaq* is plural of *alaqah*, which means congealed blood. This is the primary state of the embryo which appears a few days after conception. Then it assumes the form of a lump of flesh, then afterwards it gradually takes human shape. (For details, see Surah Al-Hajj, Ayat 5 and the corresponding E.Ns 5 to 7).

3. Read, and your Lord is Most Generous.

أَقْرَأُ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

4. Who taught (knowledge) by the pen.*5

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

*5 That is, it is a great favor of Allah that starting man's creation from a most insignificant state, He made him possessor of knowledge which is the noblest attribute of creation, and He made him not only possessor of knowledge but also taught him the art of writing by the use of pen, which became the means of propagation, progress, dissemination and preservation of knowledge on a large scale. Had He not given man the knowledge of the art of pen and writing (by inspiration) his intellectual faculty would have stagnated, and it would have had no opportunity to develop, expand and become a means of

transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next and make future progress.

5. Taught man what he did not know.*6

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

*6 That is, man originally was absolutely illiterate. Whatever of knowledge he obtained, he obtained it as a gift from Allah. Whatever doors of knowledge at any stage did Allah will to open for man, they went on opening up before him. This same thing has been expressed in the verse of the Throne (*Ayat-ul-Kursi*), thus: And the people cannot comprehend anything of His knowledge save what He Himself may please to reveal. (Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 255). Whatever man looks upon as his own scientific discovery was, in fact, unknown to him before. Allah gave him its knowledge whenever He willed without his realizing that Allah by His grace had blessed him with the knowledge of it.

These verses were the very first to be revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), as is stated in the Hadith reported by Aishah. This first experience was so intense and tremendous that the Prophet (peace be upon him) could not bear it any more. Therefore, at that time he was only made aware that the Being Whom he already knew and acknowledged as his Lord and Sustainer was in direct communion with him, had started sending down revelations to him, and had appointed him as His Prophet (peace be upon him). Then after an intermission the opening verses of Surah al-Muddaththir were revealed in which he was told what mission he had to perform after his appointment to

Prophethood. (For explanation, see Introduction to Al-Muddaththir).

6. Nay, indeed,^{*7} man transgress rebelliously.

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَيْطَغَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

*7 That is, man should never adopt an attitude of ignorance and rebellion against the Bountiful God Who has been so generous to him

7. For he deems himself to be self-sufficient.^{*8}

أَنْ رَّءَاهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

*8 That is, when the man has attained wealth, honor and rank and whatever else he desired to attain in the world, he becomes rebellious instead of being grateful and transgresses the boundaries of servitude to Allah.

8. (Although), towards your Lord indeed is the return.^{*9}

إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ أَلْرُّجَىٰ ﴿٨﴾

*9 That is, whatever he might have attained in the world, which makes him behave arrogantly and rebelliously, in the end he has to return to your Lord. Then he will realize what fate awaits him in consequence of his such attitude and behavior.

9. Have you seen the one who forbids.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

10. A servant when he prays?^{*10}

عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

*10 A servant: the Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah himself. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has been mentioned by this epithet at several places in the Quran. For example, Glory be to Him Who transported His

servant one night from the *Masjid al-Haram* to the distant Temple. (Surah Bani Israil, Ayat 1); All praise is for Allah Who has sent down this Book to His servant. (Surah Al-Kahf, Ayat 1); And that when the servant of Allah stood up to pray, the people got ready to assault him. (Surah Al-Jinn, Ayat 19). This shows that it is a special style of love by which Allah makes mention of His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) in His Book. Besides, it also shows that Allah after appointing His Messenger to Prophethood had taught him the method of performing the Prayer. There is no mention of this method anywhere in the Quran, saying: O Prophet, perform the Prayer in this and this way. Hence, this is another proof that the Revelation sent down to the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not only consist of what has been recorded in the Quran, but besides this, other things were also taught to him by revelation, which are not recorded in the Quran.

11. What do you think, if he (the Servant) be on the right path.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ أُهُدًى ﴿١١﴾

12. Or enjoins righteousness.

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾

13. What do you think, if he denies and turns away.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٣﴾

14. Does he not know that Allah sees? *11

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

*11 The audience here apparently is every just man, who is being asked: Have you watched the act of the person who prevents a servant from God's worship? What do you

think: if the servant be rightly guided, or warning the people to fear God and refrain from evil, and this forbidden be denying the truth and turning away from it, what will his act be like? Could this man adopt such an attitude had he known that Allah is watching the man who is exhorting others to piety as well as him who is denying the truth and turning away from it? Allah's watching the oppressor and his wrongdoing and the oppressed and his misery by itself implies that He will punish the oppressor and redress the grievances of the wronged and down-trodden person.

15. Nay,^{*12} if he does not desist, We shall surely drag him by his forelock.

كَلَّا لَإِن لَّمْ يَنْتَه لَنَسْفَعًا
بِالنَّاصِيَةِ

*12 That is, the person who threatens that he would trample the neck of Muhammad (peace be upon him) down when he performed the Prayer, would never be able to do so.

16. The forelock that is lying and utterly sinful.^{*13}

نَاصِيَةٍ كَذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ

*13 The forelock here implies the person with the forelock.

17. So let him call his band of supporters.^{*14}

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ

*14 As we have explained in the Introduction, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) rebuked Abu Jahl on his foolish behavior, he had retorted: O Muhammad, on what strength do you threaten me? By God, my supporters in this valley far exceed yours in number. At this it is being

said: Let him call his band of supporters.

18. We, too, shall call the angels of torment.*15

سَدَّعُ الزَّبَانِيَةِ ﴿١٨﴾

*15 According to the explanation given by Qatadah, the word *zabaniyah* in the original is used for the police in Arabic idiom, and *zaban* actually means to push away. The kings too kept armed attendants who would push out the one with whom the king was annoyed and angry. Therefore, what Allah means is: Let him call his supporters; We too shall summon Our Police, i.e. the angels of torment, to deal with him and his supporters.

19. Nay, never! Do not obey him, and prostrate yourself and draw closer (to your Lord).*16 **AsSajda**

كَلَّا لَا تَطِعَهُ وَأَسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ﴿١٩﴾

﴿١٩﴾

*16 *Sajdah* (prostration) here implies the Prayer, so as to say: O Prophet, continue to perform your Prayer fearlessly as you have been in the past, and seek your Lord's presence through it. In the *Sahih* of Muslim and other books of *Hadith* there is a tradition from Abu Huraira to the effect: The servant is nearest to his Lord when he is in the state of prostration, and in Muslim there is also a tradition from Abu Hurairah that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited this verse, he performed a *sajdah* of recital.

