

On the Path of the Beloved ﷺ

The Beginning of the Revelation

In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. Peace and blessings be upon His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

It took Forty years to prepare the Prophet for the 23 years of revelation to follow. This long preparation was necessary because our Prophet's message is the last divine message; it is a message that is meant to last until the end of time. Great projects need meticulous and gradual preparation. At the age of forty, the Prophet had acquired enough experience in all fields; Social, financial, political, and marital aspects are but few among others. The world, the Arabian Peninsula and Makkah were all ready and waiting for his call.

The last two years before the revelation were an introduction or prelude to the meeting of Jibril عليه السلام. The Prophet was beginning to feel that something extraordinary was about to happen. It was a grace from Allah ﷻ, for He says in the Qur'an **"If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, indeed you would have seen it submissive, sundered apart out of apprehension of Allah; and those similitudes We strike for mankind, that possibly they would meditate."** (59:21)

The prelude was slow for two years or more, and then grew more intense for six months. The Prophet would be walking in the street and he would hear the trees greeting him, "peace be upon you messenger of Allah." He would turn back to look and find no one. The Prophet ﷺ said, **"I know a stone in Makkah that used to salute me before I received the revelation, I still know it now."**¹

At this stage the Prophet ﷺ started seeing visions in his dreams which he used to relate to his wife and four daughters after waking up, only to see those visions come true during that day. Narrated by Aisha **"The commencement of the Divine Inspiration to Allah's Prophet was in the form of good dreams which came true like bright day light."**²

The dreams were not of great significance but rather ordinary things, like a visit from Khadijah's uncle as well as the details of such a visit. Narrated By Abu Huraira: Allah's Prophet said, **"The visionary dream of a faithful believer is a part of the forty-six parts of prophecy."**³ Hence a man who sees a visionary dream that comes true has one part of the 46 parts of prophecy. The Prophet's preaching lasted 23 years and the duration of these good dreams was six months. If we divide 23 by 6 the result is 1 over 46!

¹ Sahih Muslim, narrated by Jaber Bin-Samra.

² Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, revelation.

³ Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 87, interpretation of dreams.

In the last period before the revelation, the Prophet ﷺ started to love seclusion. We can see here how after years of hard work, Allah ﷻ wanted the Prophet to develop his spiritual beliefs, thus striking a balance between the material world and the spiritual one. The Prophet ﷺ contemplated on life, creation and the essence of existence. No man or woman can find guidance until the love of being closer to Allah filled his/her heart. Listen to this ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, **“...But Allah has made you love belief, and adorned it (i.e., made it attractive) in your hearts, and He has made disbelief, and (evident) immorality, and all-stubborn disobedience hateful to you. Those are they who are the right- minded.” (49:7).**

We can sense the greatness of the meaning of **“adorned it in your hearts”** in Ramadan. The very same night Ramadan starts all of us rejoice and look forward to worshipping Allah. It is no wonder that the Hadith says, “Abdullah bin-Amr bin-Al-As reported that he heard Allah’s Messenger ﷺ saying, **‘Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the two of the Compassionate Lord’s fingers. He turns them every which way He likes.’** Then Allah’s Messenger ﷺ said, **‘O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Thine obedience.’”⁴**

Allah Prophet constantly adorns such matters in your hearts. Allah sends us constant messages like when one feels the urge to pray two Rak'aa or think of going to Umra, but then gets distracted and chooses not to listen to these messages.

The Prophet ﷺ started to look for a place where he could contemplate peacefully. Allah made the Prophet love seclusion, hence, he started looking for a place that had warmth and that overlooked the Ka’ba. Indeed the cave he found looked like a warm, embracing place.

He must have looked hard in the mountains to have found the cave of Hira’ which was 3 miles away from the Ka’ba. He made the effort because Allah adorned in his heart the love of faith. Climbing the mountain takes about an hour and a half. When one reaches the summit one is tired and sweaty. The place, by night, is desolate. Imagine being in the heart of a mountain, in the heart of a cave at two o’clock in the morning on a moonless night; for on such a night that the Prophet ﷺ was visited by Jibril ﷺ. The Prophet used to spend many days there, some say 10 days at a time, doing one thing only: reflecting.

Aisha (RA) said, “He used to go into the cave of Hira for seclusion, where he used to worship (Allah alone).”⁵ He was not praying because at that time the prophecy did not start, nor were prayers ordained. He was merely reflecting; the way Ibrahim ﷺ did. Allah says **“And thus We show Ibrahim the dominion of the heavens and the earth that he may be of the ones of constant certitude.” (6:75).**

Contemplation leads to certitude. The Prophet ﷺ reflected on day and night, heaven and earth, stars, the power of Allah and His sovereignty over His universe.

⁴ Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Destiny

⁵ Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, revelation

Amer Ibn-Abd-Kays, one of the tabe'een (disciple of the companions of the Prophet), said that he heard ten of the companions of the Prophet say that the light of Islam is contemplation. Um-Addarda' was asked what form of worship Abu-Addarda', who was one of the greatest companions of the Prophet, used to practice the most. She said "reflecting". Al-Hasan Al-Basry used to say, **"one hour of contemplation is better than a year of Qiyam"**.

Large companies nowadays organize a day off work to take their employees to hotels in remote places to brainstorm and reflect on new schemes. Their motive is to make more money. Ask yourselves; when was the last time you reflected on the greatness of Allah, on your future or on your goals in life?

Imagine the Prophet in the cave of Hira! Imagine what he used to do there! At times, he would look at the sky and reflect on the universe. At other times, he would look at the Ka'ba and the 300 statues over it; the statues could not have looked right to him. He would also reflect on his situation, losing his parents at an early age, what was the wisdom behind that? He reflected on life and death, then he would think of the 38 years of his life and what his purpose in life was. This was the final prelude to the revelation; the cave of Hira.

If only we can promise ourselves to allocate one hour, not a day but a week, to reflect on such matters. Practice doing that while walking and you will see the difference. Try to write what comes to your mind down. Keep asking yourselves, "Why am I here?" This question haunted the Prophet for 3 years. Insist on asking yourself this question and Allah will guide you. He will open a door for you. The most essential thing though is that you should persist and not give up after the first attempt. Surely, you will find your call in life. Our lives are but one arrow, and we are bound to aim and shoot it, so beware of gambling with the one shot you have.

Khadijah used to visit the Prophet ﷺ, and spend two or three days with him in the cave. She approved of what her husband was doing and supported him, and most importantly, and this is a word of advice to all women, never was indifferent about it. It is important that a woman should take interest in what her husband is doing; A woman who doesn't, find that the gap between her and her husband increase, and soon end up speaking a different language than her husband; that could lead to divorce.

Khadijah (RA) was a great wife. She was wise and smart. She would not leave her husband all the time alone nor would impose on him all the time. She showed him her care and approval of the decision he took by her visits. Narrated by Ali (RA): The Prophet said, **"The best of the world's women is Mary (at her lifetime), and the best of the world's women is Khadijah (at her lifetime)."**⁶

A woman should always stand by her husband, and a husband should involve his wife in the things he does so that they do not grow apart.

⁶ Sahih Bukhari, Volume 5, book 58

However, do not think that what the Prophet ﷺ did means that any one can go and isolate oneself in a cave! None of the companions did that. It was a phase of the prophecy that passed. In fact the Prophet said, narrated by Abdullah Bin-Omar, "The believer who associates with people and bears their harm is rewarded far more generously than the believer who does not associate with people and does not put up with their harm."⁷

Neither the Prophet nor the companions isolated themselves in that manner after Islam. Even I'tikaf has to be done in the Mosque amongst people. Our religion is one of coexistence and harmony with other.

Khadijah endured greatly the hardships of these visits to the cave. She was a fifty-five year old woman climbing a mountain to join her husband in a cave where she was only to sit and reflect with him. She was a great woman and one of the greatest graces that Allah bestowed on the Prophet. He was indeed told to **"give Khadijah the good tidings that she will have a palace made of Qasab (pearls) in paradise and there will be neither noise nor any trouble in it."**⁸ Qasab is a type of hollow pearl that resembles the cave, because the reward is always of the same nature of the deed.

By then, The Prophet reached a point in his life where he had been reflecting for three years and felt he wants to contribute to society. Then, came the turning point. Let us look at this film of the cave and imagine the embrace that took place between the Prophet ﷺ and Jibril ﷺ.

Here is where Islam started. I am amazed how Prophet Muhammad ﷺ managed to reach this place. I am surrounded by three large rocks that look like they are embracing me.

This cave saw the first revelation. Allah Prophet says **"Surely We sent it down on the Night of Determination; And what makes you realize what the Night of Determination is? The Night of Determination is more charitable (i.e., better) than a thousand months." (97:1-3).**

Let me ask you something: where would you have preferred the revelation to begin; in a luxurious palace, or in this simple place? This is another lesson from Allah Prophet; that Islam is not founded on luxury but rather on the power of the idea, the mission itself. Besides, no matter how simple the place is, what really counts is Ikhlas.

This place witnessed the first communication between the Heavens and the Earth; this communication lasted 23 years. In this place, the Heavens embraced the Earth; the light of the Heavens met with the light of the earth. In spite of the difficulty one

⁷ Sahih Al-Alabani, Sahih Ibn-Majah

⁸ Sahih Bukhari, volume 3, book 27

faces to reach this place Allah Prophet, out of all places, chose it for the commencement of Islam.

You should apprehend the magnificence of the communication that took place between the Heavens and the Earth and that time. Anas (RA) reported that after the death of Allah's Messenger Abu-Bakr said to Omar, "Let us visit Umm-Ayman as Allah's Messenger used to visit her. As we came to her, she wept. They (Abu-Bakr and Omar) said to her, "What makes you weep? What is in store (in the next world) for Allah's Messenger is better than (this worldly life). She said, "I weep not because I am ignorant of the fact that what is in store for Allah's Messenger (in the next world) is better than (this world), but I weep because the revelation which came from the Heaven has ceased. This moved both of them to tears and they began to weep along with her." ⁹ Can you see? Um Ayman, that simple woman, realized the glory of the revelation coming down to the Earth.

Aisha (RA) narrated, "The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, "I am not a reader." The Prophet added, "The angel held me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, "I am not a reader." Thereupon he held me again and pressed me a second time until I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, "What shall I read?" Thereupon he held me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said **"Read: In the Name of your Lord Who created, Created man from clots. Read: And your Lord is The Most Honorable, Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know." (96:1-5).** Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely." ¹⁰

Now let us ponder upon the significance of that embrace. First, it is a symbol of mercy, love and peace. This is exactly the mission of Islam, which rejects all kinds of violence, oppression and injustice. Secondly, it was to prove to the Prophet that he was not dreaming, but awake; notice that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spent six months, prior to the revelation, having visionary dreams that came true, like bright day light. Thirdly, the beginning of the revelation was meant to be powerful to indicate the seriousness of Islam's mission.

The revelations commenced in Ramadan, so seize the opportunity and make this Ramadan a new beginning for us too. Our countries are on the decline, so we should revive them.

One more thing to ponder upon is the opening command itself: "Iqra" (recite). Why did the mission of Islam started with this, although Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself was unlettered?

⁹ An authentic hadith in Sahih Muslim, Book 031, Number 6009.

¹⁰ An authentic hadith in Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3.

It indicates that the era of miracles is over. A new era of knowledge, science and planning has started by Muhammad ﷺ. Nevertheless, 60% of our nation is illiterate. People are still waiting for a miracle that would change their life to a better one. They don't seem to realize that the miracle they are waiting for can only happen through them becoming true Muslims.

Such a start, with Iqra', leaves no doubt in the mind about the truth of Islam. Islam is applicable to all ages, and this is the age of knowledge. Allah Prophet says what can be translated as, **"Read: In the Name of your Lord Who created, Created man from clots. Read: And your Lord is The Most Honorable, Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know." (96:1-5).** He mentioned knowledge along with its tools six times in just five ayahs. Miracles are over. If we are to take this mission seriously, we would be the miracle.

Some people are embarrassed that Prophet Muhammad was illiterate. On the contrary, they should know that this is a miracle in itself. The illiterate man educated the whole world. He left a great heritage of knowledge that is still being explored until this very day.

After he met with Jibril ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ was very frightened. This showed everyone that he was never after the prophecy for fame or money. There was a man by the name of Abu-Amer who knew through reading the scriptures some information about the signs and seal of the Prophets. In an attempt to convince people falsely that he is a Prophet, he started forging evidences and some people even started calling him "The monk". When he heard that the revelation came upon Muhammad ﷺ, he showed great enmity to him. He was the one who dug a hole in the Battle of Uhud hoping that the Prophet ﷺ would fall in it. The lesson we learn here that we should never take things at face value; Allah will only help and guide those who are sincere in pursuing the truth.

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Seerah: Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisam, Ibn Kathir and Diya al-Nabi were used in the compilation of these lecture notes as well as various books of Hadith.

The selective topics and format is from Amr Khaled's Arabic lecture on Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ with renditions from the "dar al tarjma" convoy.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oDLD8B-has>

I have included modifications for the sake of readability and clarity.