

Some of the Small Qur'ānic Suras and their Significance in the Life of the Prophet

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Today is the 13th of the month of Rabi'al-Awwal of the year 1412¹ and this means that yesterday was the day on which the birthday of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is traditionally commemorated. Next week we are going to have a guest who will be talking about the birthday of the Prophet, and I would like to discuss with you something about that occasion also.

After his death, the Prophet left us a precious heritage. That heritage is represented mainly in the Qur'an and in the correct sunnah.² Normally, we ourselves, as well as our children, recite the short suras³ such as Sura Al-Fil, Sura Al Lahab, Sura Ikhlas, Sura Al-Kafirun, Sura Quraysh and so on, in our prayers, but we don't know what was the historic occasion of their revelation, or what we can gain from these little suras. All these little suras can be linked together to see where they fit in the life of the Prophet, and in the life of the Islamic message at the start. I would like to show you the link between some of the little suras in the Qur'an and the Prophet's life, and to show you what the occasions were when these suras were revealed, and how they served specific

functions.

We find that the event described in Surah Al-Fil⁴ is something that happened before Islam. It is said that the Prophet was born in the Year of the Elephant; that's what they say. From Islamic history we know that he was born on the 12th of Rabi'al-Awwal which coincides with the 20th of April in the year 570 CE. So that is the date of the birth of the Prophet according to the solar calendar. That is the date and the year in which the event of the elephant had taken place.

Al-Ka'bah⁵ is the first house built on earth for people to worship God. So it existed even before Islam. And pilgrimage also existed before Islam. The Ka'bah has been rebuilt several times. Some books say that the Ka'bah was built by the Prophet Adam, and then rebuilt several times after that until it was rebuilt by Prophet Ibrahim.⁶ Renovations are being made in the Ka'bah by some governments right up to the present moment. The word Al-Ka'bah refers to the earthly spot on which the building is made; it does not refer to the stones of which it is built.

Al-Ka'bah was a place of pilgrimage and a place of, what we call nowadays, tourism. Abyssinia, at that time, tried

¹ The Islamic lunar calendar: Sunday, September 22, 1991

² The example of the Prophet embodied in his statements and actions

³ Chapters of the Qur'an

⁴ Chapter 105

⁵ The House of God in Makkah, Saudi Arabia

⁶ Abraham

to compete with Al-Ka'bah, so the governor of Abyssinia built a church, decorated it very well, and invited the people to pay pilgrimage to that church with the hope to compete with the pilgrimage to Al-Ka'bah. But he found that the people of Arabia, from Yemen and on, would not accept any house to be visited other than that house which is Al-Ka'bah. So the only solution, according to the Abyssinian governor, was to destroy Al-Ka'bah, so the people would be forced to visit that church. He ordered his commander-in-chief, whose name was Abraha Al-Ashram, to prepare a big army to be led by an elephant, and to go to Makkah and destroy Al-Ka'bah. But when the elephant arrived in the precincts of Makkah, he sat down and would not move.

Sura Al-Fil or *The Elephant* starts by: **أَلَمْ تَرَ** "Did you see?", which is an interrogative, called *istifhām taqreer* in Arabic, meaning that it does not intend to ask a question about something that you don't know, but it is a rhetorical question to confirm something which has happened. And that term *ru'ya* or *ra'a'* here means, "see". It means: "Did you see (what your God did with the people of the elephant)?" And that again shows us how the Qur'an is shapeable to fit every time and every place. The word "see" in our own understanding means to see by your eyes. But there is another type of seeing: you can "see" by what we call in Arabic "*al baseera*" meaning comprehension. You can "see" through inspiration; you can see, through a telescope, things far away that the human eye cannot otherwise see, because its role is limited; you can "see" what happened in the past through knowledge, by reading books and histories of the past. So, in this connection, when the Qur'an says, "Did you see, Muhammad, what your God did to the people of the elephant?" it means to say to Muhammad: Do you know about the event of the elephant from knowledge transmitted from generation to generation?

And after that, the sura – and the sura has many interpretations; everyone interprets it in his time according to what he knows – continues to say "They were planning, and God was planning, but the planning of God is above their planning. He sent birds to throw stones on them." This is the literal translation. Now, if you read tafseer⁸ Qur'an regarding this event, you find that "He sent birds to throw stones on

them" is explained as: "God sent birds; these birds were carrying stones in their claws and in their beaks; these stones were like stones from hell; the birds dropped these stones upon the people and destroyed them."

But today people explain it another way. These latter-day commentators of the Qur'an say that it does not mean literally that there were birds carrying stones in their claws and beaks, but it means that God sent some type of disease upon the army. And this is possible since the type of germs, or, what we call, nowadays, bacteria, could have been air-borne. It is possible that God afflicted that army with some type of germs, or air-borne insect vectors carrying the germs, as a result of which the army was destroyed. That year is referred to in Islamic history as the Year of the Elephant, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, was born during that year. [Imam quotes Sura Al-Fil in Arabic. The English translation is:]

"Art thou not aware of how thy Sustainer dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to stubble."

The Prophet was born from a father and a mother. He did not see his father because his father died while he was yet unborn. And, when he was six years of age, his mother died, so he was orphaned. Then he grew up under the protection and care of his grandfather. When his grandfather passed away, his uncle, Abu Talib, took over.

Here a question comes to my mind. You know, nowadays, there are a lot of people in the Muslim countries who relate themselves to the Prophet. The *Qadriyya*, *Shadhiliyya*, and *Naqshabandhiyya* are different Sufi orders and they relate themselves to the Prophet. Some people call themselves *Hashimite* (descendants of Bani Hashim) and so they are related to the Prophet, also. And that makes me wonder, sometimes, why all these people, who relate themselves to the Prophet, always select that branch specially. If we look at the Prophet's genealogical tree, we find that Abu Lahab was his uncle. But, why does no one claim to be related to Abu Lahab or Abu Jahl? These individuals were from the same family! Why does no one claim to be a descendent of Abu Sufyan? Why always claim to be a descendant of the Prophet? The family of the Prophet had members who died as non-Muslims. And that will falsify all these ideas that someone can relate himself up to that time. I am sure there is not one of us

⁷ **أَلَمْ تَرَ** = you see

⁸ Qur'anic exegesis

present here who knows the name of his sixth great-grandfather.

At the age of 25, the Prophet married Khadija. Khadija was older than him. And Khadija was a business lady. She hired Muhammad to work for her, and that's how she came to know him. They did not date each other. They came to know each other through business dealings. Khadija was 15 years older than Muhammad, and she was his only wife until her death. He never married another wife in her lifetime. When she died, he was 50 years of age. This piece of history can teach us some things and can answer some questions.

I was in Canada yesterday, and I came across *Al Musawwar* magazine. This is an Egyptian weekly magazine, and it has a section which is comparable to the Ann Landers column in newspapers here. The "Ann Landers" of Egypt is Amina Saeed. People send her questions and she answers them. So a lady sent her a letter complaining and saying, "I am sorry to ask you such a trifling question, but that trifling question could lead to the destruction of my marital life. My husband was a government employee. He resigned his job and is working as a businessman now. And he started to wear *gallabiya* and *taqiyya*;⁹ he stopped wearing the European suit because "it is not Islamic" and he's wearing *gallabiya* now to be too much Muslim. And he forced me – and I was a teacher at the school of languages – to resign my job, which I don't object to. He asked me to be attired in what they call hijab or Islamic dress here, and I have done it because I don't see anything wrong with that. But the problem happened last week. My husband came with a friend who is around 50 years of age and asked me to make tea and have my six-year-old daughter serve it, so his friend will see her because he is interested in marrying her. I said to him, she is *six years old!* He said, "The Prophet married 'Āiyshah while she was six, so what is wrong with that?"

What makes one wonder is this: why does that man want a 50-year-old man to marry his six-year-old daughter based upon "the example of the Prophet" and why does he not follow the example of the Prophet for his marriage with Khadija while he was 25 years old and she was 40? Why do we select specific things from the life of the Prophet? And does he know what was the circumstance in which the Prophet married 'Āiyshah and why? That's why I say the Prophet's marriage with a woman 15 years older than him and his living

with her all his life will teach us a lesson: he never married another woman in her lifetime; she was his sole wife, and he lived with her for 25 years. He was 50 years old when Khadija passed away, and after Khadija's death, he stayed three years a single man with no wife till he was 53 years of age. You can consider these three years as the time of mourning and a time of preparation for another stage of his life. Then, from the years 53 to 63, until his death – 10 years – he married several wives.

I hear lots of women saying to me, "Yes, I don't mind if my husband marries a second or third wife." But, *whatever* any woman may say, the nature of a human being is such that a woman, deep down in the bottom of her heart, will never accept another woman to share her husband with her. So, when the Prophet had that number of wives – reaching nine – jealousy crept in the house of the Prophet. The women in the house of the Prophet formed two parties working against each other. 'Āiyshah, the youngest wife, was the chairwoman of one of the parties and Hafzah, the daughter of Omar bin Khattab, was her deputy. And they plotted with each other. Every time the Prophet came to one of his wives belonging to 'Āiyshah's party, she would say to him, "Your mouth smells bad. Where did you eat and what did you eat?" And he would say, he ate honey in that specific place (from the other party). And she would tell him that it made his mouth smell bad. Every woman of this party would say the same thing to him because they had agreed among themselves on what to say. So the Prophet reached the point where he declared, "I prohibit myself from eating honey." In some tafseers it is written that he did not prohibit (make *haram*) for himself the honey, but when he found out about the plot, he said, "All my wives are haram for me." It means he divorced them.

How did the Qur'an solve the problem the Prophet was having with his wives? The Qur'an came with a complete sura which is called *Surat Tahīm* – the Sura of Prohibitions¹⁰ – saying to the Prophet: O Prophet, why do you prohibit for yourself what God made legitimate for you? Is that to satisfy your wives? From now on, God gives you the power to get out of this by returning your wives to you. [Imam quotes in Arabic. The English translation is:]

"O Prophet! Why dost thou, out of a desire to please (one or another of) thy wives, impose on thyself a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to thee? But God is

⁹ The traditional Arab outfit

¹⁰ Chapter 66

much-forgiving, a dispenser of Grace: God has already enjoined upon you, O believers, the breaking and expiation of such of your oaths as may run counter to what is right and just. . .” [66:1-2].

The Prophet used to pray: “O God, I have made equality between my wives in everything I can, but, please forgive me for that which is beyond my ability” and he meant the love in his heart for ‘Aiyshah. He loved her more than the rest. She was the youngest and to satisfy ‘Aiyshah amidst all that turmoil, he said to her:

“‘Aiyshah, I am going to tell you a secret; don’t tell it to anybody.” And you notice that this happens all the time in our present time as well: if you would like to publicize something, confide to a woman about it and tell her to keep it to herself.

‘Aiyshah said:

“What, O Prophet?”

He said: “Your father will be the caliph¹¹ after me and Omar bin Khattab will be the caliph after him.”

So, ‘Aiyshah went to Hafzah, daughter of Omar bin Khattab, and said to her, “Listen, the Prophet told me a secret and he asked me not to tell anyone. I am going to tell you. My father will be the caliph after the Prophet and your father will be the caliph after my father. But don’t tell anyone.” And see how the Qur’an depicts this. [Imam quotes Arabic. The English translation is:]

“And lo! It so happened that the Prophet told something in confidence to one of his wives; and when she thereupon divulged it, and God made this known to him, he acquainted others with some of it and passed over some of it. And as soon as he let her know it, she asked, “Who has told thee this?” – to which he replied, “The All-Knowing, the All-Aware has told me” [66:3].

With all this turmoil in the house of the Prophet, Qur’anic revelations came to threaten the members of the two parties declaring that God may give him better wives than them if they were going to continue to cause strife and trouble in the Prophet’s house, and the verse enumerates all the virtues of those wives. [Imam quotes Arabic. The English translation is:]

“Say, O Prophet: Would that you two turn unto God in repentance, for the hearts of both of you have swerved from what is right! And if you uphold each other against him who is God’s message-bearer, know that God Himself is his Protector,

and that, therefore, Gabriel, and all the righteous among the believers, and all the other angels will come to his aid. O wives of the Prophet! Were he to divorce any of you, God might well give him in your stead spouses better than you – women who surrender themselves unto God, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn unto Him in repentance whenever they have sinned, worship Him alone, and go on and on seeking His goodly acceptance – be they women previously married or virgins” [66:4 -5].

This is the reason why that sura was revealed – because of an event that had taken place in the house of the Prophet, peace be upon him. So, before we say “the Qur’an said this, this, this” and pronounce a verdict,¹² we should know the reason behind the revelation of a specific verse, if it is known.

Except for his marriage to Khadija, all the other marriages in the life of the Prophet took place during the last 10 years of his life. There were *reasons* for these marriages: political reasons, educational reasons, humanitarian reasons. They were not meant to be marriages for the sake of marriages. If Muhammad intended to marry for the sake of just marrying women, he could have done that while he was a young man, not while he was 53 and 57 and 59 and 60 years of age.

When Muhammad reached 40 years of age, the event¹³ happened. He used to worship God according to the method of Ibrahim. From time to time, he would go to the cave to worship Allah until. . . until, one day, the Angel Jibreel¹⁴ came to him and started to recite the Qur’an to him, and to teach him Qur’an, and the first Qur’anic verse was revealed. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

“Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught man the use of the pen – taught man what he did not know!” [96:1-5]

The Prophet started teaching the message, but did so in secret. He used to meet with certain people and teach them. The first one who believed in him from among the men was Abu Bakr. The first woman who believed in him was Khadija. The first boy who believed in him was Ali ibn Abi Talib, and from that core group it started to branch out and

¹² Fatwa

¹³ God chose him as a prophet and the revelation of the Qur’an was initiated

¹⁴ Angel Gabriel

¹¹ Leader

Islam started to increase.

The first revelation which came through Jibreel was daunting, to the extent that Muhammad went home to Khadija and told her what had happened and said, "Cover me with a blanket or something; I am trembling; I feel cold." ¹⁵ And because he said these words, two suras were revealed: Sura Muzzammil [73] and Sura Muddaththir [74]. *Muzzammil* means "The Enwrapped One." *Muddaththir* means "The Enfolded One." That was the occasion for the revelation of these two suras, and they address the Prophet in the same language he had used in his conversation with Khadija. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُرْمَلُ "O thou enwrapped one! Keep awake in prayer at night, all but a small part of one-half thereof – or make it a little less than that, or add to it at will; and during that time recite the Qur'ān calmly and distinctly, with thy mind attuned to its meaning" [73:1-4].

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدْتَرُّ "O thou in thy solitude enfolded! Arise and warn!" [74:1-2]

Then Muhammad started to yearn more and more for the coming of Jibreel. He loved to receive revelation and was always looking forward to the guidance of God. But the revelation stopped for a while. This is known in Islamic history as *Fatrat Al-Wahy*. Muhammad was sad. And what did the Qurayshites say? They started to make fun of him and taunted him: "wadda'a rabbu Muhammadin Muhammadan." ¹⁶ The Prophet was saddened even more. And while he was consumed by his sadness, Jibreel came to him with this little chapter – Ad-Duhā. It was revealed to Muhammad to comfort him.

Chapter Ad-Duhā is divided into three sections. The first section refutes that God abandoned Muhammad. The second section reminds him of the care God gave him when he was an orphan child, and the third part is a recommendation to him and his followers to act in a certain way.

وَالضُّحَى وَاللَّيْلِ "I swear by *ad-duhā* and *al-layl*." *Ad-Duhā* is the time of day – say between 10 o'clock and one o'clock, something like that, according to the Japanese technology – when the sun is shining; it is the best time of the

day, full of life and warmth. *Al-Layl* is the darkness of the night when the night is at its darkest, and it is very, very quiet because everyone is sleeping. This is called in the Arabic language *ta-qabul* (contrasting). God makes an oath by these two and tells Muhammad that God did not bid him farewell; He did not forsake him and that He will give him what his heart desires until he is satisfied: "I swear by Ad-Duhā and Al-Layl your God did not pay you farewell and will never forsake you." It was comforting for him because the taunts of the Qurayshites had hurt him.

As we know, Muhammad's father died before his birth. His mother died while he was six years of age. His grandfather, who took care of him after his mother's death, died while he was eight years of age. After that Allah made his uncle, Abu Talib – a staunch Qurayshite – to incline towards Muhammad; God made his heart very kind towards Muhammad and made him take care of him and fight even against his own tribe for the sake of Muhammad. The Qur'an reminds him how he was an orphan and how Allah harnessed several people to take care of him in his childhood; how He found him wandering and guided him to the right direction; how He found him poor and enriched him. The word عَائِلًا is

taken from the word عَائِلٌ. Although Muhammad was, at that time, single, the word is used metaphorically to show that he was a poor person, exactly like a man who has a big family but whose income is limited. But God made him rich by accepting him as a Prophet, and, by, what we call in the Arabic language, *qana'a* [being content with what Allah has given you]; and God supported and enriched him by giving him a job with that rich business lady.

Some people have millions but they want more, so they are miserable. On the other hand, people who have a meal for the day and who say, *Alhamdulillah* I have enough food for today; they accept what they have, and so they are happy. If you accept your misery, you will be happy. So Muhammad's consciousness of his acceptance by Allah made him feel rich or satisfied, and contented. The link between him and Khadija and his manual labor were enough to satisfy him and that is the meaning of وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا .

Then the sura ends by telling Muhammad that if this was done for him, then he should do likewise for others: since you were an orphan and you were supported, so you have to

¹⁵ *Zammilooni zammilooni aw dathirooni dathirooni*

¹⁶ "The God of Muhammad bid farewell to Muhammad"

treat the orphan in the same manner; since you were poor and were enriched, so if someone asks you for help, you have to support and give that help, and, above all, remember the bounties of God which have been given to you. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

“Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark. Thy Sustainer has not forsaken thee, nor does He scorn thee: for, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part of thy life! And, indeed, in time will thy Sustainer grant thee what thy heart desires, and thou shalt be well-pleased. Has He not found thee an orphan and given thee shelter? And found thee lost on thy way, and guided thee? And found thee in want, and given thee sufficiency? Therefore, the orphan shalt thou never wrong, and him that seeks thy help shalt thou never chide, and of thy Sustainer's blessings shalt thou ever speak” [Sura 93].

There is a point of reservation here. The word **سَائِلٍ** means “one who asks or begs”, or “a beggar”. Here the Qur'an is referring to a human being with a sincere Islamic mind, one who is truly in need, a true and honest Muslim, in the proper sense of the word. Nowadays, just go to some mosques in Muslim countries and you will find lines of beggars. Those people are richer than you think. They are professional beggars and they are collecting a lot of money. In 1960, when I was in India and 100 rupees still had a great value, I used to get change for the 100-rupee bill from the beggars in the mosque. I would go to any one of the beggars and he would give me the change in one-rupee bills. I don't call such a person *sā'il*. I call this a lazy person; he should be kicked out to work to earn his living. But if a *sā'il* asks you for help, not only monetary help, but help in a difficult situation, whether physical or moral, or even for enlightenment, then don't yell at him or talk disrespectfully or unkindly to him.

For three years Muhammad preached in secret. After that, a Qur'anic verse came to him to say: Muhammad, preach to the way of God openly and in public, and don't pay any attention to the idolaters. So, how did he react to that verse? He went to the top of Mount Safā¹⁷ and started to call the tribes by their names: “O children of Quraysh, O people of Hawazeen”, and so on. At that time when somebody went up to the top of Mount Safā and called out in this way, it indicated that there was an imminent danger like an army poised to

attack the city or something ominous about to take place. So, all the people gathered together around him. The people used to address Muhammad by the title “As Sadiq-ul Amin” which means “The Most Trustworthy Man” or “The Man of Truth”. That was the title they gave him since his childhood. And – see the wisdom – the people came to see what had happened and Muhammad did not give them a statement, but, instead, he asked them a question: “If I tell you that there is an army in the valley behind this hill coming to attack you and to occupy your city, will you believe me?” They said, “For sure, we have never found you telling lies.” He said, “Then, I am the messenger of God to you, in particular, and to mankind in general.” He put them on the spot. They acknowledged that whatever he said was the truth because they had never found him telling lies; and then he gave them the statement. At that moment his uncle, Abu Lahab... you know why they called him Abu Lahab? When translated into English, “Abu Lahab” means “Father of the Flame” – that is because his cheeks were like a flame; they were red.¹⁸ Abu Lahab said to him: “Destruction (*tabban*) to you, O Muhammad, you brought us here just to tell us that nonsense – that you are a messenger of God?” So here, immediately, Jibreel came with another sura. [Imam recites Sura Lahab. The translation is:]

“Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained? In the life to come he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, [a subtle play – in the original Arabic – upon his nickname Father of the Flame] together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, who bears around her neck a rope of fire!”

That is called *Attanasuq Al Qur'an* (The Organization of the Qur'anic Verses). As soon as Abu Lahab said, “Destruction to you O Muhammad” the Qur'anic verse came immediately using the same terminology “His – Abu Lahab's – hands are to be destroyed.” “Hands” does not necessarily mean his physical hands but since the hands are indicative of the power of a person, it means that he will become helpless and powerless. The sura says:

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ : “Destroyed are the hands of Abu Lahab...” And this is followed by **وَتَبَّ** –

¹⁷ A small hill near the Ka'bah

¹⁸ He was very handsome and very rich

another *tabb – yā-‘nī*,¹⁹ “destroyed, and destroyed” – it is a confirmation of the prayer for his destruction.

His wife’s name was Mojameel. What ever she ordered, Abu Lahab would do. She used to collect thorns and throw them in the path of the Prophet, and collect garbage and throw it in front of the door of the Prophet’s house just to annoy him. So, the Qur’anic verse related to Abu Lahab mentions his wife also and says that she, who used to carry that stuff and throw it in the path of Muhammad, will have “a rope of fire” around her neck. Why her neck only? Why not all her body? That is because the neck is indicative of the whole life. When somebody dies in a car accident, the only injury sustained may be a broken neck, but the person dies. It means his life has ended because of a broken neck. The Qur’an uses symbolic language and states that the fire will be around her neck.

When the Prophet Ibrahim brought his son, Ismā’īl, to the area of the Ka’bah where there was no water and not a single plant, he prayed his famous prayer that God may send some people to the deserted area, which is now present-day Makkah, so that his son and his wife will find some people to meet them and supply their needs. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

“O our Sustainer! Behold, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Thy sanctified Temple, so that, O our Sustainer, they might devote themselves to prayer: cause Thou, therefore, people’s hearts to incline towards them, and grant them fruitful sustenance, so that they might have cause to be grateful” [14:37].

As a result of his prayer, two thriving caravan routes came into existence: one, in the winter, to Yemen, and one, in the summer, to Syria. The Arabs of Makkah used to go to Yemen in winter and to Syria in summer and take goods and bring goods back to this place and the business was flourishing. So the Qur’an came to remind the Qurayshites, in Sura Quraysh, after they fought with the Prophet and refused to accept the message of Islam: O you tribes of Quraysh, instead of fighting the Prophet, and instead of fighting the message of Islam, remember the times when you were poor and insecure and God provided you with security and food. [Imam quotes

Sura Quraysh. The English translation is:]

“So that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Sustainer of this Temple, who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger” [106].

According to some of the *mofassireen*,²⁰ the Prophet used to recite very long sections of the Qur’an in the prayers, after reading Al Fatihah.²¹ So the Qurayshites used to mock and ridicule him by saying that the Qur’an was revealed to Mohammad to punish him, to trouble him, to be a burden on him and to make his life miserable. Because of this taunt, Sura Tā-Hā²² was revealed, and it starts by saying, We have not revealed the Qur’an for troubling you, or to make it tiresome for you.

What is the meaning of the word “Tā-Hā”? Some ulama²³ say Tā-Hā is one of the names of the Prophet. And what are some of his other names? Muhammad, Ahmad, Hamid, Mahmood; these are all adapted from the same root *hamida* which means “to praise”. Al Mustafa and Ab-ul Qasim are two other names for the Prophet. But the ones which are mentioned in the Qur’an are “Muhammad Rasūlallah,”²⁴ and “Ahmad”. Jesus said to the Israelites, “I am the messenger of God to you confirming the Torah which was revealed before me and giving you the glad tidings that another messenger will come after me – his name is Ahmad” [61:6].

Sura Tā-Hā, which was revealed in Makkah, is characterized by talking about the oneness of God and it also mentions some stories to the Prophet like the story of Moses and the story of Adam, and the Qur’an gives the reasons why these stories are mentioned: “These stories will serve as a sermon for those people who are willing to think.” The other reason for their revelation was to comfort and encourage the Prophet. The people used to invent stories about him: some would say he was crazy, others called him a magician, and many other accusations were directed at him, and, as a human being, the Prophet would sometimes be in a state of semi-despair. To enable him to face the hardships he was facing during his call, the stories of earlier prophets were revealed to him to encourage him not to worry because he was not the

¹⁹ An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, “I mean” or, “you know” or, “in other words” depending on the context

²⁰ Qur’anic exegetes

²¹ Chapter one of the Qur’an, consisting of just seven lines

²² Chapter 20

²³ Scholars

²⁴ Muhammad, the messenger of God

first one faced with disbelief; it happened to Moses before; it happened to Jesus; it happened to Ibrahim; and it happened to all the messengers of God who came before him. So, the stories of past prophets were revealed to reassure and comfort Muhammad, to restore his confidence, to encourage and support him. Why is God saying, in Chapter Tā-Hā, to Muhammad:

وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى

It is to give him more security. To make him feel secure, the Qur'an is saying to him: Don't feel lonely Muhammad, God knows what they reveal and what they conceal; God knows their thoughts which they are hiding, and He even knows that which is a degree less than thought:

وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ And if thou say anything aloud,

فَأِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ He hears it –

السِّرَّ since, behold, He knows even the *secret thoughts* of man

وَأَخْفَى as well as all that is *yet more hidden* within him.”

What is the job of a prophet? The Prophet, according to the opinion of some ulama, was eager to see every one accept Islam. He was tiring himself out and preaching in a manner that appeared as if he was forcing the people to accept Islam. So the Qur'anic verse came to tell him what his job was. It says: Your job is not to impose but your job is to warn, to give the glad tidings, to remind, and when you have done this you have performed the function with which you were entrusted. The rest is not your job, that is up to God. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The English translation is:]

“It is not for thee, O Prophet, to make people follow the right path, since it is God alone who guides whom He wills...²⁵” This is mentioned in some other Qur'anic verse as well which says, “Verily, thou canst not guide aright everyone whom thou lovest: but it is God who guides him that wills to be guided; and He is fully aware of all who would let themselves be guided.”

²⁵ 2:272