

Sura 96: Al-‘Alaq (The Clot)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 19:

1. *Read: In the name of your Lord who created;*
2. *Created humankind from a clot.*
3. *Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous,*
4. *He taught by the pen,*
5. *Taught humankind that which he knew not.*
6. *Indeed, humankind transgresses all bounds,*
7. *When he thinks that he is self-sufficient.*
8. *Verily, to your Lord is the return.*
9. *Have you seen him who forbids;*
10. *A servant when he prays?*
11. *Have you considered if he is guided;*
12. *Or enjoins God consciousness?*
13. *Have you considered if he denies the truth and turns (his) back?*
14. *Does he not know that God sees?*
15. *No. If he does not desist, We will drag him by the forelock;*
16. *A deceitful, sinful forelock.*
17. *Then let him summon his associates,*
18. *We will call the guards of Hell.*
19. *No, do not obey him; but prostrate yourself, and draw near.*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. The beginning of this Sura consists of the first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). 'Aisha (RA) has been quoted to have said, "The first signs of revelation came to the Prophet (PBUH) as clear dreams that he saw in his sleep but then occurred in real life just as he saw them in his dreams. Then he started to go into seclusions. He used to spend several nights in seclusion in the cave of Hira'a. During these periods of seclusion he would worship God. One day when he was in the cave he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH). Gabriel (PBUH) said to him, 'Read.' The Prophet said, 'I do not read.' Gabriel (PBUH) embraced him tightly until the Prophet (PBUH) was exhausted. Gabriel (PBUH) said, 'Read.' Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, 'I do not read.' Gabriel (PBUH) embraced him again, then released him and asked him to read. Again the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'I do not read.' He repeated the same thing for the third time. Then he said, '*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created humankind from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*' The Messenger of God (PBUH) returned home shaken. He asked Khadija (RA) to cover him. When he felt secure, he told Khadija (RA) what happened. Then he said to Khadija (RA), 'I fear for myself.' She said, 'You should not fear. This is glad tidings and God will never let you down. You join your kin, you always tell the truth, you help the weak, you are generous to your guest, and you help the needy in calamities.' Khadija (RA) suggested that they should go to visit her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal. Waraqah was a Christian, he was literate, and he knew how to read and write the

Gospel. They went, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told him what happened in the cave. Waraqah said, ‘This is the same revelation that was sent to Prophet Moses (PBUH). I wish I were a young man so that I would live until I see your people drive you out from the city.’ Muhammad (PBUH) asked Waraqah, ‘Will they drive me out?’ Waraqah said, ‘Yes, every man who comes with what you have been given has been expelled by his people. If I live until your day comes, I will support you unconditionally.’ However, Waraqah died very soon after this incident.”

How many times did we read this story? However, we would quickly forget it; or maybe we reflect a little on it then forget it. The revelation of these verses was a major event. In fact, it was a tremendous event; an event which had a tremendous impact on the history of humanity. This event changed the course of the history of humanity. God in His Majesty, God the Great, the Compeller, the One supreme in Pride, the King of absolute Sovereignty looked upon the creature He called humankind who lived in a tiny place in the vast universe and bestowed His honor on this race by choosing one of them to become the recipient of His Divine light, the storage of His wisdom, and the landing place of His Word. This is an enormous fact whose dimensions become clear only when humankind tries to explore, as much as he can, the nature of the Divine.

Humankind was reborn when he received his values from the Divine instead of receiving them from human experience; when he received his laws from the revelation not from the whims. This event was a milestone in the history of humankind. This event changed the path of this history.

The Sura starts with a command to recite, “*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created man from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*” It is the first Sura in the Qur’an, so it starts with the name of God and commands the Messenger (PBUH) to read in the name of his Lord. It starts by specifying the attribute of God, “*Who created.*” Then it explains further, He created humankind from a clot.

This is a process that testifies to God’s generosity as much as to God’s power. God taught by the pen; and He is the source of knowledge. This verse established the fundamental concept of faith: everything, every movement, every step, every action should be in the name of God. In the name of God we start, in the name of God we walk, in the name of God we go towards Him, and in the name of God we return to Him. God is the Creator and He is the Teacher. He taught humankind that which he knew not.

The logical consequence of this fundamental concept of faith is that humankind should be grateful to God who created him, who taught him, and who honored him. But this did not happen. Indeed, what happened was the opposite, “*Indeed, humankind transgresses all bounds, when he thinks that he is self-sufficient. Verily, to your Lord is the return.*” God bestowed his bounties on humankind and made him self-sufficient. Generally, when humankind becomes self-sufficient, he does not show gratitude nor does he acknowledge the source of his self-sufficiency; except those who are protected by their faith. The verses outline another fundamental concept of

faith: to God is the return; the return to God in everything, every intention, and every movement. There is no one else to return to except God.

The following verses display an example of the tyranny of humankind, *“Have you seen him who forbids? a servant when he prays? Have you considered if he is guided, or enjoins God consciousness? Have you considered if he denies the truth and turns (his) back? Does he not know that God sees?”* The expression expresses amazement and renunciation of this behavior. This is indeed horrendous behavior. Does he not know that God sees him?

The tyrants prevent people from worshipping God; they do not follow guidance; they do not enjoin God consciousness; they deny the truth; and they turn away from the straight path. A dire warning is issued to these tyrants, *“No. If he does not desist, We will drag him by the forelock; a deceitful, sinful forelock. Then let him summon his associates, We will call the guards of Hell.”* Very stern warning, We will drag him severely by his forelock. The forelock is a symbol of pride for humankind. Let him call upon his associates, they will find the guards of Hell waiting for them. There is no doubt about what his end will be.

The command to the believer was, *“No, do not obey him; but prostrate yourself, and draw near.”* Leave the tyrant to the guards of Hell and devote yourself to the prayer. The prayer will bring you close to God. You will be most closer to God when you prostrate yourself in worship to God. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The closest one can get to God is during prostration. So, make many supplications during your prostration.”*