

اقراً باسم ربك الذي خلق

Read in the Name of Thy Lord who Created

*A Look at the True Meaning of the First
Revelation*

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

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سلسلة إملاء الخاطر | Imlā al-Khāṭir Series



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جميع الحقوق محفوظة

Imlā al-Khāṭir Series

In this series, which he names *Imlā al-Khāṭir* (literally, “dictation of thoughts”), Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi follows in the tradition of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* and shares with the world his reflections on a variety of topics ranging from theology to law, history to heart softeners, philosophy, education and more. Composed in a casual, conversational style consisting of questions followed by their brief answers (each portion predicated by *qālū/qultu*, “they said”/“I responded”), he utilizes therein the highest level of Arabic, reflecting his love of the language and his extensive expertise in Arabic grammar and rhetoric. These short but poignant reflections are part of the *balāghah* genre and tradition of Arabic literature. It should be noted that these translations, done by his senior students, serve as a guide and can never fully match the style, tone and eloquence of the original Arabic. Also note that Dr. Akram does not necessarily review each translation and is not responsible for any errors, improper word choices, or the likes, that are an inevitable part of the translation process.

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi

Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi is a world-renowned scholar of Indian origin who has resided in England for an extensive time. After receiving in-depth training to an advanced level in the traditional Islamic disciplines at the famous Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ seminary in Lucknow, India, and receiving a PhD in Arabic literature from Lucknow University, he became a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, where he conducted research for a number of years on a variety of topics, including Ḥadīth and Sufi orders in India. He has published widely in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English, including translations (like his work on Shāh Waliullah, *Bustan al-Muhaddithin*), editions of Arabic texts (such as a renowned critical edition of *Usul al-Shāshī* in Ḥanafī jurisprudence), and original monographs on Islamic law, female ḥadīth narrators and such figures as Abū Ḥanīfah and Sayyid Abul Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwi. His groundbreaking work, yet to be published, is an encyclopedic 40-volume documentation of the legacy of female scholarship in the Islamic tradition. He co-founded the Al-Salam Institute in 2006 where he continues to serve as Principal and Senior Lecturer.

Introduction

The very first revelation came down with one bold word and one unmistakable command—Read! Though crystal clear in its wording, it has been variably interpreted and celebrated throughout history. In this brief article, Dr. Akram reveals his own thoughts on this misunderstood command. For him, it is no endorsement of education or the sciences, but an emphasis of the prayer, which is of central importance in the Islamic faith.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق

بقلم: محمد أكرم الندوي

أو كسفورد

قالوا: فبسر لنا قوله تعالى "اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق" رافعا عنه
التعمية والالتباس، فهو أول ما نزل من القرآن على النبي صلى الله عليه
وسلم ولم يتضح لنا وجه أمره بالقراءة، وراجعنا كلام المؤلفين فما زادتنا
مناحيه إلا إيغالا في الخرق والغباء وإمعانا في احتجاب الحق عنا والخفاء.
قلت: هو مما زل الناس في فهمه من القرآن مزورين عن السداد والإصابة
ازورارا، فمنهم من جعل القراءة عامة مطلقة، واستدل بها على خطر القراءة
والعلم في الإسلام، ومنهم من جعل هذه الآية شعارا للمدارس والمعاهد
العلمانية موحيا بأن الآية وردت في بيان فضل الفنون والمعارف التي
يكتسبونها فيها إخلادا إلى الأرض واستمناعا بحياتها الزائلة.

قالوا: ما خطؤهم؟ قلت: لا ريب أن الإسلام يولي القراءة والعلم
عناية كبيرة في آيات من القرآن الكريم وأحاديث النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم،
ولكن هذا القول الذي سألتموني عنه والذي أسيء فهمه واستعماله لا يمث

إلى ما زعمه هؤلاء وبنو جلدتهم بصلاة ما، ولو أنهم تدبروه في سياق السورة بكاملها وفي سياق موقعها من القرآن الكريم وفي ضوء سبب نزولها لما ندّد عنهم معناه ولما استعجم عليهم فخواه، فالقرآن الكريم كله بيّن بياناً جليلاً لا ترى فيه عوجاً ولا أمّتا، وكونه مشكلاً لغير المتدبر إياه ومشتبهاً عليه لا ينافي بيانه.

قالوا: حدثنا عن معناه مفصلاً له إفصاحاً لعل ذلك يفتح لنا باباً من العلم في تفقه أول سمة النبوة. قلت: يتوقف فهمه على إدراك ثلاثة أمور، قالوا: ما هي؟ قلت:

الأول: شأن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم عند نزوله، فقد كان متبرماً بالدنيا ومعرضاً عنها إعراضاً شديداً، وموجّهاً وجهه إلى ربه ومستأنساً بذكركه وإليه حنيفاً، وقد ذكرت لكم في مقال سابق أن الإيمان بالله ربّاً وإلهاً فطرياً وعقلياً، ونبينا صلى الله عليه وسلم على سنن سائر الأنبياء والمرسلين هادي إلى ربه بفطرته السليمة، وازداد به بصيرة بإعمال العقل والنظر والفكر، وعرفه معرفة قريبة قبل أن يوحى إليه، فخشيه وقت له عالماً به متحنناً إليه أيماً تحنن، واشتد شوقه وحبه لشكره وعبادته، تاركاً إياه في اضطراب بالغ وقلق عجيب لا هدوء له ولا طمأنينة، وتضاعفت رغبته في العبادة متطلعاً إلى معرفة طريقتها الصحيحة، وليس حوله من يعلمها ولا يهتدي إليها بعقله، فبدأ قبل النبوة التردد إلى غار حراء والتحنن فيه نوعاً من التحنن، فاستجاب الله لشوقه راوياً غلته وشافياً علته، وهداه إلى عبادته رحمة به كما رحم الناس بخلقهم وإنشاءهم إنشاءً.

الثاني: معنى القراءة، فالقراءة هنا ليست قراءة مجردة، ولكنها قراءة القرآن الكريم، أي اقرأ القرآن، ومن ثم جاء في السورة التالية: "إنا أنزلناه في ليلة القدر"، ولا مرجع للضمير إلا هذا المحذوف، وقد يطلق الجزء في الكلام ويراد به الكل، وهو أمر معروف في عامة ألسنة البشر، وكثر استعماله في القرآن الكريم، فالقيام والركوع والسجود والتسبيح أجزاء الصلاة، وأريدت الصلاة بكل واحد منها، كذلك قراءة القرآن ركن جليل من أركان الصلاة، أطلقه الله تعالى وأراد به الصلاة، أي إن الأمر الأول للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم هو الصلاة، كما أن الأمر الأول لغيره من الأنبياء هي الصلاة والعبادة، فلما كلم الله موسى عليه السلام مصطفيا إياه بالنبوة قال له: إني أنا الله لا إله إلا أنا فاعبدي وأقم الصلاة لذكري"، ومثله في الجمع بين القراءة والصلاة قوله تعالى "أتل ما أوحى إليك من الكتاب وأقم الصلاة" يشير إلى التلاوة في الصلاة، ومثله ما في سورة المزمل: "يا أيها المزمل قم الليل إلا قليلا نصفه أو انقص منه قليلا أو زد عليه ورتل القرآن ترتيلا"، وقوله تعالى في موضع آخر: "والذين يمسكون بالكتاب وأقاموا الصلاة".

الثالث: نظام السورة، أنعموا النظر في السورة بكاملها، ختمها بقوله "فاسجد واقترب"، أي صل، والصلاة تزلف وحضور، وكما أن صلاتك تشتمل على القراءة كذلك يجب أن تشتمل على السجود، ففي السجود قرينة لي، ولما استجاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لربه بأداء الصلاة

عارضه صناديد قريش، فقال تعالى في السورة نفسها: "أرأيت الذي ينهى عبدا إذا صلى"، ولم يسبق في السورة ذكر الصلاة إلا قوله "اقرأ".
قلت: فتبين مما أوفيته شرحا أن هذا القول نزل على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم استجابة لتشوقه للعبادة وانقطاعه إليها، والنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أشد الناس امتثالا لأمر ربه، فلو كان أمره بالقراءة لتعلم القراءة، ولكن الذي نعلمه أنه أول ما بدأ بعد النبوة هي الصلاة، وأهم ذلك زعماء قريش وأقربهم، فهو عنها وناوؤوه وأشرس مناوأة.

قالوا: ما علاقة هذا الأمر بالخلق إذ قال: "اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق"؟ قلت: إن الخلق أثر عظيم من آثار رحمة الله، جارية أطواره على مسالك الرحمة، والشكر لهذه النعمة إقرار الفطرة التي فطر الناس عليها، والكفر نقض لها وإنكار، ولهذا كان التعبد والتحنث خيرا منسجما مع الوجود متوافقا معه، فكونه تعالى أكرم الكرماء وأرحم الراحمين يستلزم إنعامه أولا بالخلق وثانيا إعداده الإنسان لأفضل النعم وهي قراءة القرآن متعبدا بها في الصلاة ومرتلا لآيه ترتيلا، فأمره بالصلاة والقيام بين يديه من جهتين: من جهة نعمة الخلق والإنشاء، وجهة نعمة التعليم والهداية.

قالوا: لماذا ربط القراءة باسم الرب؟ قلت: أول التعبد هو ذكر اسم الرب، ومثله قوله "وذكر اسم ربه فصلى"، وقوله "سبح اسم ربك الأعلى" وهو كذلك أمر بالصلاة بذكر اسمه تعالى.

قالوا: وهل جاءت قراءة القرآن هذا المحيي أي في معنى قراءته في الصلاة في مكان آخر؟ قلت: نعم، قوله تعالى "وقرآن الفجر، إن قرآن

الفجر كان مشهوداً"، فمعناه قراءة القرآن الكريم في صلاة الفجر، ومثله قوله "سنقرئك فلا تنسى" يلمع إلى إقرائه في الصلاة ويلوح إليه تلويحاً، فإن الصلاة موقع معظم التلاوة، وما أقرب العبد إلى ربه وما أسماه إلى الدرجات العلى إذا قرن بينهما في خشوع وقنوت، ومثله "إذا قرئ القرآن فاستمعوا له وأنصتوا" أي في الصلاة.

قالوا: وهل فهم منه النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم المعنى الذي ذكرت. قلت: لن يتوصل أحد إلى فهم معنى القائل على جهته ولا سيما إذا كان قوله من عالم آخر حتى يأنسه ويألفه، والوحي الأول كان غريباً مدهشاً بل مخيفاً مريعاً للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، وخلال أيام زالت غرابته ودهشتته، وأصبح يتطلع إلى الوحي، فلا شك أن معنى القراءة إنما بان له بعد أيام، ولما بان له هام بالصلاة هيأها وصافها عالفاً بها ومولعاً بها إيلاعاً، وكانت الصلاة راحة له وقرّة عين، لا يقر له قرار إلا بها، هائناً بها ومتنعلاً تنعماً.

Read in the Name of Thy Lord who Created

A Look at the True Meaning of the First Revelation

By Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi
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They said: Explain the statement of God—“Read in the name of thy Lord who created!”¹—and remove the shrouds of confusion from us, since it is the very first revelation of the Qur’ān upon the Prophet and it is not clear to us what was the reason for this command to read. We have reviewed the various views of interpreters, but that exercise has only pushed us into foolishness and stupidity and increased the muddling of the truth and even more confusion.

I replied:

This is from those matters of the Qur’ān that people have been mistaken about in their understanding, and wound up falsifying what is true and correct. Some have made the command to mean reading in a general sense and inferred from it the seriousness of reading and knowledge in Islam. Others have taken this verse as a symbol for schools and institutions of secular education, suggesting that the verse was revealed to clarify the importance of the sciences and learning that is acquired in these institutions, all in an attempt to establish themselves in the earthly world and enjoy this fleeting life.

They asked: What is their mistake?

I replied:

No doubt Islam greatly values reading and knowledge in numerous verses of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth narrations of the Prophet, but this command which you asked me about is misunderstood, wrongly applied, and not at all

¹ Qur’ān 96:1.

associated with what these people and their associates claim in various connections. Were they to reflect over it in the context of the sūrah in which it appears, in the context of its position in the Noble Qur'ān and in light of the reasons for its revelation, its meaning would not escape them and they would not be deaf to its sense and content. The entire Qur'ān is crystal clear in the strongest sense, devoid of all crookedness or aberration, and its being difficult to comprehend for those who don't ponder over it does not negate its perfect clarity.

They said: Tell us about its meaning in a clear way that would radically open up our understanding and comprehension of this first stamp of Prophethood.

I replied:

Its comprehension lies in understanding three separate matters.

They asked: What are they?

I replied:

First, you must understand the state of the Prophet himself at the time of this revelation: increasingly disenchanted with the world and greatly averse to it, he chose instead to turn his face towards his Lord and find solace in remembering Him and turning to Him exclusively. I have mentioned in a previous article that faith in God as a sustaining Lord (rabb) and object of worship (ilāh) is both natural and rational. Our Prophet, following the practice of all the Prophets and Messengers before him, was guided to his Lord through his sound nature, and that guidance was then increased through the insight of his reason and thinking. So even prior to receiving revelation, the Prophet recognized his Lord, feared Him, was devoted towards Him, and was emotionally invested in Him. He was moved and inspired by his profound love for Him to be ever grateful and to worship Him. This, in turn, left him in profound distress and strange agitation without rest. His longing was further compounded by his aspiration to find the correct way to worship, and there was really no one around him who could teach him that nor could he attain that through his intellect alone. So prior to prophethood, he began to frequent the cave of Ḥirā' for a particular type of devotion. In turn, God responded to his aspirations, alleviating his tension and healing his illness. He guided the Prophet to the correct way of

worshipping Him out of mercy for him, just as He had mercy towards the people by creating and fashioning them.

Second, you must understand the exact meaning of read: reading here does not mean any reading but the reading of the Noble Qur'ān. In other words, the command is to recite the Qur'ān. This is the very reason the next sūrah begins: "Surely We did reveal it in the Night of the Decree."² The reference of the pronoun here can only refer to this, i.e. the Qur'ān. In conventional speech, very often a portion is mentioned which is meant to refer to the whole. This is a normative and well-known matter in all human languages and is also used quite frequently in the Qur'ān. Standing (qiyām), bowing (rukū'), prostrating (sujūd), and glorification (tasbīh) are all parts of prayer, and the use of any of these terms is meant to denote the prayer. Similarly, recitation of the Qur'ān is also a great pillar of prayer, and God uses it to mean the prayer as well. In other words, the first command to the Prophet was the prayer, just as the first command to other prophets was also prayer and worship. When God spoke to Mūsā, for instance, to choose him for prophethood, He said to him: "Verily, I am God, and no one deserves worship but I, so worship Me and establish the prayer to remember Me."³ And similar to that, in combining recitation with prayer is His statement: "Recite what has been revealed to you from the Book and establish prayer,"⁴ referring to the recitation that is part of prayer. Another example is: "O you the enwrapped one! Stand up in prayer by night, all but a small part of it; half of it, or reduce it a little; or add to it a little; and recite the Qur'an slowly and distinctly."⁵ And then there is His statement in another instance: "Those who hold fast to the Book and establish Prayer."⁶

Third, you must understand the structure of the sūrah itself: look deeply into the entirety of the sūrah, and you will see that God ends it by saying: "But prostrate yourself and become nigh (to your Lord);"⁷ i.e. pray, for prayer brings you closer and into His presence. Just as your prayer includes recitation, it also necessarily includes prostration, for prostration is

² Qur'ān 97:1.

³ Qur'ān 20:14.

⁴ Qur'ān 29:45.

⁵ Qur'ān 73:1-4.

⁶ Qur'ān 7:170.

⁷ Qur'ān 96:19.

proximity to Him. When the Prophet responded to his Lord by performing the prayer, the mighty Quraysh resisted him. God says in the very same sūrah, quite explicitly: “Did you see him who forbids a servant (of Allah) when he prays?”⁸ And prior to this verse there was no reference to prayer in the sūrah except for the command to read.

I also said:

It should be apparent from my explanation that this command was revealed upon the Prophet as a response to his desire to worship and his inclination towards it. The Prophet was the keenest of all people to follow the commands of his Lord. Had the command to read meant simply learning to read in general the Prophet would have learned to read. But what we do know is that the first thing he began focusing on after Prophethood was the prayer. More importantly, this concerned and frightened the leaders of Quraysh, so they tried to stop him from it and viciously resisted him in that.

The asked: What is the relation of this command with creation, as God says: “Read in the name of thy Lord who created”?

I replied:

Creation is a great manifestation from the manifestations of God’s abundant mercy, and its stages follow the paths of mercy. Gratitude for this blessing is to confirm the innate nature upon which God created all of humanity, while ingratitude would be to destroy it and reject it entirely. Because of this, worship and devotion were selected to be in harmony and agreement with existence itself. God being the most noble and most merciful of all beings necessitates that He first favor us with His creation and second, He prepare the human being for the choicest of blessings, which is to recite the Qur’ān in worship through prayer, reciting each verse in succession. So He commanded him with prayer and standing before the Divine presence from two aspects: from the blessing of creation and originating as well as the blessing of education and guidance.

They asked: Why was reading tied to the name of the Lord?

⁸ Qur’ān 96:9-10.

I replied:

The first form of worship is the mention of the name of the Lord, as in the verse: “. . .and he mentions the name of his Lord and prays.”⁹ and “Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High;”¹⁰ which is also a command to pray with mention of His name.

They asked: Has the recitation of the Qur’ān come in this sense—in the meaning of recitation within prayer—in any other place?

I replied:

Yes, there is God’s statement: “And hold fast to the recitation of the Qur’ān at dawn, for the recitation of the Qur’ān at dawn is witnessed.”¹¹ This refers to the recitation of the Noble Qur’ān in the Fajr prayer. There is also His statement: “We shall make you recite and then you will not forget,”¹² which points to his recitation in prayer, for the prayer is where most of recitation takes place. How close is the servant to his Lord and how high he climbs among the lofty ranks when he combines the two in humility and devotion! There is also His statement: “So when the Qur’an is recited, listen carefully to it, and keep silent so that you may be shown mercy,”¹³ which also refers to prayer.

They asked: Did the Prophet understand this meaning that you have mentioned?

I replied:

No one can arrive at the understanding of a speaker from his own perspective, even if the statement is from another world, until he gains intimate familiarity with it. For the Prophet, the first revelation was a strange and alarming event, even fearful and dreadful. But after some days had passed, this strangeness and fright dissipated, and he began to look forward to it. There is no doubt that the meaning of read became apparent to him after some time. And when it did, he became so preoccupied with

⁹ Qur’ān 87:15.

¹⁰ Qur’ān 87:1.

¹¹ Qur’ān 17:78.

¹² Qur’ān 87:6.

¹³ Qur’ān 7:204.

prayer, with passion and longing, that it became his comfort, his repose, and the delight of his eyes. He could not relax without it. He took delight and great joy in it.