

Sūrah 94: ash-Sharh

Period of Revelation

Its subject matter so closely resembles that of Sūrah adh-Dhuhā that both these Sūrah seem to have been revealed in about the same period under similar conditions. According to Abdullah bin Abbas, it was sent down in Makkah just after Sūrah adh-Dhuhā.

Theme and Subject Matter

The aim and object of this Sūrah too is to console and encourage the Messenger. Before his call he never had to encounter the conditions which he suddenly had to encounter after it when he embarked on his mission of inviting the people to Islām. This was by itself a great revolution in his own life of which he had no idea in his life before Prophethood. No sooner had he started preaching the message of Islām than the same society which had esteemed him with unique honour, turned hostile to him. The same relatives and friends, the same clansmen and neighbors, who used to treat him with the highest respect, began to shower him with abuse and invective. No one in Makkah was prepared to listen to him; he began to be ridiculed and mocked in the street and on the road; and at every step he had to face new difficulties. Although gradually he became accustomed to the hardships, even much severer ones, yet the initial stage was very discouraging for him. That is why first Sūrah adh-Dhuhā was sent down to console him, and then this Sūrah.

In it, at the outset, God says: “We have favored you, O Prophet, with three great blessings; therefore you have no cause to be disheartened. The first is the blessing of Sharh Sadr (opening up of the breast), the second of removing from you the heavy burden that was weighing down your back before the call, and the third of exalting your renown the like of which has never been granted to any man before. Further below in the notes we have explained what is implied by each of these blessings and how great and unique these blessings indeed are!

After this, the Lord and Sustainer of the universe has reassured His Servant and Messenger that the period of hardships which he is passing through, is not very long, but following close behind it there is also a period of ease. This same thing has been described in Sūrah adh-Dhuhā, saying: “Every later period is better for you than the former period, and soon your Lord will give you so much that you will be well pleased.”

In conclusion, the Prophet has been instructed, so as to say, “You can develop the power to bear and resist the hardships of the initial stage only by one means, and it is this: ‘When you are free from your occupations, you should devote yourself to the labour and toil of worship, and turn all your attention exclusively to your Lord.’” This same instruction has been given to him in much greater detail in Sūrah Al-Muzzammil 1-9.

Sūrah 94: ash-Sharh¹⁸¹²

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast?¹⁸¹³
2. And We removed from you your burden¹⁸¹⁴
3. Which had weighed upon your back
4. And raised high for you your repute.
5. For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease [i.e., relief].
6. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.
7. So when you have finished [your duties], then stand up [for worship].
8. And to your Lord direct [your] longing.

¹⁸¹² *Asb-Sharh* or *al-Inshirah*: Expansion.

¹⁸¹³ i.e., enlighten, assure and gladden your heart with guidance.

¹⁸¹⁴ By forgiving any errors which you may have committed previously or might commit consequently. "Burden" can also refer to the anxiety experienced by the Prophet at the beginning of his mission.