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Research Article

Rereading the Pre-prophetic Stage of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as Divine Script and Spiritual Paradigm for Present Times

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Abstract. This paper reinterprets the Pre-prophetic stage of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ life as a manifestation of Taqdir Ilāhī (Divine Orchestration) and Manhaj al-Rūḥānī (Spiritual Paradigm). It states that these formative years were neither accidental but constituted divinely arranged stages of spiritual purification, ethical cultivation, and inner discipline—designed by Allah to mould him into the supreme moral exemplar and Insān al-Kāmil (Perfect Human). By re-examining pivotal Themes—such as the divine selection of Arabia, his orphanhood, his rearing in the desert, his experience as a shepherd, and his practice of Tahannuth (spiritual retreats) in the Cave of Ḥirā'—the study demonstrates how these experiences nurtured key prophetic virtues, including empathy, patience, moral sensitivity, resilience, self-mastery, and contemplative depth which later helped him to Propagate his mission effectively. Drawing upon classical Sirah sources alongside contemporary Fiqh al-Sirah scholarship, the paper situates the Prophet's early life within a wider theological and spiritual interpretive framework. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in descriptive, hermeneutical, and discursive analysis. Eventually, it proposes and highlights that the

early phase of Prophets life embodies a divinely ordained curriculum of prophetic refinement and, by extension, offers a timeless model for individuals seeking spiritual renewal and moral elevation today. Reflecting on the Prophet's inner journey prior to revelation can thus guide contemporary communities toward spiritual strength, ethical clarity, and deeper connectedness with the Divine.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Taqdir Ilāhī (Divine Orchestration) and Manhaj al-Rūḥānī (Spiritual Paradigm), Insān al-Kāmil (Perfect Human)

INTRODUCTION

The *Sīrah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has traditionally served as a foundational source for understanding Islam's ethical, spiritual, and civilizational framework.ⁱ It has long been examined for its historical value, offering insights into the social, political, and cultural context of 7th-century Arabia.ⁱⁱ While much attention has been given to the post-revelatory period of the Prophet's life—marked by prophetic mission, legal rulings, and community formation—the pre-revelatory phase often remains underexplored, or is treated merely as a prelude to his public career. Classical and later writers preserved these details primarily to document the Prophet's biography and to situate his mission within the socio-political and tribal landscape of Arabia. Modern scholarship has continued this descriptive tendency, focusing on the historical, anthropological, or cultural circumstances that shaped pre-Islamic Mecca. While these contributions are indispensable for understanding the environment into which Islam emerged, they often leave unaddressed the deeper spiritual logic that underlies the Prophet's formative years. It is this unexplored spiritual dimension that forms the point of departure for the present study.

Despite the vast literature on the *Sīrah*, very few works examine the pre-revelatory life of the Prophet ﷺ as a deliberate divine process—an unfolding of *Hikmah Ilāhī* (Divine Wisdom) intended to refine, prepare, and elevate him for prophethood. Much of the modern discourse interprets these episodes as sociological precursors or moral anecdotes, rather than as elements of a divinely orchestrated curriculum of spiritual purification, resilience, ethical maturation, and spiritual awakening. This gap becomes particularly significant in contemporary times, where Muslims face crises not merely of information but of meaning, purpose, and inner orientation. This paper challenges that conventional historiographical approach by proposing a rereading of the Prophet's early life as a purposeful and divinely orchestrated process—*Taqdir Ilāhī*—that embodies a comprehensive *Manhaj al-Rūḥānī* (Spiritual Paradigm). In doing so, it suggests that the seemingly ordinary or even painful experiences of the Prophet's childhood and youth were in fact integral to his spiritual training (*tarbiyyah ilāhiyyah*), deeply meaningful and relevant for those seeking spiritual direction in the contemporary world. From orphanhood and economic modesty to shepherding and solitary retreats, the early life events of the Prophet ﷺ reveal recurring patterns of divine intervention, moral testing, and spiritual refinement. These events were not mere accidents of fate or social conditioning; they reflected a divine curriculum designed to prepare the Prophet ﷺ inwardly for the immense task of carrying the final revelation. This inward formation occurred in a pre-Islamic context marked by spiritual desolation (*jahiliyyah*), yet it

also offered glimpses of monotheistic remnants, moral conscience, and prophetic foresight. Such a setting makes the Prophet's spiritual development not only unique but also universal in its implications. The present study draws on both classical and modern sources. By revisiting the *Sīrah* through the lenses of spiritual anthropology, ethical psychology, and divine pedagogy, this paper contributes to a growing scholarly movement that emphasizes the inner dimensions of Prophethood, often overlooked in historical or legalistic readings. In an age marked by spiritual confusion, psychological restlessness, and ethical fragmentation, the early life of the Prophet ﷺ offers a timeless model for spiritual cultivation, resilience, and divine proximity. It beckons believers to rediscover Prophethood not just as a historical phenomenon but as an ongoing invitation to transformation—both individual and collective—rooted in trust, solitude, compassion, and purposeful struggle.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The traditional chronological approach, both in classical and contemporary *Sīrah* scholarship, narrates the life of the Prophet ﷺ with primary focus on the biographical and historical dimensions of his life. Consequently, there has been comparatively little scholarly engagement that interprets the formative years of the Prophet as *Ḥikmah Ilāhiyyah* (Divinely Orchestrated Wisdom) and *Manhaj Rūḥānī* (Spiritual Paradigm). Most of the classical works, emphasize the chronological narration and socio-cultural background of pre-Islamic Arabia and the early life of the Prophet, but do not explore these experiences in terms of their spiritual psychology or divine intentionality. In contrast, modern *Sīrah* scholarship has witnessed the emergence of a new interpretive trend known as *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, which seeks to revisit the events of the Prophet's life through the lenses of theology, spirituality, and moral philosophy. This approach was pioneered by Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (d.2013), a prominent Syrian scholar of modern times. His seminal work, *Fiqh al-Sīrah ma' al-Mujaz Tārīkh Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*, not only presents the early life of the Prophet ﷺ in a chronological manner but also employs an analytical methodology to demonstrate that each stage of the Prophet's pre-prophetic life was divinely orchestrated to serve as a spiritual framework for his future mission. This interpretive model was further developed by scholars such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d.1996) of Egypt in his *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, where he approaches the *Sīrah* as a living guide for ethical and social transformation. Similarly, a prominent Syrian Mustafa as-Sibā'ī (d.1964) in *As-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah: Durūs wa 'Ibar*, Arab Scholar Zayd bin 'Abd al-Karīm al-Zayd (nd) in *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, Libyan Scholar 'Alī Muḥammad al-Ṣallābī (b.1963) in *As-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah: 'Arḍ Waqā'i' wa Taḥlīl Aḥdāth, Durūs wa 'Ibar*, and Iraqi Scholar Maḥdī Rizqullāh Aḥmad (nd) in *As-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah fī Ḍaw' al-Maṣādir al-Aṣīlah: Dirāsah Tawthīqiyyah Taḥlīliyyah fī Fiqh al-Sīrah* have all built upon this framework. Their writings collectively emphasize that the early experiences of the Prophet ﷺ—his solitude in Ḥirā', moral integrity, and reflection upon the injustices of society—form a divinely designed pattern of spiritual preparation. In the South Asian context, this *Fiqh al-Sīrah* approach finds resonance in Urdu scholarship as well like *Siratun Nabi* by a great Indian scholars Shibli Nomani (d.1914) and Syed Suleiman Nadvi (d.1953), *Seerat-e-Mustafa* by Deobandi scholar Idris

Kandhlawi(d.1974) , *Payghambar-e-Insaniyat* by Shah Jafar Phulwari an Indian scholar .Though the most prominent is that of Mawlānā Khālid Saifullāh Raḥmānī(b.1956) an Indian scholar , his *Payām-e-Sīrat: ‘Aṣr-e-Ḥāẓir ke Pas-Manẓar Mein*, as he interprets the Prophet’s life not merely as historical narration but as a living guidance model, stressing the relevance of his formative years for contemporary Muslim spirituality and minority identity. Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a notable scholarly gap in systematically connecting the Prophet’s early life events with the *Qur’anic* concept of *ḥikmah* and the Prophetic model of *tarbiyah rūḥāniyyah* (spiritual nurturing). The existing literature, though rich in historical narration and moral reflections, has yet to fully articulate how these formative experiences can be recontextualized as a *Manhaj Rūḥānī*—a spiritual methodology for moral and psychological renewal in the modern world. Hence, this study seeks to reassess the early *Sīrah* in this interpretive light, bridging classical tradition with modern spiritual hermeneutics.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

The present study is qualitative in nature and is grounded in a descriptive, hermeneutical, and discourse analysis. It seeks to explore the life of Prophet ﷺ not merely as a chronological biography but as a multidimensional source of divine wisdom (*Ḥikmah Ilāhiyyah*) and spiritual methodology (*Manhaj Rūḥānī*). The study is primarily based on the foundational sources of Islam—the *Qur’ān* and *Hadīth*—which form the essential epistemological basis for understanding the Prophet’s life, character, and mission. Alongside these primary sources, the study draws extensively from classical and contemporary *Sīrah* literature. The study employs a descriptive approach, which identifies, organizes, and presents the central events, themes, and interpretive patterns in both classical and modern writings. This descriptive analysis lays the foundation for deeper reflection by highlighting how various scholars have approached the Prophet’s early life, his spiritual preparation, and his formative experiences in the context of divine planning and moral evolution. Building upon this descriptive base, the study advances toward a hermeneutical and discourse-oriented analysis, aiming to uncover the deeper spiritual, ethical, and sociological meanings embedded within the *Sīrah*. The hermeneutical dimension allows for an interpretive engagement with texts, focusing on how the Prophet’s experiences reflect divine wisdom and spiritual training relevant to modern humanity. This interpretive layer is further expanded through discourse analysis, examining how early *Sīrah* articulates themes such as Kindness, patience , endurance, pedagogy, and contemplation within their respective intellectual and historical contexts. The study thus aspires to present the *Sīrah* not as a mere record of the past but as a living paradigm that continues to illuminate moral insight, spiritual refinement, and social wisdom for the contemporary world.

Sīrah as divinely Orchestrated Discourse:

The following themes unfold to illustrate how the Prophet’s life events were guided, shaped, and harmonized by divine wisdom and intentionality how it relates in today’s world:

Why Arabia? Divine Wisdom in the Prophetic Mission:

The Arabian Peninsula which was chosen by Allah for Prophet (ﷺ) is bounded by the Red Sea and Sinai to the west, the Arabian Gulf to the east, the Arabian Sea—an offshoot of the Indian Ocean—to the south, and ancient Syria along with parts of Iraq to the north. Its unique geographic position has long granted it exceptional significance. Internally, it is dominated by wide deserts and vast stretches of sand, making it extremely difficult for foreign powers to penetrate or conquer. This natural isolation preserved the freedom and independence of its inhabitants across centuries, even with two mighty empires—the Romans and the Persians—positioned close by. Externally, however, the Peninsula's location placed it at the heart of the ancient world. Its coasts opened to key seas, and its routes connected it by land and water to many civilizations. This strategic centrality made the region a hub for trade, cultural exchange, religious ideas, and artistic expression.ⁱⁱⁱ It appears that these factors offer an initial explanation, while a deeper analysis that clarifies why Arabia was chosen for the last Prophet ﷺ.

The first is that of the broader world surrounding the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam which had sunk into profound moral and spiritual decline, dominated by materialistic civilizations that had lost their ethical compass and connection with divine guidance. In contrast, Arabia existed as an unlettered and largely unrefined society, untouched by the philosophical complexities and civilizational legacies of neighbouring cultures. Although marked by ignorance, it retained a natural simplicity and purity of temperament. This contrast points to a deliberate divine wisdom: an unlettered Prophet ﷺ was raised within an unlettered society so that revelation would remain entirely independent of human intellectual traditions. As a result, the Qur'an and the Prophetic mission could not be attributed to earlier philosophies, cultures, or inherited scriptures. Moreover, the geographical positioning of the Arabian Peninsula—situated among major civilizations and anchored by the Ka'bah, the sanctuary of Abraham—served a divinely ordained purpose, enabling the message to radiate outward with authenticity and persuasive force.^{iv}

Moreover, the region stood politically autonomous, free from direct Roman or Persian domination. Its religious landscape was diverse and fragmented, with idol worship, Judaism, Christianity, and residual traces of *hanīfiyyah* existing side by side without any single belief system prevailing. The tribal order—particularly the protective role of *Banū Hāshim*^{vi}—afforded the Prophet ﷺ a degree of security in the early phase. Arabian society was marked by a simple way of life, largely untouched by the complexities and moral influences of surrounding civilizations. Its strategic central location facilitated the swift diffusion of the message, while the common Arabic tongue—celebrated for its eloquence—was widely understood throughout the Peninsula.^{vii}

Furthermore, the social and historical circumstances of Arabia provided a particularly conducive setting for the emergence of Islam. This is reflected in the remarkable success of the earliest Islamic experience, during which the message expanded rapidly and was embraced across extensive territories within a short span of time. Although Islam possesses the capacity to thrive in any context, a closer look

at its rise in Arabia highlights crucial foundational conditions that enabled its initial spread and lasting influence.^{viii} Thus, the emergence of Islam in this particular land, language, and historical moment signifies, a purposeful divine orchestration meant to underscore the miraculous nature, authenticity, and universality of the final revelation.

This divine wisdom may also be understood as a moral framework for the contemporary Muslim world. Islam arose from what appeared to be a marginal region, yet it went on to reshape the course of human history.^{ix} It affirms the Qur'anic truth that "*Allah brings about His command in ways you do not perceive*".^x This serves as a reminder to present-day Muslims that transformative change can emerge from the most unexpected places when it is anchored in divine purpose and principled leadership.^{xi} The Quran indicates it in "*Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves*".^{xii} The downfall of great civilizations such as Persia and Byzantium stands as a cautionary lesson that material power alone cannot preserve societies once their moral and spiritual foundations erode—"*Those towns—We destroyed them when they wronged, and We set for their destruction an appointed time*".^{xiii} Many of today's global crises—social inequality, spiritual emptiness, and environmental degradation—reflect similar trajectories, echoing the Qur'anic warning: "*Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned*".^{xiv} Just as the Qur'an descended as a source of light amid widespread turmoil—"*There has certainly come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book*"^{xv}—the Prophetic model continues to offer a timeless framework grounded in justice, mercy, and balance (*'adl, raḥmah, and mizān*). In an age marked by fragmentation, confusion, and ethical uncertainty, the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ remains a comprehensive guide for restoring moral clarity and human harmony.

The Divine Preparation Beyond Parental Influence of Orphan Prophet:

The Prophet ﷺ was born an orphan, as his father Abdullah passed away before his birth, a condition that occurred according to divine *Ḥikmah* of blessing in disguise. Even had Abdullah survived, it would not have affected the essence or legitimacy of prophethood. Paternal presence constitutes only one factor within a child's social formation, and even if prophethood were hypothetically achievable through human agency, the existence of a living father would not render it more attainable. This holds with even greater force given that prophethood is not a humanly acquired status but a divinely conferred office, granted exclusively by the will and selection of Allah. The story of Prophet Ya'qūb is the best example. Ya'qūb lived long, gained wisdom, and was himself granted prophethood. He raised Yūsuf (a) with affection, but at a critical moment in Yūsuf's youth, full of vitality and promise, he lost him. Yūsuf was thrust into societies steeped in corruption, yet his soul remained radiant with purity and chastity—"*a lamp glowing amidst darkness*". When father and son were eventually reunited, Ya'qūb found that the son he had lost as a boy had grown into a resolute and perfected prophet.^{xvi}

Allah also willed that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ enter the world without the immediate guidance of a father, and that his early life unfold under conditions that removed him from the conventional environments of upbringing—his infancy spent

in the purity of Banū Sa'd's desert, followed by the passing of his mother and then his grandfather shortly thereafter. The most significant wisdom behind this divinely orchestrated sequence is the absolute negation of any claim that the Prophet ﷺ acquired the teachings of his future mission from his parents or grandfather. Since his grandfather enjoyed a respected position among Quraysh—responsible for providing water and food to pilgrims—some might otherwise have alleged that the Prophet ﷺ inherited honour, leadership, or religious ideas from him. By ensuring that the Prophet ﷺ grew up without prolonged exposure to these familial influences, Allah silenced every avenue for such suspicion, leaving no doubt that the message he later proclaimed emerged solely from divine revelation rather than any human tutelage or inherited prestige.^{xvii}

Moreover, it was a divinely decreed design that shaped the spiritual and moral character of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Allah willed His Prophet to grow without the protection of parents, not out of any deficiency in their physical constitution, but because their earthly mission had been fulfilled, and their departure created a unique environment for the Prophet's formation. By losing his father before birth, and then his mother and grandfather in early childhood, the Prophet ﷺ experienced profound human vulnerability. These hardships refined his soul, making him deeply sensitive to the pain of others, and cultivating humility, emotional softness, and an aversion to arrogance—traits essential for a universal messenger. The Prophet's orphanhood strengthened his determination, taught him self-reliance, insulated him from the corruption of *jāhiliyyah*, and offered solace to every orphaned soul by demonstrating that greatness is crafted by divine nurture rather than human circumstance.^{xviii}

In the Prophet's orphanhood lies a model and inspiration for orphans in every era and every place: that being an orphan is not a punishment or a sign of divine anger from Allah, nor does it prevent a person from being elevated to the highest ranks.^{xix} In the famous tradition Prophet Said that, "*I and the one who cares for an orphan will be like this in Paradise, and the Prophet ﷺ gestured by holding his index and middle fingers together.*"^{xx} This Prophetic ethic can be extended to contemporary realities. The seemingly simple gesture of wiping an orphan's head carries immense psychological value for a child who envies the warmth given to children embraced by their fathers. There are countless orphans across the Muslim world who lack basic needs—shelter, clothing, food—and who are often targeted by external forces seeking to detach them from their faith. By grounding this appeal in the Prophet's own experience of orphanhood, it can be argued that caring for these children is not merely a charitable act but a religious duty, one that softens the hard heart, elevates the believer to the rank promised by the Prophet ﷺ, and safeguards the vulnerable members of the Ummah from exploitation.

Rearing in Nature to Nurture, and Prophetic Formation:

Among the Quraysh^{xxi}, it was a well-established tradition to place new-born children in the care of Bedouin tribes for their early upbringing. This arrangement was intended to ensure that children grew up in a healthy, open environment, distant from the congested and culturally mixed atmosphere of the city. Owing to continuous commercial activity and the influx of people from various regions, the spoken

language of Makkah had become noticeably influenced by external elements. To preserve linguistic purity and attain proficiency in eloquent Arabic, the Quraysh therefore adopted deliberate measures. The tribe of Banū Sa‘d bin Bakr, an outlying branch of *Hawāzin*^{xxii}, inhabiting the area between Makkah and Ṭā‘if, enjoyed a distinguished reputation across Arabia for the clarity and eloquence of its speech. As a result, women from this tribe regularly visited Makkah to serve as wet nurses, and Quraysh families entrusted their infants to them so that they might acquire a refined and authentic form of Bedouin Arabic.^{xxiii} Aminah entrusted her son to the care of a woman of this tribe.^{xxiv}

Yet if seen broadly it was a divine planning as it played a vital role in linguistic refinement, physical and moral development which later helped the prophet to carry out his mission with utmost care and courtesy. As the magnanimous personality of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ could not have been left by *Ināyat-e-Ilāhī* (Divine Providence) to fall prey to the same doubts and temptations that often befall ordinary people. When people's hearts are inclined toward evil of *wasāwis* (whispers), the hearts of the Prophets remain distant from them. This is because the mission of the Prophets is focused on purifying others from evil, not purifying themselves. Since Allah Almighty has already kept them pure from the outset.^{xxv}

It is narrated from Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd (RA) that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

‘There is none among you who does not have a constant companion from among the angels and a constant companion from among the jinn.’ The people asked: ‘Even you, O Messenger of Allah?’ He ﷺ replied: ‘Yes, even I. But Allah has helped me against him and he has submitted (i.e., become Muslim), and he only guides me toward good.’^{xxvi}

In another narration from Aisha (RA), she reported that the Prophet ﷺ said to her:

‘Has jealousy overtaken you?’ She replied: ‘How can someone like me not be jealous over someone like you?’ The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Your devil (shayṭān) has come to you.’ She said: ‘Is there a devil with me too?’ He replied: ‘There is no one among you without a devil.’ She asked: ‘And with you too?’ He ﷺ said: ‘Yes, with me too. But Allah helped me against him and he submitted (became obedient). Now he does not urge me toward evil.’^{xxvii}

This period of the Prophet’s upbringing among the desert-dwelling *Banū Sa‘d* later contributed to the development of his distinctive quality of *jawāmi‘ al-kalim*—the ability to convey profound meanings through concise and eloquent speech as he claimed that:

I am the most eloquent Arabic speaker among you. I am a Qurayshi, and I was nursed among the tribe of Banū Sa‘d ibn Bakr.^{xxviii}

It may be viewed as a lasting source of inspiration and guidance for contemporary Muslims. Raising children in the natural environment of the countryside is far more beneficial for physical well-being as well as for the healthy development and refinement of the mind and intellect. In contrast, many modern children grow up in cramped, densely packed apartments—spaces that, like closed hearts, restrict their inhabitants and deny them the freedom to breathe clean, open air. This separation from nature and reliance on artificial ways of living are among the

major causes of the psychological stress that characterizes modern civilization. In this light, the noble Makkan practice of sending children to the open countryside for their early upbringing stands out as remarkably insightful, especially when many modern experts in child development now emphasize that a child's nurturing should, above all, occur in close harmony with nature.^{xxix}

The value of nurturing children in natural surroundings for their overall development is widely emphasized. Educators stress the importance of safeguarding a child's health by regularly taking them outdoors into open spaces and fresh air, recognizing the deep psychological and educational benefits this brings to their later life. Many illnesses—particularly psychological disorders—are more prevalent among urban populations, where confined living spaces and parental neglect often deny children environments that uplift their spirits, purify their air, and restore their vitality. Contemporary educational thought further underscores the importance of visits to the countryside, mountains, plains, and valleys, as such experiences broaden the mind and contribute to the growth of intelligence.^{xxx}

Self-Reliance and the Prophetic Model of Livelihood:

Born an orphan, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was placed under the guardianship of his grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who cared for him with deep affection. Upon his death, the noble responsibility of raising the young boy fell to his uncle, Abu Ṭālib, who, despite his high standing in the Quraysh, was financially constrained.^{xxxi} The Prophet ﷺ, from a young age, became acutely aware of his uncle's limited means and sought to ease the burden. In response, he took up the humble profession of herding sheep, a common occupation among the people of Makkah but often reserved for the less privileged. This was not a mere economic necessity; rather, it signified the revival of a noble tradition.^{xxxii} In a hadith reported in Sahih al-Bukhari, the Prophet ﷺ said, *"Allah did not send any prophet but that he herded sheep."* When asked if he too had done so, he replied, *"Yes, I used to herd sheep for the people of Makkah for a few qirats."*^{xxxiii} Through this act, he aligned himself with the path of earlier Prophets, embracing simplicity, solitude, and reflection. This early phase of his life trained him in responsibility, patience, and empathy—virtues that would later shape his mission as the Messenger of Mercy.

The wisdom behind having the Prophets as shepherds before Prophethood is that they may become skilled in herding a flock, as they will be responsible for their respective nations in the future.^{xxxiv} In herding, one attains forbearance and mercy and it endues patience, for when a shepherd is obliged to gather his flock and herd it from one area to another at once, knowing the traits of all, and all the while protecting the flock from predators, he has thus attained the skills necessary to lead a nation and protect it from its enemies, both within and abroad. Thus the Prophets learned patience when leading their people and attained an understanding of the different natures of people, they learned to show kindness to the weak and resolve with the dominant. The reasons for which Allah had chosen the sheep for the Prophets as opposed to the communal cows or camels, is that they are animals that are weak and need extra guidance and attention. Sheep are more difficult to maintain as a flock because of their propensity to go astray and wander away. This is akin to human traits

within a society, and it is the divine wisdom of Allah to train these Prophets accordingly. The Prophet's mentioning of this humble trait shared by all Prophets attests to his humility to Allah."^{xxxv}

It was certainly within Allah's power to provide the Prophet ﷺ with every comfort and luxury from the start — to spare him from the toil of earning a living and struggling for sustenance. But divine wisdom required that people be shown a clear example: that the best form of wealth is what a person earns through their own honest labour, and that a truly beneficial human being is one who uses his strength and capacity to serve society. This is what brings dignity and honor to a person. Here we learn about the kind of life that God Almighty wills for His righteous servants in this world. By contrast, wealth acquired without effort or without contributing to the welfare of others ultimately proves harmful rather than beneficial.^{xxxvi} Another lesson is that those engaged in the work of *da'wah* (Islamic outreach) and reform cannot maintain their dignity unless they earn their own livelihood. If their sustenance depends on people's donations, charity, or hand-outs, they will lose respect in the eyes of the public. Therefore, it is essential for every *da'i* to place trust in his own labour and resources, to avoid asking from others — so that no worldly favour is held over him by anyone. This independence empowers him to proclaim the truth with full strength and fearlessness.^{xxxvii}

***Tahannuth* as Prophetic Spiritual Training:**

Prophet ﷺ before the prophethood continued practicing the remaining rituals of the Abrahamic tradition—such as prayer, fasting, circumambulation, pilgrimage, and sacrifice—while persistently reflecting in search of the ultimate truth. When even this did not unlock the answers, his inclination turned toward detachment from the town and toward solitude and contemplation. For this purpose, he began spending time on the top of a mountain in a small cave, away from the noise and commotion of the city, engaging in worship according to the Abrahamic way. He would take provisions with him, go up the mountain, reside in the Cave of Hira, and return home only when his supplies were exhausted. This cycle of retreating to the Cave of *Hira* and returning to his family continued for quite some time.^{xxxviii} This form of worship came to be known as *Tahannuth*.^{xxxix} From narrations, it becomes evident that the Prophet ﷺ was not alone in this practice. Other people, too, who were interested in the Abrahamic legacy, used to dedicate time for such contemplative worship—sometimes for long durations.^{xl}

It is incorrect to think of *Tahannuth* as a form of asceticism, mystic exercise, or meditation akin to what sorcerers, magicians, or astrologers undergo as part of their training—where disciples spend years under the tutelage of masters learning skills and performing spiritual exercises, with everyone around them aware of their aspirations. In contrast, the path of Prophethood is entirely different. There is no human effort involved in acquiring it, because Prophethood is not an acquired rank—it is a divine bestowal. It is Allah's grace: He grants it to whom He wills. Therefore, a Prophet ﷺ has no human teacher, no spiritual guide from whom he learns meditation or exercises, nor does he even have the notion that he is preparing for Prophethood. Those who are destined for this honor are not driven by self-determined goals. Even

their sacrifices are not meant to impress others or signal any special mission. Hence, the initial experiences of Prophets are completely unfamiliar, unique, and astonishing to them. One aspect of their divine preparation is that Allah exposes them to extraordinary conditions to make the mysteries and secrets of Prophethood familiar to their hearts.^{xli}

The practice represented the final phase of divine preparation and protection for the Prophet ﷺ before the descent of revelation. It came after a sequence of formative experiences: the *shaqq al-ṣadr* (cleansing of the heart) in childhood, which purified him spiritually; the event of the “song” during his youth, which preserved him from immoral gatherings; the meeting with Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl, which reinforced his awareness of the *ḥanīf* tradition; and the incident of rebuilding the *Ka‘bah*, which established his reputation for trustworthiness and impartiality. These earlier episodes each worked as preparatory milestones, but the *Tahannuth* acted as the final touch in Allah’s meticulous arrangement, shielding him from the moral pollution of Makkah and refining his heart and mind to bear the weight of *wahy* (revelation).

So it can be regarded the practice of *tahannuth* played an important preparatory role in making the Prophet's heart receptive to revelation. It purified and refined his heart, making it ready to receive the divine light from the Angel of Revelation (*Jibrīl*). Right After passing through the phase of inner purification through *tahannuth*, a transformation occurred in the Prophet (ﷺ). He began to experience true dreams (*ru’yā ṣāliḥa*)—dreams filled with good news and glad tidings. These dreams were so vivid and clear that they resembled the appearance of dawn emerging from the darkness of night. They had a deeply positive impact on his blessed temperament. It appears that through these dreams, the Prophet (ﷺ) was being spiritually prepared for the coming blessings and responsibilities.^{xlii}

The Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ practice of retreat (*‘uzlah*) and solitude (*khalwah*) shortly before the beginning of his Prophethood signifies a profound reality, which holds great importance in the life of every Muslim—especially for those engaged in the work of *da‘wah* (calling others to God). This reveals that regardless of how virtuous a Muslim may be, or how devoted he is in acts of worship, his Islam cannot reach its full maturity unless he spends some time in seclusion and retreat. During such moments of solitude, he is able to hold himself accountable (*muḥāsabah*), remember and reflect upon Allah, and contemplate the signs of the universe and how they point to the greatness of Allah. This form of *muraqāba* (spiritual reflection) is essential for any believer who desires a genuine and complete Islamic character. Its importance becomes even greater for someone who aspires to be a *dā‘ī* or a flag-bearer of the truth. The wisdom lies in the fact that there are certain spiritual ailments of the soul that can only be cured through seclusion. True self-accountability is only possible when one isolates oneself from the distractions and noise of the world.^{xliii}

Arrogance, self-conceit, envy, showing off, love of the world—these are deep-rooted diseases that can become entrenched in the soul and upset the internal balance of a person. These may persist even if the person outwardly performs good deeds, engages in *dawah*, or delivers sermons and guidance. The only cure for these inner illnesses is for one to periodically retreat into solitude, reflect on the reality of

his soul, his Creator, and his constant need for divine aid at every moment. He should contemplate people's helplessness before Allah and realize how meaningless their praise or criticism truly is. Alongside this, he should ponder over the signs of Allah's greatness, reflect upon the Hereafter, the Day of Judgement, divine mercy, and divine punishment. Through prolonged and repeated contemplation of these matters, the soul's diseases begin to dissolve. The heart becomes illuminated with knowledge, awareness, sincerity, and purity. Life returns to the soul, and the worldly distractions are no longer able to cloud its clarity.^{xliv}

Another essential aspect, especially for Muslims involved in *da'wah*, is to nurture love for Allah in the heart. This love is the true fountainhead of sacrifice and struggle and forms the very foundation of a sound and enlightened *da'wah* effort. The love of Allah does not arise merely through intellectual belief. Purely rational truths can never stir the emotions and the heart. If that were the case, then orientalists (despite their deep academic engagement) would be the foremost in their belief in Allah and His Messenger, and their hearts would overflow with divine love. After believing in Allah, the way to establish His love in the heart is to deeply reflect upon His countless favours and blessings, to contemplate His majesty and grandeur, and to remember Him frequently with both heart and tongue. However, this is only possible when one periodically disconnects from worldly affairs and noise, and retreats into solitude. When a believer does this and is granted success by Allah, divine love becomes firmly rooted in his heart. Then, even the greatest of worldly pleasures appear trivial to him, the most enticing of things lose their allure, and he can endure all kinds of suffering with contentment. Humiliation or mockery will not obstruct his path. This is the powerful weapon every caller to Allah must be equipped with. It was with this very provision that Allah equipped His beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ before entrusting him with the mission of Prophethood. This is because emotional and spiritual motivations—like fear, hope, and love—have a deeper and more effective impact on human behaviour than rational understanding alone.^{xlv}

There is a consensus among scholars that various spiritual means and practices are necessary to develop such emotional and spiritual states. According to the majority of scholars and researchers, this is what is referred to as *Tassawuf* (Sufism); others may call it *ihsān* (spiritual excellence), and scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah refer to it as *'ilm al-sulūk* (the science of spiritual wayfaring). The Prophet ﷺ's retreat and seclusion before Prophethood was a method to generate such inner spiritual energy and motivation. However, seclusion should not be misunderstood to mean complete withdrawal from people by living in caves and mountains, as some deviant-minded people believe. That would be contrary to the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions. Rather, such solitude should be treated as a spiritual prescription—to be taken when needed and in the right dosage. Otherwise, it can lead to spiritual imbalance. As for some pious predecessors who are mentioned as having remained in seclusion most of their lives, it must have been due to specific personal circumstances. Their practice does not serve as a general rule or proof for others to follow.^{xlvi}

Moreover, In recent centuries, some ascetic orders have considered isolation to be one of the stages one must go through in order to achieve a higher level of

spirituality. To be sure, moderate stints of isolation can be useful in illuminating one's heart, in removing darkness from one's soul, and in turning away from evil desires and lusts. One of the Sunan (plural of Sunnah) of the Prophet is to perform *I'tikaaf* (to isolate oneself in a Masjid, in order to worship Allah) during Ramadan. This form of isolation is something that every Muslim should strive to apply, regardless of whether he is a leader, a scholar, a businessman, or anyone else for that matter. The period of *I'tikaaf* is an ideal time for one to remove the blemishes that, through the continual perpetration of sins, become attached to one's soul and heart. And while we perform *I'tikaaf*, we should avail ourselves of the opportunity of judging ourselves, of seeing where we stand of taking account of ourselves before we are taken to account for our actions (after we die). Scholars and *Du'aat* should especially make it a point to perform *I'tikaaf* and to use at least part of the time spent in *I'tikaaf* on studying the situation of the Da'wah and reflecting on how to better spread the teachings of Islam.^{xlvii}

CONCLUSION

The Pre-prophetic stage of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when reread through the lenses of *Taqdīr Ilāhī* (Divine Orchestration) and *Manhaj al-Rūḥānī* (Spiritual Paradigm), emerges not as a mere prelude to Prophethood but as a divinely designed curriculum of inner formation. His orphanhood, guardianship, shepherding, trading journeys, and meditative retreats in Ḥirā' were not incidental stages, but purposeful stations through which Allah cultivated empathy, detachment from worldly excess, self-discipline, contemplation, and an ethic of compassion. This subtle divine pedagogy demonstrates that the Prophet ﷺ was being prepared not only intellectually and socially but also spiritually and morally to embody *al-Insān al-Kāmil*. By reframing these formative years as active sites of spiritual refinement rather than passive biographical episodes, the Pre-prophetic *Sirah* becomes a model of *tarbiyyah rūḥāniyyah* (spiritual nurturing) for believers today. In a world where Muslim identity is often confined to political resistance or cultural assertion, this paradigm reminds us that authentic revival begins with inner purification and ethical grounding. The Prophet's ﷺ early life therefore serves as a timeless reminder that divine wisdom unfolds in silence, trials, and solitude—shaping hearts for higher purposes. For contemporary Muslims, reconnecting with this spiritual syllabus embedded in the *Sirah* offers not only historical insight but also a transformative path toward resilience, clarity, and intimacy with the Divine. The present study can be extended by examining patterns of pre-prophetic spiritual formation across different prophetic traditions, thereby situating the *Sirah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ within a wider discourse on prophetic pedagogy and moral preparation. Further empirical work may also investigate how practices such as *tahannuth*, solitude, and ethical self-discipline are understood and lived within contemporary Muslim contexts, particularly among Sufi circles, educational spaces, and youth-oriented spiritual initiatives. Moreover, engaging insights from psychology, pedagogy, and sociology could help clarify how the pre-prophetic model offers enduring resources for spiritual resilience, leadership development, and ethical formation in modern Muslim societies. Such directions of inquiry have the potential not only to enrich *Sirah* scholarship but also to speak

meaningfully to contemporary concerns of inner reform and moral grounding in an increasingly fragmented and distraction-driven world.

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- ⁱⁱ For details see: Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarakpuri, “*Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum/ The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet*”, (Brunei: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1979)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Safi-ur-Rahman Mubarakpuri, “*Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum/ The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet*”, (Brunei: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1979), 15
- ^{iv} al-Būṭī, “*Fiqh al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*”, 69-74
- ^v Primarily used to refer to pre-Islamic Arabians who were Abrahamic monotheists.
- ^{vi} The Banu *Hashim* is a prestigious Arab clan within the Quraysh tribe, named after Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ great-grandfather, Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, and is famous as the clan of the Prophet ﷺ.
- ^{vii} Zaid Abd al-Karīm, “*Fiqh al-Sīrah*”, 3rd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmuriyyah, 2017), 20-22.
- ^{viii} Ragheb Sergany, “*Al-Seerah al-Nabawīyyah*”. (Noor Book, unofficial edition, no date.) 41-44
- ^{ix}, Marshall Hodgson G. S, “*The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam*”. Volume 1.(United Kingdom: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 68-71
- ^x Qur’an 65:3 Trans.Sahih International.
- ^{xi} W. Montgomery Watt, “*Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*”(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 52-56
- ^{xii} Qur’an 13:11
- ^{xiii} Qur’an 18:59
- ^{xiv} Qur’an 30:41
- ^{xv} Qur’an 5:15
- ^{xvi} Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah: Understanding the Life of Prophet Muhammad*, trans. International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), rev. 2nd ed. (Jeddah: International Islamic Publishing House, 1999), 49.
- ^{xvii} M. R. Ahmad, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah fī Ḍaw’ al-Maṣādir al-Aṣliyyah: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah*. Trans.Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Amīn, (Dar al-‘Ilm, 2012), 66-67
- ^{xviii} Alī Muḥammad Al-Ṣallābī. *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah: ‘Arḍ Wāqī’ wa Taḥlīl al-Aḥdāth*. Trans.Faisal Shafeeq, Darussalam, 2011, 91-92
- ^{xix} Ahmad, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah fī Ḍaw’ al-Maṣādir*,167
- ^{xx} Al Bukhari,Sahih,no.6005
- ^{xxi} The Quraysh are an Arab tribe who controlled Mecca before the rise of Islam.
- ^{xxii} The Hawazin were an Arab tribe originally based in the western Najd and around Ta’if in the Hejaz. They formed part of the larger Qays tribal group. The Hawazin

consisted of the subtribes of Banu Sa'd, and Banu Jusham, as well as the powerful Banu Tha'qif and Banu Amir, which were both often counted separately from the Hawazin.

xxiii Khālīd Mas'ūd, *Ḥayāt-e Rasūl-e Ummī*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Al-Balagh Publications, 2019), 81.

xxiv Mubarakpuri, "Ar-Raḥeeq Al-Makhtum,

xxv al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 76-77

xxvi Al- Muslim, Sahih, No. 2814

xxvii Al- Muslim, Sahih, No. 2815

xxviii Mas'ūd, *Ḥayāt-e Rasūl-e Ummī*, 81

xxix al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 75

xxx Zaid Abd al-Karīm, "Fiqh al-Sīrah, 62

xxxi al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 75

xxxii Mas'ūd, *Ḥayāt-e Rasūl-e Ummī*, 83

xxxiii Al Bukhari, Sahih, no. 2262

xxxiv al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah*, 83

xxxv Ahmad, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah fī Ḍaw' al-Maṣādir*, 79-80

xxxvi al-Būṭī, "Fiqh al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah", 102-103

xxxvii Ahmad, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah fī Ḍaw' al-Maṣādir*, 180-181

xxxviii Mas'ūd, *Ḥayāt-e Rasūl-e Ummī*, 98

xxxix *al-tahannuth* means devotion, is one interpreted from the context. It is also interpreted from its form, "entering into al-hinth", i.e. sin or perjury. However, a few words in the language mean "the departure from" rather than "entering into". These words have a form like the verb *tahannatha*, i.e. "he left the state of *hinth*". Examples would be *tahawwaba*, i.e. "he abstained from crime", and *taharraja*, i.e. "he kept away from sin", and *ta'aththama*, i.e. "he abstained from iniquity". Similarly there is *tahajjada*, a word meaning to give up *al-hujūd*, sleep to attend prayer. Also there are *tanajjasa*, "he left an impure state", i.e. he cleaned himself, and *tagadhdhara*, "he avoided foul actions". Ibn al-A'rabi was asked about his interpreting *yatahannathu* as meaning "he performs his devotions", and he replied, "Well, I don't actually know that, but there is the example of *yatahannafu*, derived from the word *al-hanifiyya*, signifying the religion of Abraham, peace be upon him."

xl Mas'ūd, *Ḥayāt-e Rasūl-e Ummī*, 98

xli Ibid., 98

xlii Ibid., 99

xliii al-Būṭī, "Fiqh al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah.", 118

xliv Ibid., 119

xlv Ibid., 119-120

xlvi Ibid., 121

xlvii Al-Ṣallābī. *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, 133-134