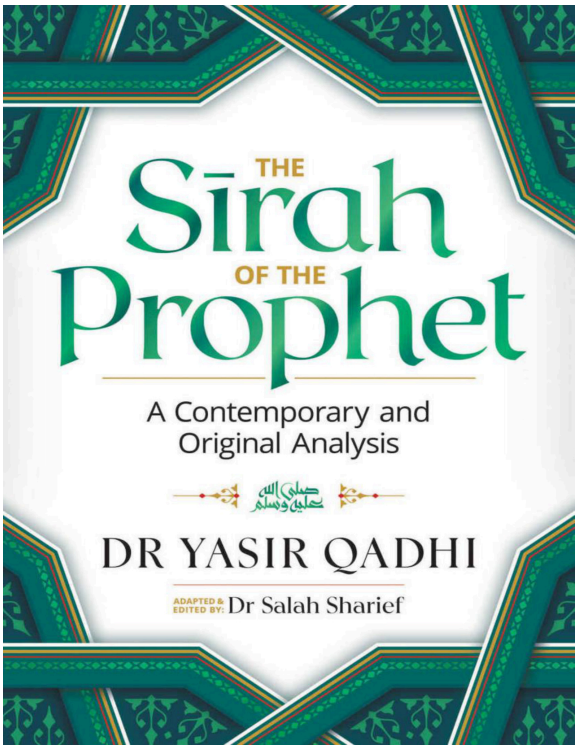


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Arabic Letter	Transliteration
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	ū
ي	ī
ا	ā
ة	ah

Symbol	Arabic	English
ﷺ	صلى الله عليه وسلم	May peace and blessings be upon him.
ﷻ	سبحانه وتعالى	Hallowed and exalted.
ﷻ	جل وعلا	Majestic and exalted.
ﷻ	عز وجل	Mighty and majestic.
ﷺ	رضي الله عنه	May Allah be pleased with him.
ﷺ	رضي الله عنهما	May Allah be pleased with them both.
ﷺ	رضي الله عنهم	May Allah be pleased with them (masculine).
ﷺ	رضي الله عنها	May Allah be pleased with her.
ﷺ	رضي الله عنهن	May Allah be pleased with them (feminine).
ﷺ	عليه السلام	Peace be upon him.
ﷺ	عليهم السلام	Peace be upon them (masculine).
ﷺ	عليها السلام	Peace be upon her.
ﷺ	رحمه الله	May Allah have mercy on him.

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Foreword



All praise be to Allah,
Who knows what the hearts conceal,
and what the tongues shall not reveal.
The One before Whom the believers kneel,
and on Judgement Day to Whom all shall appeal.
And may ṣalāh and salām be upon the one
to whom the Qur'an was revealed,
And whose Message and teachings cause
the hearts and souls to heal.

I began my studies at the Islamic University of Madinah in August of 1995. During my first semester of the Arabic programme, a teacher whose name I cannot recall—but whose face and manners are forever etched in my memory—first taught me the very basic outline of the *sīrah*. Although at this level of the Arabic Institute (or the "*Shuʿbah*" as we used to call it), the goal was not the academic study of the subject as much as learning the language. However, I will never forget one point that this teacher made, which forever resonated with me. "I was born raised and orphan", he said, "…and only Allah knows how difficult life was for me, but hearing that the Prophet ﷺ was an orphan always gave me much comfort and courage to face the challenges of life."

I was twenty years old when I heard that phrase, and up until that point had never really *connected* with the Prophet ﷺ. Of course, there was immense

love and reverence, but if I look back at that phase, my perception of him ﷺ was like a highly respected ancestor of whom you hear legends but have never met. Seeing this teacher feel a direct connection with him, and find inspiration for his life, stirred feelings in me that planted the seed to a life-long study, and which I am continuing to this day. I wanted to have that direct connection, and I wanted to be inspired by him in my daily life!

When I entered the Faculty of Hadith Studies at the University, we had the opportunity to take far more advanced classes on the *sīrah*, and I had the privilege of studying with erudite professors, many of whom were trained by, and had written dissertations under, the world-famous *sīrah* specialist from Iraq, Dr. Akram Ḍiyā' al-ʿUmarī. Sadly, he was no longer teaching in Medina when I arrived, but I did have the honor of meeting him at some conferences. That same year, Allah blessed me to make the acquaintance of someone who was to have a profound impact on my life: none other than Shaykh Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubarakpūrī (d. 2006), the author of *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* (*The Sealed Nectar*), which was awarded the top prize in a global competition for the best modern book on *sīrah* organised in the late 1970s by the Muslim World League.

The Shaykh was a quiet and humble man living in Medina, and did not have many students. Somehow, and for a wisdom Allah knows, he agreed to give me private lessons in the Masjid of the Prophet ﷺ daily, and teach me *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. He was my first Hadith teacher, and the first from whom I received *ijazah* (license to teach), but it is not because of my lessons in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that I remember him. He was an encyclopedia of information, and he had a silent charisma and wry sense of humor of an elderly grandfather—you would know he was about to crack a joke by that peculiar smile and a twinkle in his eye! Frequently, our discussion over Imam al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* would turn over to aspects of the *sīrah*.

Those were magical moments in my life that I cherish to this day. At the time, I had no idea of how blessed I was, sitting in al-Masjid al-Nabawī, with the greatest scholar of *sīrah* alive, reflecting over aspects of the Prophet's life that took place barely a few feet from where I was listening to them! Even as I write these lines, my eyes fill with tears recalling those joyous years and bygone memories…

One evening, as he was narrating some aspects of the *sīrah*, on the spur of the moment I begged him for one favour. I asked him if he could spend a morning with me (our lessons were between Maghrib and ʿIshā'), and take me around the city to see the sites of Medina where incidents of the *sīrah* took place. It was a bold request, for who was I to take up such valuable time of someone so esteemed as he!? But he readily agreed, and so one early morning on a beautiful spring day in the city of the Prophet ﷺ, I picked him up outside of al-Masjid al-Nabawī and we went around the city of Medina, to its outskirts to see Mt. ʿAyr and Thawr, to the site of the Battle of Uḥud and the Battle of the Trench, some famous wells that are mentioned in our books, and some other sites. What a wonderful day it was! Every single time I lead a *ziyārah* trip during the sightseeing tours of Medina that I frequently do with my Hajj and ʿUmrah groups—and especially as I climb on Jabal al-Rumāh where the archers stood with their backs to Mt. Uḥud—I recall that beautiful morning I spent with the Shaykh as I literally trace his footsteps and narrate to my audience the stories he told me. Sadly, that morning was one of the last times I would spend with him, for shortly afterwards, the Shaykh informed me that he had cancer and would not be able to teach anymore. He returned to his home in India, and after battling with the disease for a few years, passed away in December of 2006. Allah have mercy on Sh. Ṣafī al-Raḥmān for all that he taught me, and for the love of the *sīrah* he instilled in me.

My studies at the Islamic University lasted an entire decade, and I specialised at the undergraduate level in Hadith and its science, and at the graduate level in the development of early Islamic theology. Whilst my actual courses of study were not historical or *sīrah*-based, the passion and desire to study the *sīrah* afresh, and to analyse it from different angles and sources, remained in me throughout. Every time I would find a book on the topic, I purchased it, and my personal library of references on the *sīrah* slowly continued to grow. But alas…my studies did not allow me time to peruse them and benefit from them!

When I returned to America in early 2005, one of the masjids in my hometown of Houston, TX, approached me and asked if I wanted to start a regular weekly class in their masjid. The masjid (Synott Masjid) was one I had grown up praying *tarāwīḥ* in as a teenager. I readily agreed, and immediately told them that I wanted to start a class on the *sīrah*, but that I would only be in Houston for six months, as I would start my studies for my doctoral degree in Connecticut later that year. Thus, within days of returning from Medina, I found an excuse to start researching the *sīrah* again, and began my first actual class on the subject.

Within a few weeks, word spread across the city, and the attendance continued to grow, until the masjid became packed, and the parking lot full. One particularly amusing incident that I recall was when an elderly family friend, who had known me as a child, came up to me with a look of pride in his eyes, and referring to the crowd in the masjid, said: 'Your *ḥalaqah* has made this night like Ramadan!' But it was not I who brought such a crowd, rather it was the love of the *sīrah* in the hearts of the people that caused so many of them to come. This series was recorded on audio cassettes, and for a few years distributed in Houston, but unfortunately, I only managed to finish most of the Meccan timeframe before my studies forced me to discontinue and move away from Texas. Then, in New Haven, CT, I was again asked to

start a series for the local masjid (Masjid al-Islam, where a few months before me Imam Zaid Shakir had been the Imam). And so once again I started teaching the *sīrah*, and this time made it to early Medina before I had to move away from Connecticut, on to my first job, as professor of religious studies at Rhodes College, in Memphis, TN. Hence, twice I started and stopped the *sīrah* because of my life's circumstances.

It was in Memphis where I also joined the newly formed masjid, the Memphis Islamic Center (MIC), as its resident scholar. It was a very beautiful phase of my life; my young children were growing up, and my jobs kept me busy, whilst I was surrounded by a vibrant and close-knit community of Muslims. At MIC, I had the opportunity to finally teach the *sīrah* from beginning to end, and it was with MIC's support and help that the series was recorded and uploaded onto YouTube.

My first lesson of the *sīrah* began on the last Wednesday of April, in 2011. Whilst I had already prepared notes from my previous two times of having taught the *sīrah*, I wanted to make this series even more comprehensive and analytical than any previous class I had taught. Hence, every Wednesday, from morning until Maghrib, I began my weekly routine. I would first read the original sources, starting with Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah*, and then peruse Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* and al-Wāqidī's *Maghāzī* and other primary texts, then turn to the books of Hadith (and of course due to my studies in Hadith I had an extensive personal library). I would also consult the tidbits of the biographies found in such works like Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥābāh*, before moving on to the modern works of *sīrah* to see if they had any insights I could cull. Throughout all this research, I put on myself a few conditions:

Firstly, I would go wherever my own curiosity wandered. If I needed to explain why a certain practice was being done, or whether a particular