AL-TAHANNUTH
AN INQUIRY INTO THE MEANING OF A TERM

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The expression *tahannuth* mentioned in some traditions in connexion with the first revelation of the Prophet was variously interpreted by Muslim philologists and commentators of *hadith*. Several meanings have been attached to it by modern scholars. A re-examination of the material seems to give us a clue for elucidation of the meaning of *tahannuth* and the ideas connected with it. This may also be helpful towards understanding the circumstances of the 'Call to Prophecy' of Mūḥammad.

I

The word *al-tahannuth* occurs in the famous tradition recorded in the *Sira* of Ibn ‘Iṣḥāq concerning the ‘Beginning of the Prophethood’. The tradition is quoted on the authority of ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr b. Qatāda al-Laythī and reported by Wahb b. Kaysān. ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr related the tradition in the presence of ‘Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr and other people; among them was Wahb b. Kaysān. 'The Prophet—says the tradition—used to sojourn (yujawiru) on Mt. Ḥīrā for a month every year. That was the *tahannuth* which Quraysh used to practise in the period of the Jahiliyya (wa-kāna dhālika mimmā tahannatha bihi Qurayshun fi 'l-Jahiliyyati). The Prophet used to sojourn during that month every year, feeding the poor who called on him. After the conclusion of that month of sojourn, before entering his house, he would go to the Ka’ba and circumambulate it seven times or as many times as it pleased God. Then he would go back to his home. When the month came in which God wished to grant him His grace (karama), in the year when God sent him and it was the month of Ramaḍān the Prophet went out to Ḥīrā as was his custom for his sojourn (li-jiwarihi). With him was his family.'


5 In the translation of Guillaume: ‘... the apostle would pray in seclusion and give food to the poor ... ’.

6 See al-Halabī, *Insān ‘l-uyūn*, i, 272 (the discussion as to whether it happened in Ramaḍān, or in the month of Rabi’ al-awwal or in the month of Rajab). And see Ibn al-Jauzi, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa,*
The tradition giving an account of the same events in al-Bukhārī’s Saḥīḥ ⁷ is told on the authority of ‘Ā’isha. The chain of the īsmā is as follows: [Note: The rest of the text is not clearly visible or legible due to the quality of the image.]

The text includes references to various scholars and sources, including Ibn Sa’d, Ibn Ishaq, Bukayr, Al-Bajawi, and others, discussing the tradition of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the role of his wife Khadija in supporting the Prophet Muhammad during the early days of Islam. The text mentions the importance of this tradition in understanding the early history of Islam and the supporting role of women during that time.
The differences between the two traditions are crucial: according to the tradition of Ibn Ḥaṣq the sojourn of Muḥammad on Mt. Ḥira’ was in accordance with the custom of Quraysh to practise ṭaḥannuth for a month every year; according to the tradition of al-Bukhārī the Prophet was made to like solitude.14 Whereas the tradition of Ibn Ḥaṣq states that he went out with his family,15 i.e. Khadija—the tradition of al-Bukhārī maintains that the Prophet went out alone and used to come back at certain intervals16 in order to get provisions.17

(There is even a tradition stating that the Prophet reported his apprehensions in connexion with the summons he heard to Abū Bakr, who was his companion—al-Suyūṭī, al-Khāṣṣīḥ al-ka'būrā, i, 95.)

This tradition stands in opposition to the Shī'ī version that the first believer was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb. 'The first who prayed with the Prophet was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb' (al-Majlisi, op. cit., xxxviii, 202, 203—the chapter '... annahu eabaqa 'l-niisa fi 'l-islāmi wa 'l-imāni', pp. 201–88; Ibn Shahrāshīb, Manāqīb al-Abī Ṭalīb, Najaf, 1956, i, 288–303; al-Ya'qūbī, Ta’rīkh, Najaf, 1964, i, 18–19; al-Karājaki, Kanz al-fawā‘id, lithograph, 1322/1904–5, 117–28; al-Shaykh al-Tūsī, al-Amālī, Najaf, 1964, i, 265, 267; and see al-Suyūṭī, al-Lā‘lī al-maṣ‘ūṣa, Cairo, 1959, n.d., 322–4). 'I am al-Ṣiddīq al-akbar,' states ‘Alī, 'whoever says it after me is merely a liar or forger; I prayed with the Prophet seven years' (al-Majlisi, op. cit., xxxviii, 204). 'When the revelation was sent down on the Prophet he came to the masjid and stood up praying; ‘Alī passed by the Prophet—and he was nine years old—and the Prophet summoned him: 'O, ‘Alī, come to me (aqbīl) ...' ' (ibid., 207). 'I was the first of people who embraced Islam: the Prophet received his call on Monday and I prayed with him on Tuesday; I remained with him praying for seven years till a group embraced Islam', says 'Alī (ibid., 209—cf. Ibn Ṣayyid al-Nāṣ, op. cit., i, 92; see al-Nasāʿī, Khāṣṣīḥ Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, Cairo, 1308/1890–1, 2–3; see the discussion about the first to embrace Islam in al-Tirmidhī’s Ṣahīh, Cairo, 1934, xiii, 177; and see Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmi‘ al-ushūl min ahadīth al-rasūl, Cairo, 1952, ii, 440, no. 6412; Ibn Abī l-Hadīd, Sharh al-balāgha, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīmīn, Cairo, 1959, iv, 116 et seq.); ‘Alī states plainly on the minbar of al-Baṣra that he is al-Ṣiddīq al-akbar, that he believed before Abū Bakr and embraced Islam before Abū Bakr did (al-Mufīd, Iṣrahād, Najaf, 1962, 21).

The tradition in favour of Abū Bakr maintains that he was the first one to embrace Islam (al-Suyūṭī, Ta’rīkh al-khulafa’, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn Abī al-Jamā’ī, Cairo, 1952, 33). He even believed in the mission of the Prophet in the time of Bahira, the monk (ibid.). There is, in fact, a tendency towards harmonization: the first man who embraced Islam was Abū Bakr; the first boy was ‘Alī (ibid., 34). The tradition of al-Jāḥiẓ that Abū Bakr was the first to embrace Islam (al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Ukhmānīyya, ed. Abū al-Salām Hārīn, Cairo, 1955, 3; and see there other versions about the first who embraced Islam: Sayd b. Ḥārītha, Khābbāb b. Aratt; ‘Alī is not mentioned) is fiercely denied by al-Iṣkāfī (ibid., 286 et seq.). Of interest is the tradition recorded by al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, Muṣḥīḥ asbāb al-jamʿ wa l-tafrīq, Hyderabad, 1960, iii, 321, on the authority of Mūsā b. Miḥrān: ‘Abū Bakr believed in the Prophet in the time of Bahira, the monk; Abū Bakr was the match-maker who arranged the Prophet’s marriage with Khadija, and all that before ‘Alī was born’. And see the chapter ‘Awwalu l-nāṣri Ḳimān bi-l-ḥākī warrasūlíḥi’ in Ibn Sāyīd al-Nāṣ, ‘Uyūn al-athar, i, 91 et seq.; and Abī al-Razzāq, al-Muṣannaf, MS Murād Molla, 604, f. 67b inf.; the traditions that ‘Alī was the first who embraced Islam are opposed by the tradition of al-Zuhīrī that the first was Zayd b. al-Ritāhīa.

16 The expression khabība ishāq al-khalāt etc. is explained by Ibn Ḥazm, Jauhari al-Sirā, ed. Ǧaḥṣān Abūl-Ābābā, Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭus, A. M. Shākir, Cairo, n.d., 44; that nobody did order him to do it, nor did he see anybody do it whom he could imitate; it was merely Allāh who wanted him to do it and he remained there (i.e. in the cave) for days and nights.


18 On these periods see e.g. al-Zurqānī, Sharh al-mawābih, i, 211.

19 On the kinds of provisions see al-Ḥalābī, op. cit., i, 271; and see Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir
Furthermore, the cave where he retired for solitude, according to the tradition of al-Bukhārī, is not mentioned in the tradition recorded by Ibn Ishaq. The information about the feeding of the poor is missing in the tradition of al-Bukhārī. Consequently other differences occur stemming from the fundamental divergences between the two traditions: according to the tradition of Ibn Ishaq, Khadija sent messengers to look for the Prophet: they went out and reached the upper part of Mecca in their search for the Prophet. They were, of course, sent by Khadija from the mountain of Ḥirā’ where they both sojourned. After the talk of Khadija with the Prophet she descended from the mountain, went to Waraqa, and told him the story of the Call to Prophecy. According to the tradition recorded by al-Bukhārī, the Prophet sojourned in solitude in the cave and went to Khadija at Mecca after receiving the Call, and she went with him to Waraqa.

II

The explanation of the word taḥannuth is differently given in the two traditions. In the tradition of Ibn Ishaq it is glossed by tabarrur; in the tradition of al-Bukhārī it is glossed by taʻabbud.18 Ibn Hishām replaces it by taḥannuf, i.e. professing the Ḥanīfiyya, performing the actions of a Ḥanīf.19 There are other traditions in which the expression tanassaka is mentioned instead of taḥannatha.20 Al-Baladhurī in his report about the revelation, recorded on the authority of ‘Ā’isha,21 glosses taḥannuth as al-taʻabbud wa l-tabarrur. It is evident that al-Baladhurī referred to the glosses of the two different traditions.22

18 According to Ibn Hajar, Fath al-bārī, Cairo, 1348/1929–30, i, 18, the word taḥannuth was glossed taʻabbud by al-Zuhri.

19 Abū Dharr considers this explanation as unnecessary. See his commentary, Brünne, Cairo, 1911, 75.

20 Al-Dhahabi, Ta’rikh al-islām, 1, 74: wa-kāna yakhruju ilā Ḥirā’a fi kulli ‘āmin shahran min al-sanati yanouku fihi ; Ibn Kathīr, al-Sīra al-nahawīyya, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Weḥīd, Cairo, 1964, i, 390: wa-kāna yakhruju ilā Ḥirā’a fi kulli ‘āmin shahran min al-sanati yatassaka fihi, wa-kāna min nuṣuk Qurayshin fi l-jāhilliyatī, yuḥimu man jā’ahu min al-māsākin. This expression is used as well in the MS of the Sīra in the Qarawīyīn library at Fez, no. 727, as mentioned by A. Guillaume, New Light on the life of Muhammad (Journal of Semitic Studies, Monograph No. 1), [1960], p. 29, ll. 5–7: ‘The word used of Muhammad’s devotions, is nasāk, and it is said that members of Quraysh who practised such devotions in the pagan era used to feed any of the poor who came to them’. And see al-Suyūṭī, al-Khaddā’is al-kubrā, 1, 94, kāna rasūlu ‘llāhi ṣallā ‘llāhu ‘alayhī wa-sallama yakhruju ilā Ḥirā’a fi kulli ‘āmin shahran min al-sanati yatassaka fihi ... (but feeding the poor is not mentioned here).

21 Ansāb al-ashrāf, ed. Muhammad Ḥamidullāh, Cairo, 1959, i, 105, no. 191: ... fa-yataḥannathu fihi wa-yambukhu al-layyikya qabla an ..., in the Sāsi̇ of Muslim, Cairo, 1334/1915–16, i, 97, ... al-layyikya wādī al-‘adād; the Tafsir of al-Ṭabarī, Būlāq, 1329/1911, xxx, 101, and the Muṣannaf of ‘Abd al-Razzaq, MS Murād Molla, 604, f. 67a, inf., have (like al-Bukhārī) dhawāt al-‘adād. A version recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzaq deserves mention: the Prophet started to practise taḥannuth and he was made to like solitude after some of his daughters were born (wa-taṣafqa rasūlu ‘llāhi ṣallā ‘llāhu ‘alayhī wa-sallama ba’dā mā wulidat lahu ba’du banāthi yataḥannathu wa-bubūba ilayhi ‘l-khalāt u—op. cit., f. 67a, l. 6 from bottom).

22 Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, Beirut, 1960, i, 194, records a tradition on the authority of ‘Ā’isha, but does not, however, gloss the term taḥannuth.
The obscure expression *tahannuth* caused some difficulties to the philologists, lexicographers, and commentators of *hadith*. The famous scholars Ibn al-Arābī and Ibn 'Amr al-Shaybānī stated that they did not know the expression *tahannuth*. The explanation commonly given was that *tahannuth* means 'to remove sin (*hinth*) from oneself'; some other examples of similar verbs having the form *tafa'la* with a cognate are quoted (ta'aththama, taharroja, tahawwaba).

In the tradition of al-Bukhārī *tahannuth* is glossed by *ta'abbud*. *Ta'abbud* has a wide range of meanings and commentators are at pains to define the *ta'abbud* of the Prophet. Al-Qastallānī states that the Prophet performed three devotional practices ('*ibādā*): seclusion (*khalwa*), *tahannuth*, and the watching of the Ka'ba (*al-nizar ila 'l-Ka'ba*). Comparing the expression in the tradition of Ibn Ishāq, *ya'takifu shahra Ramadāna*, in which there is no clear definition of the kind of *ta'abbud*, with the expression of the tradition of 'Ā'isha, al-Qastallānī remarks that 'Ā'isha assigned the idea of *ta'abbud* exclusively (bi-*mujarradiha*) to seclusion because withdrawal from people, and especially people living in falsehood (*man kāna 'alā bātilin*), is a kind of *'ibāda*. Finally al-Qastallānī quotes an anonymous opinion that the *ta'abbud* of the Prophet was meditation (*tafakkur*).

The discussion of the term in al-Qastallānī's *Irshād* does not add much to our understanding of the meaning of the expression. *Tahannuth* is identified with *ta'abbud*; *ta'abbud* is identified with *khalwa*, which was, however, the cause or means of *ta'abbud*. Further, *tahannuth* is stated to be one of the three '*ibādāt*, and lastly *ta'abbud* is stated to be contemplation.

The mention of the word *i'takafa* in connexion with *tahannuth* does not by itself, lend more definition to the obscure expression *tahannuth*. It is noteworthy that the expression *i'takafa* is used for *tahannath* in the traditions recorded by Abū Nu'aym and al-Suyūṭī, stating that the Prophet vowed to sojourn with Khadīja for a month at Ḥirā'.

The identification of *ta'abbud* with *tahannuth* raised consequently the question of the religious basis of this devotion, the *ta'abbud* of the Prophet.
Opinions varied about whether the ta'abbud was according to the shari'a of Ibrāhīm or Mūsā or Īsā or Nūḥ or Ādām or according to the shari'a of some of his predecessors, or whether he did or did not follow before his Call any other shari'a.  

On the form of his ta'abbud at Ḥīrā', Sirāj al-Bulqaynī could plainly state that the manner of the ta'abbud was not specified in the traditions which he had perused.

III

Modern scholars have been divided in their opinions as to the origin of the term tahannuth and its meaning, and have reached a number of divergent conclusions.

Sprenger collected a good deal of material about the beginning of the revelation and took great pains to analyse the various traditions. He considered tahannuth as a 'Kraftausdruck' repeated by the men of hadīth in almost all versions of this tradition. 'Ein unverdaulicher Ausdruck' sums up Sprenger's view of the word. He based his opinion about the character of the sojourn of the Prophet on Mt. Ḥīrā' on a passage of Bal'ami's translation of al-Ţabarī. Sprenger refutes the possibility of devotional practices of the Meccans at Ḥīrā' as incompatible with the spirit of the Ḥajiliyya and supposes that Ḥīrā' served as a summer resort for these Meccans who could not afford to spend the summer in al-Ṭā'if or Wāḍi 'l-Qurā. Muḥammad dwelt in the hot month of Ramaḍān in a cave at Ḥīrā'. One may imagine—continues Sprenger—that he might have pitched a tent in front of the cave; of course, he could not find there a place for his wife and children: the cave was too small.

Nöldeke rendered tahannuth by 'living a solitary life'. Pautz—quoting the tradition of Ibn Ishaq with the gloss tabarrur—renders it by 'Andachtsübungen'.

Grimme renders the gloss of Ibn Ishaq, al-tabarrur, by 'fromm sein'. He also records the gloss of Ibn Hishām, tahannuf, explaining it by 'sich für sündig halten' and follows it by a question mark. Quoting the gloss ta'abbud

29 Al-Ḥalabi, Insān al-ʿuyūn, i, 271; on al-Sirāj al-Bulqaynī see al-Samʿānī, Ansāb, ii, p. 317, n. 7.
30 A. Sprenger, Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad, zweite Auflage, i, 330-49.
31 ibid., 330: 'In Traditionen kommen nicht selten Kraftausdrücke und obsolete Worte vor, und diese werden gewöhnlich in allen, dem Sinne nach auch so verschiedenen Versionen einer und derselben Erzählung festgehalten: die Kraftausdrücke, weil sie den Ueberlieferern gefielen, die obsolete, unverständliche Worte, weil sie sie nicht verdauen konnten und darunter etwas mysteriöses suchten, und auch weil sie sich darauf etwas einbildeten, mit solchen gelehrten Brocken um sich werfen zu können. Ein solcher unverdaulicher Ausdruck ist in dieser Tradition taḥannoth'.
32 ibid., 295-6.
33 Th. Nöldeke, Geschichte des Qurans, bearbeitet von F. Schwally, Leipzig, 1909, i, 84: '...als er noch in den Bergen ein eingeses Leben führte (taḥannath)'.
34 O. Pautz, Muhammeds Lehre von der Offenbarung, Leipzig, 1898, 16; and see ibid., 17, 'yataḥannathu, "ändachtig war"'. 
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of the tradition of al-Bukhārī he asks whether it did not mean a kind of service at the temple (‘eine Art Tempeldienst’) like the later Mujāwir. Tor Andrae renders tahannuth (like Pautz), by ‘einsame Andachtsübungen’ and finds similarity between these practices and the practices of Syrian Christianity.

Buhl does not differ from Andrae in his rendering of the expression. He defines it, however, more precisely: ‘eine asketische Observanz, die die Mekkaner im Monat Ramadān auf dem Berge Ḥīrā’ vollzogen haben und die im Fasten und sexueller Enthaltsamkeit bestand’.

Hirschfeld suggests that tahannuth is nothing but the Hebrew tehinnoth ‘prayers’, a word very common among the Jews to express voluntary devotions apart from official liturgy. ‘There is little doubt’, says Hirschfeld, ‘that Muḥammad heard this word often in Medina before he framed his report of the affair and employed it readily on account of its strange and sacred character.’

Lyall accepts Hirschfeld’s suggestion about the Hebrew origin of the word tahannuth, rejects the connexion between tahannif and tahannuth, and thinks that ‘the proposal to take tahannuth as a private formation, doing that by which a sin is expelled, appears to be unnecessary’.

Caetani is inclined to accept Hirschfeld’s suggestion; he remarks, however, that it may be a more modern expression used in the legendary story about the Call to Prophecy in the second part of the first century of the Hijra, although it cannot be excluded that the word was known in the time of Muḥammad in Mecca and might denote retirement into solitude and prayer.

W. M. Watt gives a compound version of the views quoted. He suggests that Muḥammad’s going to Ḥīrā ‘might be a method of escaping from the heat of Mecca in an unpleasant season for those who could not afford to go to al-Ta‘īf’: ‘Judaean-Christian influence, such as the example of monks, or a little personal experience’, continues Watt, ‘would show the need and desirability of solitude’. ‘The precise meaning and derivation of tahannuth’, says Watt, ‘is uncertain, though it is evidently some sort of devotional practice. The best suggestion is perhaps that of H. Hirschfeld, that it comes from the Hebrew tehinnot or tehinnoth, meaning prayers for God’s favour. The meaning may have been influenced by the Arabic root, however. Ḥinith is properly the

35 H. Grimme, Mohammed, Münster, 1892, i, p. 10, n. 1.
36 Tor Andrae, Mohammed, sein Leben und Glaube, Göttingen, 1932, 34–5.
37 F. Buhl, Das Leben Muhammeds, 134: ‘um sich Andachtsübungen hinzugeben...’; see ibid., p. 68, n. 167.
38 ibid., p. 88, n. 244.
41 L. Caetani, Annali dell’Islam, Milano, 1905, i, 222, ’Introduzione’, § 208, n. 2.
42 W. M. Watt, Muḥammad at Mecca, London, 1953, 44: this opinion of Watt’s is reminiscent of the proposition of Sprenger mentioned above, which is not, however, referred to by Watt.
43 op. cit., 44. There seems to be some connexion between the proposition of Tor Andrae and the opinion of Watt; Tor Andrae is not mentioned.
violation of or failure to perform an oath, and so more generally sin; and *tahannuth* is accordingly said to mean "doing some work so as to escape from sin or crime". The use of the word *tahannuth* here is probably a mark that the material is old and in this respect genuine.\(^44\)

In his article 'Hanif' Watt repeats the assertion that *tahannuth* is almost certainly from Hebrew and means devotional exercises.\(^45\)

Bell remarks that *tahannuth* is explained as meaning 'worship'. The real meaning of the word, says Bell, is uncertain, but is probably something like 'bewailing of sin'.\(^46\) Bell, doubting the truth of the story, argues as follows: 'That *tahannuth* was a Quraish practice may well be doubted, because of the character of the Meccans as depicted in the Koran, the absence of any record of such a practice in pre-Islamic Arabia, and the fact that the Koran makes no reference to any such practice. In fact, the ascetic note in such a practice was entirely alien to Mohammed's nature, and the accompanying fasts, so often imaginatively decked out even by Western scholars, as predisposing the future prophet to seeing visions at this stage, have no support whatever in the early parts of the Koran. Fasting was not introduced until the Medinan period, and then as an imitation of Jewish practice. ... The whole story is the invention of a later age. It is founded probably on Christian ascetic practice'.\(^47\)

Chelhod, stressing the ambivalence of the root *hnf*, compares it with *hnth*, remarking that it is probable that *hnth* is derived from *hnf*. The meaning of *hnth* is perjury; *tahannuth* means refusal ('rejet') of paganism.\(^48\)

None of the opinions about the meaning of *tahannuth* quoted above seems entirely satisfactory. Sprenger's proposition about *J.ürri* as 'summer resort' for the Prophet was rejected by Caetani, who considered the whole story of little historical value.\(^49\)

The opinion of Nöldeke about Muḥammad's life of solitude in the mountains fits the tradition of al-Bukhārī and corresponds to the idea of *khalā", seclusion; *khalā"* cannot, however, be rendered by *tahannuth*. Neither does it agree with the tradition of Ibn Iṣḥāq, where it is explicitly stated that the Prophet went out to *J.ürri* with his family.

Fasting—as assumed by Buhl—cannot be accepted; sources do not mention fasting by the Prophet at *J.ürri* at all.\(^50\) Further: the tradition of al-Bukhārī on which Buhl relied states explicitly that the Prophet used to come back in order to take provisions for his sojourn. According to the tradition of Ibn Iṣḥāq the Prophet went out to *J.ürri* with Khadija and thus the idea of sexual abstention seems to be excluded.

\(^{44}\) op. cit., 44; Watt quotes in a note the contrasting opinion of Caetani.

\(^{45}\) EI, second ed., s.v. hanif.

\(^{46}\) R. Bell, 'Mohammed's Call', *Moslem World*, xxiv, 1, 1934, p. 13, n. 1.

\(^{47}\) ibid., 16; and see idem, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh, 1953, 104–5: 'it was apparently some sort of pious exercise expressing repentance or doing penance for sin'.


\(^{49}\) Caetani, op. cit., 'Introduzione', § 208, n. 1.

\(^{50}\) See Bell, art. cit., 16 (quoted in n. 46 above).
Hirschfeld’s assumption about the derivation of the word *tahannuth* from the Hebrew *tehinnoth* was convincingly refuted by Goitein: this Hebrew word, states Goitein, was used in that technical sense only in far later times.\(^{51}\)

Grimme’s rendering for *tahannuth*, ‘sich sündig halten’, is not based on lexicographical grounds. *Ta‘abbud* here cannot be connected with the later *mujāwar*, denoting ‘service at the Temple’.

Whether the Prophet was influenced by Christian monks as suggested by Andrae or whether his ‘crise mystique’ was influenced by the *kunāfa‘* as assumed by Blachère \(^{52}\) cannot be discussed here.

It is doubtful whether *yujawiru* can be translated ‘to pray in seclusion’, as was rendered by Guillaume,\(^{54}\) or whether *tabarrur* may be rendered by ‘religious devotion’.

Bell’s assertion about the ‘absence of any record of such a practice in pre-Islamic Arabia’ is not accurate: there are some records of such *tahannuth*. His opinion about the character of Quraysh cannot be discussed within the limits of the present article. The question of whether ascetic practices were alien to the Prophet or not may be preceded by a discussion of the question of whether *tahannuth* is an ascetic practice.

### IV

The expression *tahannuth* occurs not only in the tradition about the Call of the Prophet. Stories in which this expression appears may be quoted here.

There is a significant tradition reported by Muhammad b. Ḥabīb about an alliance made between a leader of al-Ḫārīth b. ‘Abd Manāt b. Kināna, a tribal group which entered the federation of the Ahābīsh \(^{56}\) and a clan of Quraysh. The leader, Khalīd b. al-Ḫārīth b. ‘Ubayd b. Taym b. ‘Amr b. al-Ḫārīth b. Mabdūl b. al-Ḫārīth b. ‘Abd Manāt b. Kināna, came to Mecca. Every clan of Quraysh was eager to get him as its ally. Every clan invited him to be its guest or offered to give him one of its daughters in marriage. Khalīd did not want to give preference to any one of those clans. He asked for a delay of three days and ‘he went out to Ḥira‘ and practised *ta‘abbud* three nights on the top of the mountain and went down’. He decided to be an ally of the (clan of the) first man whom he would meet. The first man was ‘Abd ‘Auf b. ‘Abd al-Ḫārīth b. Zuhra b. Kilāb. He tied his garment with the garments of ‘Abd ‘Auf, took his hand, and they continued until they entered the *masjid*.

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\(^{54}\) A. Guillaume (tr.), *The life of Muhammed*, 105.

\(^{55}\) ibid.

al-ḥarām (i.e. the Ka‘ba—K); they stood at the House and the alliance was accomplished.57

The expression occurring in this tradition is ta‘abbada. It is exactly the expression used for glossing the word tahannuth in some of the traditions of the Call to Prophecy. The setting in which ta‘abbud takes place in this tradition deserves to be stressed. Ta‘abbud is practised before making an important decision and is followed by a solemn ceremony at the Ka‘ba. It seems to be quite clear that the expression ta‘abbada in this tradition corresponds to the expression tahannatha in the tradition of the Call to Prophecy and in the traditions about the practices of Quraysh mentioned below. In these traditions the tahannuth is followed by a circumambulation of the Ka‘ba several times before the mutaḥannith returns to his home.

Several traditions about the Ḥanīf Zayd b. ‘Amr b. Nufayl are connected with Ḥirā‘; in some of them tahannuth or a similar expression occurs. Ibn Iḥṣāq reports that Zayd was expelled from Mecca and sojourned at Ḥirā‘.58 Al-Balādhrī records that Zayd ‘pitched a tent at Ḥirā‘ practising in it taḥannuth. He withdrew from Quraysh and they named him al-Rāḥib. He died and was buried inside Mt. Ḥirā‘’.59 Ibn Ḥabīb reports about him that he practised taḥannuf at Ḥirā‘.60 This tradition seems to have been recorded with a significant variant: kāna yakhruju li ’l-taḥawwub (or li ’l-taḥayyub). Taḥawwub is glossed by al-ta‘abbud wa ’l-tajannub li ’l-ma‘tham (ta‘abbud and refraining from sin).61

The first man who practised tahannuth at Ḥirā‘ is said to have been ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. A tradition with the isnād al-Wāqidī—‘Abdullāh b. Ja‘far—Makhrama b. Naufal—al-Zuhri relates that ‘he was the first who practised tahannuth at Ḥirā‘’. (Tahannuth, says the gloss, is ta‘alluh and tabarrur.) When the moon of Ramadan appeared he used to enter Ḥirā‘ and did not leave till the end of the month and fed the poor. He was distressed by the iniquity of the people of Mecca and would perform circumambulation of the Ka‘ba many times ’.62

A tradition recorded by al-Balādhrī gives some information about

58 Ibn Hishām, al-Sira, 1, 246; al-Kalā‘, al-Īṭifā‘a, ed. H. Massé, Alger-Paris, 1931, 1, 320; Ibn ‘Asākir, Tahdhib ta‘rikh, vi, 29, l. 9; Ibn Kathīr, al-Sira al-nabawiyya, 1, 154-5 (but the words fa-nazala Ḥir‘a are omitted); and see Ibn ‘Asākir, op. cit., vi, 34; Ibn Kathīr, op. cit., 1, 162; al-Suyūṭī, al-Khaṣā‘īṣ al-kubrā, 1, 24, l. 3 from bottom; al-Dhahābī, Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā‘, ed. Ṣālāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Cairo, 1956, 1, 86, 90.
59 Al-Balādhrī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, MS, f. 867b; and see Ibn Sa‘d, Tabaqāt, Beirut, 1957, iii, 381: he was buried inside Ḥirā‘.
60 Al-Munammag, 532, l. 3.
61 Abū ‘Ubayd, Gharib al-hadīth, ed. M. ‘Abd al-Mu‘t‘al Khan, Hyderabad, 1965, 11, 21; and see the explanation of tahawwub on the authority of Abū ‘Ubayd in L‘A, s.v. hub, where the story of Zayd b. ‘Amr is not, however, recorded.
62 Al-Balādhrī, Ansāb, 1, 84; see Dāhān, Sīra, 1, 20 sup. (on margin of the Sīra Ḥalabiyya); al-Zurqānī, Shahr al-mawāḥib, 1, 71: ... ẓihā dakhala shakru ramaḍāna ẓa‘idahu wa-alʿama ’l-masākina...
Qurashites who practised *tahannuth* at Ḥīrāʾ (the *isnād* is: Muḥammad b. Saʿd—al-Wāqīḍī—Tālḥa b. ʿAmr—Ibn ʿAbbās): ‘When the month of Ramadān began people of Quraysh—these intending *tahannuth*—used to leave for Ḥīrāʾ and stayed there a month and fed the poor who called on them. When they saw the moon of Shawwāl they (descended and) did not enter their homes until they had performed the circumbulation of the Kaʿba for a week. The Prophet used to perform it (i.e. this custom)’.

It is noteworthy that in both these traditions about *tahannuth* at Ḥīrāʾ, the one about ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and the one about the people of Quraysh, two elements are emphasized: the feeding of the poor and the ritual practices of the circumbulation of the Kaʿba, a token of the veneration of the House. These are exactly the elements of *tahannuth* as related in the tradition of Ibn Ishaq about the Call of Prophecy.

A group of traditions about *tahannuth* is connected with the person of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām and refers to his deeds in the period before he embraced Islam. A tradition (with the *isnād* al-Zuhrī—Urwa b. al-Zubayr—Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām) runs as follows: ‘Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām asked the Prophet: What is your opinion about things which I used to do, practising thus *tahannuth* (a-raʾaya umūran kuntu atahannathu biḥā) in the period of the Jāhiliyya, viz. doing good to my people, freeing slaves and giving alms; shall I be rewarded for it? The Prophet answered: You embraced Islam having the credit of the good (deeds of your) past’.

In another tradition recorded on the authority of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām, Ḥakīm says about himself: ‘I was a man of good luck in trade. I never bought a thing without gaining profit (scil. in selling). Quraysh used to send their merchandise and I used to send my merchandise (scil. separately). It happened sometimes that a man from among them (i.e. the Quraysh) asked me to allow him to share with me in his expenditures (scil. concerning the merchandise), aiming by it (scil. to benefit from) the good luck in (the profit of) my merchandise (I refused—K) and that (was) because of this, viz. whatever I got of profit I used to spend (*tahannathu biḥā* it (partly ?) or wholly, intending by that (deed) the increase of wealth and (increase of) friendship *(al-maḥabbā*) in the clan’.  

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63 Al-Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, 1, 105.
64 Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-mufrad*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, Cairo, 1379/1959–60, p. 38, no. 70, under the heading Bāb man waṣṣal raḥimahu fi l-jāhiliyyati-thumma astalama (and see the references given by the editor); al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab Quraysh*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥ. Shākir, Cairo, 1381/1961–2, 1, 362, no. 637 (see the parallels recorded by the editor); LʿA, TʿA, and Ibn al-Athir, *Nihāya*, s.v. *lah, with a comment *ay ataqqarrabu ila ḫāhi taʾalā bi-afʿailin fi l-jāhiliyyati*; al-Nabulusi, *Dhakhīr al-mawārit*, Cairo, 1934, 1, 198, no. 1790; and see Abū ʿAwāna, *Musnad*, Hyderabad, 1362/1943, 1, 72–3 *(tahannuth is glossed by *taʿabbud*, p. 72); in a variant of this tradition Ḥakīm, assured by the Prophet that he would receive the reward for his *tahannuth* in the period of the Jāhiliyya, promises to do as a Muslim these deeds which he did as a pagan. These deeds in the Jāhiliyya are explained as freeing 100 slaves and driving 100 victims for sacrifice at Mecca (scil. to feed the people; another version, ibid.: and providing 100 men with camels).
In a very similar passage Ḥakīm states: 'I used to make many profits and I used to distribute them among the poor of my people—and we did not worship anything (wa-nahnu Ṽa’na-budu shay’an)—intending the (increase of) wealth and friendship in the clan'.

In this tradition the word taḥannatha is missing. But the phrase fa-a’ādu ‘alā fugarā’ī quumī explains the action of taḥannuth and the motive of the deed is given in an explanatory phrase: kuntu u’āliju 'l-birra fi 'l-jāhilīyyatī 'I used to perform good deeds towards kinsmen in the Jāhilīyya'.

It is evident that the expression taḥannatha in the traditions of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām denotes good deeds towards poor kinsmen, freeing of slaves, giving alms to the needy and poor. That is plainly indicated in the tradition of al-Bukhārī on the authority of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām: the word ataḥannathu is followed by an explicative phrase: min ẓilatin wa-‘atāqatin wa-ṣadaqatin. Taḥannuth here is identical with the term birr. This is indeed confirmed by another version of this tradition; L’A s.v. birr records the tradition as follows: a-ra’aya umūrān kuntu abrartuhā. This expression is glossed: ay atiubu biha ‘l-birra wa ‘l-iḥsāna ila ‘l-nāsi wa ‘l-taqarruba ila ‘l-lāhī ta’ālā. The first part of this gloss is accurate; but the second part, wa ‘l-taqarruba ila ‘l-lāhī ta’ālā, is a Muslim interpretation of a Jāhilīyya tradition.

The sentence inserted in the tradition of Ḥakīm quoted above, wa-nahnu Ṽa’na-budu shay’an, is significant. It indicates that his birr, or his taḥannuth, was not connected with ritual practices. A line is thus drawn between the taḥannuth of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām, consisting of good deeds, and the taḥannuth of the leader of al-Ḥārith b. ‘Abd Manāt of Kināna, Zayd b. ‘Amr, and the taḥannuth of the Prophet according to the tradition of the Call as recorded by al-Bukhārī in which only the ta’abbud is mentioned. The taḥannuth of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the taḥannuth of some groups of Quraysh, and the taḥannuth of the Prophet according to the tradition of Ibn Ishāq included two elements: ta’abbud and tabarrur. It consisted in feeding the poor and in the practice of veneration at the Ka’ba.

The traditions about Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām are apparently very early ones and the expression taḥannath in these traditions is, no doubt, original. The argument of Sprenger that the tradition is forged (‘gewiss unecht’) and fairly late (‘ziemlich neu’) is unfounded. If there were any doubt about the usage of the term taḥannuth in the tradition of the talk of Ḥakīm with the Prophet, the expression taḥannuth is evidently genuine in the story of his deeds towards his kinsmen. Here there was no need to put in the word taḥannatha.

There is also no reason to entertain doubts about the genuineness of the expression taḥannath in the traditions about the practices of Quraysh at Ḥirā. The feeding of the poor at Ḥirā in the month of Ramadān belonged to the category of birr. The identity of taḥannath with birr is plainly seen in a state-

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66 Al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, op. cit., i, 367, no. 644; and see Ibn ‘Asākir, Tahdhib ta’rikh, iv, 414; al-Dhahabi, Siyar a’lām al-nubalā‘, od. As’ad Ṭalas, Cairo, 1962, iii, 32, l. 1–2.
67 Sprenger, op. cit., i, 331, ll. 16–20.
ment of Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir where it is also seen that this was the Prophet’s only purpose in practising ṭahannuth: wa-kāna Qurayshun yataḥannathūna bi-Ḥirā’ fī Ramada’āna wa-kāna rasūlu ‘llāhi yaf’alu dhālikā li-anrahū mīn al-birrī ‘Quraysh used to practise ṭahannuth during the month of Ramada’n and the Prophet did it because it was a kind of good deed towards his fellow men (birr)’. ⁶⁸ The meaning attached to ṭahannatha here fully corresponds to the meaning of the traditions of Ḥakīm, as pointed out above, and to the meaning of the tradition of the Call to Prophecy in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq. Muhammad’s reinterpretation and revaluation of this simple meaning of the Jāhili term of birr were fully explained by H. A. R. Gibb: ‘In its secular use the root (i.e. birr) indicates the paternal and filial relation, with its attitudes of affection, obedience and loyalty. To Muhammad, as to all other prophetic teachers, the test of true belief lay in character and works. If the repeated insistence of the Koran upon good works were not enough, it would be conclusively proved by the comprehensive definition of birr in the noble verse Sūra 2, 172: not only belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Scripture and the prophets, but charity to all for the love of God, steadfastness in prayers, loyalty to the plighted word, and patience under all afflictions—these are the qualities that mark out the truly believing and the truly God-fearing. Birr is thus the crown of true belief, when the believer at last realizes and responds to the ever-presence of God in all his thoughts and conduct’. ⁶⁹ In the light of this passage we can understand the essential changes in the Muslim interpretation of birr and consequently in the meaning of ṭahannuth which is identical with birr. In the tradition of Ibn Ishāq about the Call it denotes thus merely good deeds, charity and giving alms to the poor.

A crucial question which remains to be answered is that of the sojourn on Mt. Ḥirā’. Why did these groups of Quraysh who practised ṭahannuth perform it there? The answer can be gauged from the traditions quoted above including variants of ṭahannuth. Ḥirā’ was a mansik, a place of ritual practices of some groups of Quraysh; these practices were apparently connected with the veneration of the Ka’ba. This assumption is confirmed by such terms as tanassaka, jāvara, i’takafa, ta’abbada, and the significant sentence in all the traditions (except these of Ḥakīm) about the numerous circumambulations of the Ka’ba. The word ta’abbada in the tradition of Khālid b. al-Ḥārith of the ‘Abd Manāt of Kināna indicates various practices (probably austerities, hardships, and perhaps some good deeds) connected with the cult of the Ka’ba. This assumption is further confirmed by an interesting interpretation recorded by al-Ḥalabī: ‘The Prophet used to sojourn (scil. on Mt. Ḥirā’) feeding the

⁶⁸ Al-Bad’ wa ‘l-ta’rikh, ed. Huart, iv, 141.
poor who called on him i.e. because it was a ritual practice (nusuk) \(^70\) of Quraysh in the period of the Jāhiliyya, i.e. in this place the man used to feed the poor who came to him. It has been said that this was the ta‘abbud of the Prophet in the cave of Ḥira’ \(^71\). The tradition of ta‘abbud of the Prophet on Mt. Ḥira’ has thus to be understood according to the quoted traditions: he followed an old custom of his predecessors and sojourned at Ḥira’ performing some ritual practices and deeds of charity towards the needy and the poor. That was the tāhannuth of the Jāhiliyya and the Prophet practised it before he received his Call to Prophecy.\(^72\) The discussion about what was the shari‘a adopted by the Prophet for his ta‘abbud before he received his revelation is, of course, an expression of a later Muslim attitude with regard to an ancient Jāhili term.

It was while Muhammad was practising tāhannuth, which consisted, as we have seen, of the veneration of the Ka‘ba and of doing charitable deeds towards one’s fellow men on Mt. Ḥira’, that he received—according to Muslim tradition—his first revelation. In so doing he was following the ancient custom of Quraysh.

\(^70\) In text, min nsl; this is an error—read min nusuk.

\(^71\) Al-Ḥalabī, Insān al-‘uyūn, 1, 271 inf., 272 sup.

\(^72\) See H. Birkeland, The Lord guideth, Oslo, 1956, 40–1: ‘About 100 H. no Muslim doubted that Muhammad was a pagan before he was called by Allah at the age of 40’.