

Who was Muhammad?

History records that a person by the name Muhammad was born into the tribe of Quraysh in the city of Makkah in 570 C.E. His father, Abdullah, died before his birth. When Muhammad was six years old, his mother, Amina became ill and died. Thus, at a very young age Muhammad experienced the loss of his parents and became an orphan.

For the next few years Muhammad was entrusted to his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. When Muhammad was eight years old, his grandfather also passed away. His uncle Abu Talib, a well-respected member of the Quraysh tribe, took responsibility for him. Muhammad grew up to become an honest and trustworthy businessman. Indeed, Muhammad's upright and dependable reputation earned him the designation al-Amin ("the Trustworthy One") among his fellow Makkans, and even invited a marriage proposal from Khadijah, a businesswoman in Makkah for whom Muhammad worked.

At the age of twenty-five, Muhammad married Khadijah, a widow who was his elder by fifteen years. Their marriage lasted twenty-five years, until Khadijah's death. Muhammad and Khadijah had six children: two sons died in early childhood, and four daughters lived to bless their household.

While most of his fellow Makkans were polytheists, Muhammad refused to worship the traditional tribal deities and often retreated to meditate and worship the One God of his ancestor, Abraham. At the age of forty, while meditating in the cave of Hira in the mountains above Makkah, Muhammad received the first of many revelations, beginning with the Arabic word Iqra, meaning "Read" or "Recite." Soon afterwards, he was commanded to convey the Divine message and thus became the last messenger of God, according to the Qur'an.

"Read, in the name of thy Lord, Who Created-
Created man, out of a clot (embryo).
Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,
He Who taught the use of the pen-
Taught man that which he knew not." (Qur'an, 96: 1-5)

Muhammad spent the remaining twenty-three years of his life receiving revelations from God and advocating the message of Islam among the peoples of the Arabian peninsula and working to implement the principles and teachings of Islam in human society. After suffering severe persecution from the polytheistic Makkans for 11 years, he and his fellow Muslims emigrated to Yathrib, a city 200 miles north of Makkah, where he established Islamic rule. The city was renamed Madinah (short for Madinat an-Nabi, City of the Prophet). In the following years, the message of Islam brought more and more tribes in the Arabian peninsula into the fold, creating a new community based on common religious principles, rather than tribal or other affiliations. Muhammad died in 632 C.E. at the age of 63. His tomb is located adjacent to the Masjid an-Nabawi

(Prophet's Masjid) in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, in what used to be his quarters next to the original masjid of the city.

What was Muhammad's role as the last prophet?

Islam teaches that Muhammad's role as the final prophet of God was to confirm the authentic teachings of previous prophets and to rectify mistakes or innovations that followers of previous monotheistic faith traditions had introduced into the original religion of humankind. Muhammad is also viewed as the conduit for the completion of God's guidance to humanity; the scope of his mission is seen as encompassing all people, rather than a specific region, group or community. Furthermore, his life serves as a perfect model of how to practice Islam fully.

"We have sent you forth to all humankind, so that you may give them good news and warn them." (Qur'an, 34: 28)

Muslims believe that the original revelations or scriptures given by God to prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus had been lost or modified over time. Moreover, the ethno-religious concept of a "chosen people" found in Judaism and the doctrines of Trinity and Original Sin found in Christianity are believed to be later developments that grew away from the original practices and scriptures of previous prophets.

Essentially, Muslims view Islam not as a "new" religion, since it embodies the same message and guidance that God revealed to all His messengers, but rather a reestablishment of the "primordial" religion of humankind, centered around recognizing God's Oneness and adhering to His commands. The view of Islam as having achieved its final form through the scripture given to Muhammad and his own teachings is an important aspect of faith. Consequently, Muhammad is considered the final messenger of God, the "Seal" of the Prophets. Any claimants to prophethood after Muhammad, who died in 632 C.E., are not accepted by Muslims.

"Muhammad is the father of no man among you.
He is the Apostle of Allah and the seal of the Prophets.
Allah has knowledge of all things." (Qur'an, 33: 40)

What is the "Sunnah" of Muhammad? What are "Hadith"?

The term Sunnah refers to the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, as distinct from the revelations that comprise the Qur'an. It is the second source of Islam after the Qur'an, for in the Prophet there is a "beautiful pattern of conduct for any whose hope is in God and the Last Day"
(Qur'an, 33:21).

When the Prophet's wife Aisha was asked about her husband's character, she stated simply, "It was the Qur'an," meaning that his life was the Qur'an in application. Based on this premise, the Prophet is considered by all Muslims a guide and role model for living a successful life-one who emulates the Prophet receives God's mercy and forgiveness. Following Muhammad's example contributes to a Muslim's efforts fulfill obligations to God and gain entrance into Paradise.

One form in which Muhammad's Sunnah has been recorded and preserved is the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet). Hadith are records of the doings and personal sayings of the Prophet. Hadith were painstakingly verified and compiled by scholars in various books in the centuries following the Prophet's death. Six collections of hadith are considered the most authentic, the most commonly used ones being the volumes titled Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

Hadith – Sayings of Prophet Muhammad

- ❁ "Obey your parents and treat them kindly for if you do so then your own children will be obedient and kind to you."
- ❁ "Heaven lies under the feet of the mother."
- ❁ "All children are God's children and those dearest to God are those who treat His children kindly."
- ❁ "When three people are together two should not talk secretly, leaving the third alone, since this may grieve him."
- ❁ "Seeking knowledge is a duty of every Muslim."
- ❁ "Exchange presents with one another for they remove ill feelings from the heart."
- ❁ "Take advantage of five things before five others happen: your youth before you grow old; your health before you fall sick; your money before you become poor; your leisure before you become busy and your life before you die."
- ❁ "Cleanliness is half of the religion."
- ❁ "The most perfect in faith amongst Muslim men is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife."
- ❁ "Powerful is not he who knocks the other down. Indeed powerful is he who controls himself when he is angry."
- ❁ "If one of you sees something evil he should change it with his hand. If he cannot he should speak out against it, and if he cannot do even that he should at least detest it in his heart."
- ❁ "Actions are judged according to their intentions, and every person will be judged (in the hereafter) according to what he or she intends."
- ❁ "The world is green and beautiful, and God has appointed you His stewards over it."
- ❁ "Modesty and Faith are joined closely together and if either of them is lost, the other goes also."
- ❁ "The best richness is the richness of the soul."
- ❁ "God will show no compassion on the one who has no compassion towards all humankind."
- ❁ "He who eats his fill while his neighbor goes without food is not a believer."