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Teacher- Dr. Niru Jain

Topic Islam: Early Life and

Preaching's

Of Prophet Mohammad

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Early Life of Muhammad

Born c. 570 CE in Mecca, Muhammad was raised by his uncle Abu Talib and later worked as a merchant.

Muhammad unified Arabia into a single religious polity under Islam. Muslims and Bahá'ís believe he is a messenger and prophet of God. The Quran, the central religious text in Islam, alludes to Muhammad's life. Muhammad's life is traditionally defined into two periods: pre-hijra (emigration) in Mecca (from 570 to 622 CE) and post-hijra in Medina (from 622 until 632 CE). There are also traditional Muslim biographies of Muhammad (the sira literature), which provide additional information about Muhammad's life. Muhammad is almost universally considered by Muslims as the last prophet sent by God to mankind. While non-Muslims regard Muhammad as the founder of Islam, Muslims consider him to have restored the unaltered original monotheistic faith of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets.

Childhood

Muhammad was born around the year 570 CE to the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe, one of Mecca's prominent families. His father, Abdullah, died almost six months before Muhammad was born. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was sent to live with a Bedouin family in the desert, as desert life was considered healthier for infants. Muhammad stayed with his foster mother, Halimah bint Abi Dhuayb, and her husband until he was two years old. At the age of six, Muhammad lost his biological mother, Amina, to illness and was raised by his paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, until he died when Muhammad was eight. He then came under the care of his uncle Abu Talib, the new leader of Banu Hashim.

Adolescence and Early Adulthood

While still in his teens, Muhammad accompanied his uncle on trading journeys to Syria, gaining experience in commercial trade, which was the only career open to him as an orphan. Islamic tradition states that when Muhammad was either nine or twelve, while accompanying a caravan to Syria he met a Christian monk or hermit named Bahira, who is said to have foreseen Muhammad's career as a prophet of God. Little is known of Muhammad during his later youth; available information is fragmented, and it is difficult to separate history from legend. It is known that he became a merchant and "was involved in trade between the Indian ocean and the Mediterranean Sea." Due to his upright character during this time, he acquired the nickname "al-Amin," meaning "faithful, trustworthy," and "al-Sadiq," meaning "truthful."

Muhammad worked as a trader for Khadija, a widow, until he married her in 595 CE at the age of 25. The marriage lasted for 25 years and was reported to be a happy

one. Muhammad relied upon Khadija and did not enter into a marriage with another woman during his first marriage. After Khadija's death, Khawla bint Hakim suggested that Muhammad should marry Sawda bint Zama, a Muslim widow, or Aisha, daughter of Um Ruman and Abu Bakr of Mecca. Muhammad is said to have asked for arrangements to marry both.

According to a text collected by historian Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad was involved with a well-known story about setting the Black Stone in place in the wall of the Kaaba in 605 CE. The Black Stone, a sacred object, had been removed to facilitate renovations to the Kaaba. The leaders of Mecca could not agree on which clan should have the honor of setting the Black Stone back in its place. They agreed to wait for the next man to come through the gate and ask him to choose. That man was the 35-year-old Muhammad, five years before his first revelation. He asked for a cloth and put the Black Stone in its center. The clan leaders held the corners of the cloth and together carried the Black Stone to the right spot; then Muhammad set the stone in place, satisfying all who were present.

Occasionally he would retreat to a cave in the mountains for several nights of seclusion and prayer; it is reported that it was at this spot that he was visited by Gabriel and received his first revelation from God.

Muhammad's First Revelations

When he was nearly 40, Muhammad began spending many hours alone in prayer and speculating over the aspects of creation. He was concerned with the "ignorance of divine guidance" (*Jahiliyyah*), social unrest, injustice, widespread discrimination (particularly against women), fighting among tribes, and abuse of tribal authorities prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia. The moral degeneration of his fellow people, and his own quest for a true religion, further lent fuel to this, with the result that he began to withdraw periodically to a cave called Mount Hira, three miles north of Mecca, for contemplation and reflection. During this period Muhammad began to have dreams replete with spiritual significance that were fulfilled according to their true import; this was the commencement of his divine revelation. Islamic tradition holds that during one of his visits to Mount Hira in the year 609 CE, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and commanded Muhammad to recite verses that would later be included in the Quran. Upon receiving his first revelations, Muhammad was deeply distressed. When he returned home, he was consoled and reassured by Khadijah and her Christian cousin. Muhammad feared that others would dismiss his claims as evidence of him being possessed. On the other hand, Shi'a tradition maintains that Muhammad was neither surprised nor frightened at the appearance of Gabriel, but rather welcomed him as if he was expected.

The initial revelation was followed by a pause of three years (a period known as *fatra*) during which Muhammad felt depressed and further gave himself to prayers and spiritual practices. When the revelations resumed, he was reassured and began preaching.

Rise of Islam in Mecca

According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad's wife Khadija was the first to believe he was a prophet. She was followed by Muhammad's ten-year-old cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, close friend Abu Bakr, and adopted son Zaid. Around 613, Muhammad began to preach to the public. Most Meccans ignored and mocked him, but he did begin to gain followers. There were three main groups of early converts to Islam: younger brothers and sons of great merchants; people who had fallen out of the first rank in their tribe or failed to attain it; and the weak, mostly unprotected foreigners.

Basic Tenets and Practices of Islam

Islam is a monotheistic and Abrahamic religion articulated by the Quran, which is considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allah), and, for the vast majority of adherents, by the teachings and normative example (called the *sunnah*, composed of accounts called *hadith*) of Muhammad. An adherent of Islam is called a Muslim. Muslims believe that God is one and incomparable and that the purpose of existence is to worship God. Nearly all Muslims consider Muhammad to be the last prophet of God.

Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed many times before through prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims believe the Quran to be both the unaltered and the final revelation of God. Religious concepts and practices include the Five Pillars of Islam and following Islamic law, which touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, from banking and welfare to the status of women and the environment.

The Five Pillars of Islam are five basic acts in Islam; they are considered mandatory by believers and are the foundation of Muslim life. They are summarized in the famous *hadith* of Gabriel. The Five Pillars are:

1. *Shahada* (faith): there is only one God (Allah), and Muhammad is God's messenger. It is a set statement normally recited in Arabic: *lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāhu muḥammadun rasūlu-llāh* (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ) "There is no god but God (and) Muhammad is the messenger of God."
2. *Salat* (prayer): consists of five daily prayers, the names referring to the prayer times: *Fajr* (dawn), *Dhuhr* (noon), *'Aṣr* (afternoon), *Maghrib* (evening), and *'Ishā'* (night). All of these prayers are recited while facing in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, and are accompanied by a series of set positions including bowing with hands on knees, standing, prostrating, and sitting in a special position.
3. *Zakāt* (charity): the practice of charitable giving based on accumulated wealth. It is the personal responsibility of each Muslim to ease the economic hardship of others and to strive towards eliminating inequality. *Zakāt* consists of spending a portion of one's wealth for the benefit of the poor or needy, like debtors or travelers.
4. *Sawm* (fasting): three types of fasting are recognized by the Quran: ritual fasting, fasting as compensation for repentance, and ascetic fasting. Ritual fasting is an obligatory act during the month of Ramadan. The fast is meant to allow Muslims to

seek nearness to and look for forgiveness from God, to express their gratitude to and dependence on him, to atone for their past sins, and to remind them of the needy.

5. *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca): every able-bodied Muslim is obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her life. The main rituals of the *Hajj* include walking seven times around the Kaaba, termed *Tawaf*; touching the Black Stone, termed *Istilam*; traveling seven times between Mount Safa and Mount Marwah, termed *Sa'yee*; and symbolically stoning the Devil in Mina, termed *Ramee*.

Mecca to Medina

As Islam faced more political and religious opposition in Mecca, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina in 622 CE.

Key Points

- As Islam spread in Mecca, the ruling tribes began to oppose Muhammad's preaching and his condemnation of idolatry.
- The Quraysh tribe controlled the Kaaba and drew their religious and political power from its polytheistic shrines, so they began to persecute the Muslims and many of Muhammad's followers became martyrs.
- When Muhammad's wife Khadijah and uncle Abu Talib both died in 619 CE, Abu Lahab assumed leadership of the Banu Hashim clan and withdrew the clan's protection from Muhammad.
- In 622 CE, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib in the Hijra to escape persecution, renaming the city Medina in honor of the prophet.
- Among the first things Muhammad did to ease the longstanding grievances among the tribes of Medina was draft a document known as the Constitution of Medina.

Muhammad Starts Preaching

During the first three years of his ministry, Muhammad preached Islam privately, mainly among his near relatives and close acquaintances. According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad's wife Khadija was the first to believe he was a prophet. She was followed by Muhammad's ten-year-old cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, close friend Abu Bakr, and adopted son Zaid. According to Islamic belief, in the fourth year of Muhammad's prophethood, around 613, he was ordered by God to make his propagation of this monotheistic faith public. Muhammad's earliest teachings were marked by his insistence on the oneness of God, the denunciation of polytheism, belief in the last judgment and its recompense, and social and economic justice.

Most Meccans ignored and mocked him, though a few became his followers. There were three main groups of early converts to Islam: younger brothers and sons of great merchants; people who had fallen out of the first rank in their tribe or failed to attain it; and the weak, mostly unprotected foreigners.

Death of Khadijah and Abu Talib in 619 CE

Muhammad's wife Khadijah and Uncle Abu Talib both died in 619 CE, the year that became known as the "year of sorrow." With the death of Abu Talib, Abu Lahab assumed leadership of the Banu Hashim clan. Soon after, Abu Lahab withdrew the clan's protection from Muhammad, endangering him and his followers. Muhammad took this opportunity to look for a new home for himself and his followers. After several unsuccessful negotiations, he found hope with some men from Yathrib (later called Medina). The Arab population of Yathrib were familiar with monotheism and were prepared for the appearance of a prophet because a Jewish community existed there as well. They also hoped, by the means of Muhammad and the new faith, to gain supremacy over Mecca; the Yathrib were jealous of its importance as the place of pilgrimage. Converts to Islam came from nearly all Arab tribes in Medina; by June of the subsequent year, seventy-five Muslims came to Mecca for pilgrimage and to meet Muhammad.

At the end of the 10th year after the migration to Medina, Muhammad performed his first truly Islamic pilgrimage, thereby teaching his followers the rules governing the various ceremonies of the annual Great Pilgrimage. In 632, a few months after returning to Medina from the Farewell Pilgrimage, Muhammad fell ill and died. By the time Muhammad died, most of the Arabian Peninsula had converted to Islam, and he had united Arabia into a single Muslim religious polity.