

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW)

Prophet Muhammad (saw)

Muhammad ibn Abdullah (570 – 8 June 632 CE) was an Arab religious, social, and political leader, who revived the religion of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (saw) was a prophet, divinely inspired to preach and confirm the monotheistic teachings of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. Prophet Muhammad (saw) is the final prophet of God. Prophet Muhammad (saw) united Arabia into a single Muslim polity with the Qur'an.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was born in 570 CE in Mecca. He was the son of Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib and Amina bint Wahb. His father 'Abdullah was the son of the Quraysh tribal leader Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, he died a few months before Prophet Muhammad (saw)'s birth. His mother Amina died when he was six. He was raised under the care of his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, and paternal uncle, Abu Talib. The revelations, each known as an Ayah – literally, "Sign of God" that Prophet Muhammad (saw) reported receiving until his death form the verses of the Holy Qur'an. Prophet Muhammad (saw)'s teachings and practices (sunnah) found in the Ahadiths are also used as sources of Islamic law (Sharia).

Less than one hundred years after Prophet Muhammad (saw) 's death in 632, the first Muslim historians began to write about his life. These were Prophet Muhammad (saw) ibn Ishaq (d. 767), Prophet Muhammad (saw) ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi (d. ca 820); Prophet Muhammad (saw) ibn Sa'd (d. 845); and Abu Jarir at-Tabari (d. 923).

These scholars reconstructed their narrative from oral traditions and early documents, and through their effort we know more about Prophet Muhammad (saw) than we do of any other Prophet.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was born in Mecca in 570, the year known as the Year of the Elephant, in which Mecca was miraculously saved. Abraha, the Abyssinian Christian ruler of Yemen, attacked Mecca with a herd of elephants. Abraha's goal was to destroy the Ka'abah and make the Christian church at Sana' the new religious center of the Arab world. The terrified Quraysh had never seen an elephant before, much less a whole herd, so they ran to the mountains to escape, leaving the Ka'abah with no defence, as they were about to attack the Ka'abah, the sky turned dark with a flock of birds carrying stones, they rained down the stones upon the invaders and destroyed them.

By the time Prophet Muhammad (saw) was eight, his grandfather died, he was taken in by his uncle Abu Talib, who had a successful caravan business.

In a story that resembles that of Samuel in the Old Testament, it was on a trading expedition to Syria, when Prophet Muhammad (saw) was only nine years old, that a Christian monk named Bahira recognized him as "the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds."

Prophet Muhammad (saw) at the age of 25 met a very distant cousin, Khadija. According to most sources, she was about 40 years old with children from her previous marriages, a beautiful widow. Khadija was unusual for a woman of her time, she was a respected member of the Meccan society and a very

successful businesswoman. In spite of his tenuous social circumstances, according to Ibn Hisham, Prophet Muhammad (saw) had a reputation for truthfulness, reliability, and nobility of character, so Khadija entrusted him to take a caravan of goods to Syria and sell them. When he returned home with more profits than she anticipated, she proposed marriage to him and he accepted, thus acquiring status and entry into Meccan society. Polygamy was a normal practice at that time, Prophet Muhammad (saw) and Khadija were in a monogamous marriage for twenty-five years until her death. They had six children, three sons and four daughters, except one son, named Ibrahim, who was born to Maria al-Qibtiyya. Prophet Muhammad (saw) also had an adopted son, Zayd ibn Harithah.

- Qasim (CE 598 – 601)
- Zainab (CE 599 – 629)
- Ruqayyah (CE 601 – 624)
- Umm Kulthum (CE 603 – 630)
- Fatimah (CE 605 – 632) (disputed date-of-birth)
- Abdullah (CE 611 – 615)
- Ibrahim (CE 630 – 632)

With his marriage and his businesses doing well, he now had access to a prosperous life, he saw first-hand that although the leading families of the Quraysh believed in the one God, this belief was not relevant to their lives; they had forgotten that everything depended upon God. They took no responsibility for the people outside their immediate, elite circle.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) saw the decline in traditional values as a threat to the very existence of his tribe. He was sure that social reform had to be based

on a new spiritual foundation for it to actually take effect. As a trader, Prophet Muhammad (saw) came in frequent contact with Jews and Christians. According to the scholar Iqbal Ali Shah, Prophet Muhammad (saw) made an exhaustive study of other religions. Prophet Muhammad (saw) was aware that his people, although they believed in Allah, lacked a sacred book of their own. The people of the Book had codified Laws that were both religious and social, governing their behaviour from dawn to dusk. His own people had no such thing and because of this their lives were in chaos, many were suffering and destitute, and the whole tribe was in danger of extinction. Before the revelations, he had no idea that his destiny would be to implement these vital changes. He was from a minor clan, the Hashim, and scholars point out that, in common with other prophets before him, he initially wanted nothing to do with what was happening to him and was extremely upset, so much so that without Khadija's intervention Prophet Muhammad (saw) might have gone through with his plan to end it all.

Prophet Muhammad (saw), the Messenger

Prophet Muhammad (saw) had developed a refined integrated understanding, an intuitive capacity to connect to what has been referred to throughout our religious history as God/Truth/Knowledge/Love. As a result of this, Prophet Muhammad (saw) understood the duty and function of his life. Jesus, Prophet Muhammad (saw) and all other prophets – many of whom are referred to in the Qur'an – along with Islamic Sufi teachers who would come after Prophet Muhammad (saw), are examples of human being's, who reached a permanent stage where they were able to maintain existence in two worlds. "They were in the world but not of the world." (the Prophet)

Mount Hira'

Tradition states that one day, when Prophet Muhammad (saw) was about forty years old, he was alone in a cave on Mount Hira, suddenly he saw before him a brightness like the dawn, an angel who commanded that he recite ... Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that he could not do so.

“Then he took me and squeezed me vehemently and then let me go and repeated the order ‘Recite.’ ‘I cannot recite’ said I, and once again he squeezed me and let me go till I was exhausted. Then he said, ‘Recite.’ I said, ‘I cannot read.’ He squeezed me for a third time and then let me go and said: ‘Recite in the name of your lord who created – From an embryo created the human. Recite your lord is all-giving, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know before.

The human being is a tyrant, who thinks that his possession’s make him secure. To your lord is the return of everything” (Qur’an: 96:1-8)

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was terrified and unable to understand what had happened to him. Had he gone mad or become one of the Kahins, the ecstatic poets whom he despised? What had happened? He staggered down the mountain and sought Khadija, crying “Wrap me up! Wrap me up!” Khadija covered him in a cloak and held him and when he was calmer, questioned him. He told her what he had experienced and that he feared he had gone mad, but Khadija had no doubt that his revelation was authentic, “This cannot be my dear, God would not treat you thus. You are known to be truthful and a bearer of the burdens of others. You give to the poor, you feed guests, you work against injustice,” but Prophet Muhammad (saw) was inconsolable, so

Khadija, who was a Christian took him to the only person she could think might be able to verify the nature of what had happened, her cousin Waraqa. Waraqa, an Ebionite Christian, had been one of the founding four Hanifs. He recognized Prophet Muhammad (saw)'s experience for what it was: "If this be true, Khadija, there has come to him the great divinity (Gabriel) who came to Moses a foretime, and lo, he is the Prophet of these people."

The revelations that Prophet Muhammad (saw) received were conveyed to others in words remote from his world: he was not known to have composed any poetry and had no special rhetorical gifts. From the first revelation, the Suras (chapters) of the Qur'an would deal with matters of belief, law, politics, ritual, spirituality and personal conduct, cosmology, and economics.

The Qur'an states, "If you are in doubt of what We have revealed to Our messenger, then produce one chapter like it. Call upon all your helpers, besides God, if you are truthful." (Qur'an 2.23) No one was able to do this.

Revelations and the Qur'an

Islam considers the Qur'an to be a document that had existed throughout all eternity, graven like the tablets of Moses by the hand of God. We (Muslim's) see Prophet Muhammad (saw) as God's scribe, and the classical Arabic of the Qur'an to be created by God and the eternal language of heaven. It was a task into which he poured all his energy and abilities. It will be remembered that Prophet Muhammad (saw) testified, 'Never once did I receive a revelation without thinking my soul had been torn away from me.' It is, also clear that he constantly strove towards ultimate perfection in this task of recitation. Perhaps he knew he had succeeded when the recitations no longer sounded

within him as clear as a bell, but he could hear them as if they were dictated by an angel (**Gabriel**) standing ‘at a distance of two bows – or even closer.’”

The Qur’an is a document with numerous levels of transmission, each one of which has a meaning in accordance with the capacity for understanding of the reader. It is this attitude toward the book which made possible the understanding between people who were of nominally Christian, pagan or Jewish backgrounds—a feeling which the orthodox could not understand. The Qur’an in one sense is therefore a document of psychological importance.

Chapter 112 of the Qur’an is an excellent example of this synthesizing capacity of the book. This is one of the shortest chapters, and it may be translated thus: Say, O messenger, to the people: ‘He, Allah, is Unity! Allah the Eternal. Fathering nobody, and not himself engendered, and absolutely nothing is like him!’”

A modern understanding of a revelation is that at such times Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) and other prophets experienced a higher state of consciousness that enabled them to intuitively understand aspects of an alternate Reality. This Reality is “beyond words.” “I cannot recite” might actually mean that the experience is impossible to put into words.

Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) developed a refined integrated understanding, an intuitive capacity to connect to what has been referred to throughout our religious history as God/Truth/Knowledge and Love. As a result, Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) understood the duty and function of his life. Jesus and Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) and other prophets – many of whom are referred to in the Qur’an – along with Islamic Sufi teachers who would come after

Prophet Muhammad (saw) are examples of human beings who reached a permanent stage where they were able to maintain existence in two world's. In the words of Prophet Muhammad (saw), they were “in the world, but not of the world.”

“Speak to everyone in accordance with his degree of understanding” is a dictum of Prophet Muhammad (saw). Traditionally, it is understood that there are seven levels of understanding passages of the Qur'an. Its major goal then was to provide contemporary guidance to those who wished to live an exemplary life, not only on a societal level but, more importantly, on an interior level. Everything – thought, action, and word – needed to be in harmony if one were to follow in Prophet Muhammad (saw) 's footsteps. As Fred Donner writes in his book ‘Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing’, The Qur'an omits politics then and in the future.

The Qur'an offers no clear guidance on who should exercise political power among the Believers after Prophet Muhammad (saw) – or even if anyone should; this simply does not seem to be of interest or concern to the Qur'an. Nor does it provide any indication of how power should be exercised; the only exceptions are moral injunctions to all Believers alike. It does, however, provide detailed rules of conduct for the individual.

For example, in Sura 4 An-Nisaa' (The Women), one gets the sense that this is God's guide to life with the Absolute is the only reason for the Believer's life. God reckons all things. He is fully conscious of everything we do. He is forgiving and yet merciful – you don't have to worry about anyone else's behaviour, worry about your own in the sight of God. God watches every

action, every thought, behaviour and intention. The text establishes the requisite mental and emotional attitude, the continuous exercise of self-observation and awareness, that will take the Believer further into the consciousness of God. “You shall remember god while standing, sitting or lying down.” (Qur’an 4: 103) Through haunting repetition one is constantly reminded that: God is omniscient. Most wise. God is the forgiver. Most merciful. God is aware of everything you do. God is the Pardoner, Omnipotent. God is Almighty – Most wise. God is in full control of all thing’s. He has taught you what you never knew.

As a Believer with progress in understanding, his responsibility increases: Sura 3: 7 “None receive this reminder except men of understanding.”

From a traditional point of view, “God’s words were inspired directly to Prophet Muhammad (saw) as they had been to the Old Testament Prophets before him. Because it is the language of sacred texts, Hebrew was often considered sacred. In post-biblical times, it was referred to as *lashon ha-kodesh*, the holy language. And like biblical Hebrew, the Arabic of the Qur’an is also considered sacred, because it is the language through which Prophet Muhammad (saw) received God’s revelations. Both Hebrew and Arabic have multiple resonances of words that have the same trilateral root which affect the listener on multiple levels.

The Qur’an refers to the Old Testament narratives and prophets such as Joseph, Jacob, Abraham, and Moses and New Testament figures, such as Mary, Zachariah and Jesus. The lesson of every prophet is that there is an eternal moral choice – the choice between good and evil, Belief and unbelief –

faced by all people from Adam, and hence simply repeated generation after generation.

The seven verses of Al-Fatiha, the first sura of the Qur'an.

After the first revelation there was a gap of two years in which Prophet Muhammad (saw) received no revelations, and he quite naturally would have doubted the veracity of the first one. After all, he was not from a distinguished clan, not a miracle worker, and not an impressive figure in the eyes of the Quraysh; what was he doing receiving the word of God? Then a second vision occurred, this time revealing that those who experience the care of God have a duty to others "... one who asks for help – do not turn him away;" (Qur'an 93: 10) and Prophet Muhammad (saw) was clearly instructed to proclaim God's message to the Quraysh: "And the grace of your lord – proclaim!" (Qur'an 93: 11) Thus Prophet Muhammad (saw) became a Messenger whose duty was to remind his people of what they had forgotten in both religious and social terms.

The prophet received revelations for 23 years until his death in 632.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) never thought nor claimed to be inventing a new religion. He never sought power nor took advantage of his situation or status: "I am nothing but a warner and a herald of glad tidings unto people who will believe." (Qur'an 7:188) "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith." (Qur'an 2: 256), and again, "But if they turn away from you, O Prophet, remember that your only duty is a clearly delivery My message, which has been entrusted to you." (Qur'an 16:82)

From the second revelation until his death he maintained a singleness of purpose as a Messenger of God to convey and carry out His wishes. He was tasked to restore the original monotheistic faith of Adam, Abraham and other prophets whose messages had become misinterpreted or corrupted over time. His revelations confirmed that the God of the “People of the Book” was the one and only Allah, God of all humanity, and that people should honour Him and only Him in life and deed. (Qur’an 42:13) says : “God has established for you the same religion as that which was enjoined upon Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.”

Reza Aslan notes in, ‘No god but God, The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam’, it is not surprising that: “There are striking similarities between the Christian and Qur’anic description of the Apocalypse, the Last Judgment, and the paradise awaiting those who have been saved.” But he points out that “These similarities do not contradict the Muslim belief that the Qur’an was divinely revealed, but they do indicate that the Qur’anic vision of the Last Days may have been revealed to the pagan Arabs through a set of symbols and metaphors, with which they were already familiar, thanks to some parts of the wide spread Christianity in the region.”

Qur'an manuscript from the 7th century CE, written on vellum in the Hijazi script.



Just as the first followers of Jesus did not consider themselves members of a new religion, neither did the initial “believers” close to Prophet Muhammad (saw). The group included former pagan’s, Jew’s and Christian’s: monotheist’s who saw themselves as people trying to live in accordance with God’s rules and law.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) and the Believers.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) built a movement of devout spiritualists from many faiths who shared a few core beliefs: God was One, the end of the world was near, and religious individuals had to live an exemplary life, rather than merely pay lip service to God’s laws. It was almost a century after Prophet Muhammed (saw) founded his ‘community of believers’ and launched the great Islamic conquest that his followers started to define their beliefs as a distinct religious faith.”

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was a gentle and contemplative man, he had no real status within the Quraysh tribe and was not of the stature that the Arab

world would expect of a Prophet. He was not a violent man, rather faced a violent, barbaric, corrupt, greedy and contemptuous world that he understood would destroy itself unless it changed. Prophet Muhammad (saw) literally sweated with the effort to bring peace to war-torn Arabia. He realized that Arabia was at a turning point, and that the old way of thinking would no longer suffice, so he wore himself out in the creative effort to evolve an entirely new solution.

Those close to Prophet Muhammad (saw) were the first to believe in his revelations. Ali, who was taken in by Prophet Muhammad (saw) when his father, Abu Talib, was in financial distress, was the first; then Zayd, who remained at his side, although he had been a Syrian slave until he was given his freedom by Prophet Muhammad (saw); the merchant Abu Bakr was the third to join the believers. He had a reputation for kindness and honesty and once he joined Prophet Muhammad (saw), others who knew him did the same. The Messenger's immediate goal was to bring the message of Allah to his own tribe, and many of the revelations were extremely difficult for the Quraysh to adopt. Not only had they to reject all their idols, but their conduct had to change entirely – they had to submit their will to the will of Allah.

Ideas that shaped the Modern World.

Prophet Muhammad (saw), was tasked to unite not only the Arab tribes, but, as he proclaimed again and again, anyone who believes in the One True God. His mystical experience of the Night Journey prepared him for this life-long task. The record of his experience inspired generations of mystics, including the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages and beyond.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was openly abused on the streets of Mecca. He could no longer preach or pray in public.

In many traditional teaching stories there comes a point at which the protagonist, having gone through numerous hardships, continues to be faced with so many obstacles, he or she feels that “all is lost” then a breakthrough – psychological or circumstantial – occurs. People working creatively on a challenging task of any kind have frequently reported experiencing despair prior to a breakthrough. It was so with Prophet Muhammed (saw) when in 619 the “year of sadness,” he lost not only his wife of 25 years, Khadija, but also his uncle, and protector, the tribal chief Abu Talib. He was not only devastated, but found, himself, in an extremely precarious situation. Prophet Muhammad (saw) was openly abused on the streets of Mecca. He could no longer preach or pray in public. When he tried to do so, one person poured dirt over his head, and another threw a sheep’s uterus at him.

After his first revelation, Khadija’s elderly cousin Waraqa had warned Prophet Muhammad (saw) that his task would not be easy and that the Quraysh would, eventually expel him from Mecca. Prophet Muhammad (saw) had been dismayed at hearing this, but almost seven years later, it looked inevitable. His message was dividing the families of Mecca, appealing above all to the young. The Believers were in essence removing themselves from the traditions of the tribe. Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his followers were seen to be undermining the rituals and values upon which the Quraysh religious and economic foundation depended, a devastating boycott was put upon the whole tribe of Hashim, to try to starve the Believers out of Mecca. It seemed inevitable that he and his followers would have to take steps

unheard of in the Arab world: they would have to leave their city, their tribe, their clan, their family ties and possessions and go off into the desert to establish a new community.

Prophet Muhammad (saw) was still grieving for Khadijah, and his position in Mecca was desperately precarious; and after preaching for seven years, he had made no real headway. Yet at this low point of his career, he had the greatest personal mystical experience of his life. One night he was awakened by the Angel Gabriel and conveyed miraculously to the holy city of the Jews and Christians – the Qur’an refers only obliquely to this vision:

“Limitless in His glory, who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship (al masjid al-haram) to the Remote House of Worship (al-masjid al-Aqsa) – the environs, of which We had blessed – so that We might show him some of Our signs.” (Qur’an 17:1)

Jerusalem is not mentioned by name, but later tradition associated the “Remote House” with the holy city of the “People of the Book.”

Later Muslims, starting with Ibn Ishaq’s eighth-century biography of Prophet Muhammad (saw), began to piece together all the fragmentary references to create a coherent narrative. According to the historian Tabari, Prophet Muhammad (saw) told his companions that he had once been taken by angel Gabriel and Michael to meet his “fathers”: Adam (in the first heaven) and Abraham (in the seventh heaven), and that he also saw his “brothers”: Jesus, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Joseph.

Ibn Ishaq presents the event as a spiritual experience. He tells of Aisha, the prophet’s wife and daughter of Abu Bakr as saying, “The Prophet’s body

stayed where it was, while Allah transported his spirit by night.” Later historians like Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir describe it as a physical journey, which many Muslims prefer to believe.

Whatever one’s interpretation, the Night Journey is important. From his youth, the Prophet had been a unifier. The historian Ibn Ishaq, in a memorable story, tells of a reconstruction of the Ka’ba when Prophet Muhammad (saw) was a boy. A quarrel broke out between the Meccan clans as to which clan should set the Black Stone in place. The solution was to ask the first person who entered the Sanctuary to be the judge. Prophet Muhammad (saw) was the first to do so. He put the stone on to a heavy cloth and had all the clan elders take part of the cloth to raise it, and thus share in the task equally.

Now, not only did this mystical experience prepare Prophet Muhammad (saw) for the Hijra but, more importantly, from it he moves away from tribalism and finishes with an embrace of humanity.

Prophet Muhammad (saw), the last Prophet of God, was tasked to unite not only the Arab tribes, but, as he proclaimed again and again, anyone who believes in the One True God. Anyone can enter into a new community of unity between themselves and Allah.

God has established for you the same religion, which He had enjoined upon Noah, Abraham, Moses, and on Jesus. “All Believers, Jews, Sabaeans or Christians - whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right - shall have nothing to fear nor to regret.” (Qur’an 2: 62)

The record of this Night Journey experience inspired generations of mystics to seek a similar experience of divinity. “It kept the religion open to the mystics, the Sufis, who followed in the steps of Prophet Muhammad (saw), men such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Sidi Belhassan and Rumi Mevlana, who for generations would explode the stuffy legalism that threatened to constrict Islam and recharge the creed with Allah’s light, love and a divine scent that came not from this world.”

The Hijra

The first four verses (Ayat) of Al-Alaq, the 96th chapter (sura) of the Qur’an.



The Hijra, the name for the migration from Mecca to an area called Yathrib (later Medina), took place at night and was a clandestine operation. Sons and daughters left their family homes for a week-long journey through the barren wilderness. The old man Waraqa’s warning had proved correct. Upon arrival Prophet Muhammad (saw) allowed his camel to select a place for the first masjid (place for prostration in prayer to Allah, which would later become a mosque) so as not to give any preference to anyone’s choice. This

small group of about 70 Believers became the first of a new kind of community (**Ummah**), one whose establishment was commemorated many years later on by a uniquely Muslim calendar. That year, 622 CE, became known as the year 1 AH (**After Hijra**) and at that time the oasis of Yathrib then became celebrated as Medinat an-Nabi, “The City of the Prophet” – Medina.

Unlike Jesus or the Buddha, who seem to have been purely spiritual leaders with no temporal responsibilities, Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) found himself now head of a state. Having transferred the Muslim families from Mecca to Medina, he now had to make sure they could survive. Establishing the community in Yathrib was not going to be easy and Prophet Muhammad (**saw**) and his Believers were pushed into conflict with the Quraysh, when desperation forced some believers to send out a ghazu raid to disrupt and loot Quraysh caravans. Unfortunately, this occurred during the sacred month, so it galvanized the Quraysh and resulted in the Battle of Badr in 624 CE. A thousand Quraysh, some on horseback, met the smaller Muslim group, but the latter, although poorly equipped, were highly motivated and won.

Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, at sunset



Warfare

Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his companions patiently bore persecution in Mecca for nearly 13 year's. This included a three-year starvation boycott, which lead to his wife Khadija's death. The situation worsened so Prophet Muhammad (saw) sent some of the Believers to Abyssinia to seek refuge under a Christian King. When the Prophet's companions asked to fight back, Prophet Muhammad (saw) told them, "I have not been given permission to fight." And, finally, when the persecution became unbearable, Prophet Muhammad (saw) and the Muslims simply left Mecca – still refusing to fight back.

They trekked 240 miles through the desert to escape these aggressors, finally arriving in the predominantly Jewish city of Medina where the Prophet was invited to act as Conciliator between fractious Jewish and Pagan tribes. Prophet Muhammad (saw), in his new role there as Head of State, formed what is known as the Constitution of Medina which established a unified secular state. Yet the extremists from Mecca pursued the Community and then, finally the Qur'an addressed fighting for the first time, permitting them to fight back, but only in self-defence. Qur'an 22:40-41 "Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged and Allah indeed has power to help them." Fighting wasn't just to defend Muslims from persecution, but to defend Christians, Jews, and people of all faiths that were under Prophet Muhammad (saw)'s protection. All subsequent verses addressing fighting are pre-conditioned on these clearly outlined rules of self-defence. For example, in the Qur'an 2: 194 "Fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for Allah. But if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors."

So, according to the Qur'an, Muslims may only fight active combatants. And if during a battle an enemy combatant asks for amnesty, a Believer must grant it.

Prisoners of War

The Prophet instructed that Prisoners of War should be treated as if they were family members. He favoured freedom after restitution. Those who could not pay monetary restitution were asked to teach ten individuals to read and to write. According to Cherif Bassiouni of DePaul University ([Chicago, IL](#)) this is the first time in recorded history that POWs were treated humanely as a policy. Here there were no class distinctions; the value of one man was not higher than another's.

The Quraysh attack during the Battle of Uhud two years later resulted in seventy of the 700 believer's being killed, and those taken prisoner by the Quraysh were tortured and mutilated. In the fifth year after the Hijra a third major confrontation occurred, The Battle of Khandaq ([The Trench](#)). This time the believer's took the advice of a Persian and dug a trench alongside the city most vulnerable to attack. The episode resulted in a victory for the Muslims without a battle actually being fought. The Quraysh, who had never encountered such a situation in battle, were unable to cross it and eventually turned back, defeated.

The community of Believers expanded rapidly since anyone from any culture, race or tribe could join the Ummah by simply declaring: "There is no god but God, and Prophet Muhammad ([saw](#)) is God's Messenger." As head of the Ummah, Prophet Muhammad ([saw](#)) undertook the protection of every

member. Here there were no class distinctions; the value of one man was not higher than another's. Prophet Muhammad (saw) urged against the traditional tribal Law of Retribution towards forgiveness: "The retribution for an injury is an equal injury, but those who forgive the injury and make reconciliation will be rewarded by God." (Qur'an 42:40)

Usury was forbidden and taxes were replaced by a tithe called, 'Zakat' whereby everyone gave according to his means for the care of the less fortunate one's: "True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the East or the West, but truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day; and the angels, and His revelations, and the prophets; and spends his substance – however much he himself may cherish it – upon his kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; and is constant in prayer, and renders the purifying dues; and the truly pious are they who keep their promises whenever they promise, and are patient in misfortune and hardship and during times of peril: it is they that have proved themselves true, and it is they, who are conscious of God." (Qur'an 2:177)

Women's Rights

Women's rights were foremost in Prophet Muhammad (saw)'s struggle for social and economic egalitarianism. Here are some of the areas addressed:

- The Qur'an (in 33.35) emphasizes the equality of the sexes in the eyes of God in all but physical strength, which men should use to provide for women.

- Prophet Muhammad (saw) said: “Women are the twin-halves of men.”
- He changed the laws of inheritance so that women could inherit and maintain their own wealth and their husband’s in the event of his death.
- Women could now keep their marriage dowries as their own personal property, even if they divorce.
- For the first time he gave women the right to divorce their husbands if they feared cruelty or ill-treatment. (Qur’an4:128)
- For the first time he limited the number of wives a man could have. He accepted that men should be able to have up to four wives, with one proviso: “only if you can treat them all equally.” (Qur’an 4:3)
- He did not allow women to have more than one husband. The scholar Reza Aslan describes this step as one that was necessary to ensure the survival of the community at Yathrib, which, after war with the Quraysh, resulted in hundreds of widows and orphans who needed to be provided for and protected.
- The tradition of women wearing a veil was borrowed from the upper classes of Iranian and Syrian women and used by Prophet Muhammad (saw)’s wives as an identifier and for their protection. Though modesty was required of all believers, during the Prophet’s lifetime only his wives wore a veil (Hijab).

- As Leila Ahmed and others have observed, nowhere in the Qur'an is the term Hijab applied to any other women.

By the year 630 CE Prophet Muhammad (saw) had become the powerful leader of an expanding community and was able to lead 10,000 Believers back to Mecca for the Hajj, a pilgrimage that remains a cornerstone of the spiritual life of Muslims. There the same people who had tried to murder him now offered him the keys to the Ka'abah unconditionally and without a fight. From that time on he was generally accepted by the faithful as the true, final Prophet of God and continued to lead his community both spiritually and in earthly matters until his death in 632.

Saying of the Prophet

“Speak to everyone in accordance with his degree of understanding.”

“I order you to assist any oppressed person, whether he is a Muslim or not.”

“Do you think you love your Creator? Love your fellow-creature first.”

“Those who are crooked, and those who are greedy, and those who like to recount their favours upon others cannot enter Paradise.”

“He is not a perfect believer, who goes to bed full and knows that his neighbour is hungry.”

“By the One who holds my soul in His hand, a man does not believe until he loves for his neighbour or brother what he loves for himself.”

“You ask me to curse the unbelievers, but I was not sent to curse anyone.”

“My back has been broken by ‘pious’ men.”

“Desire not the world, and God will love you. Desire not what others have, and they will love you.”

“Do not ask for authority, for if you are given it as a result of asking, you will be left to deal with it yourself, but if you are given it without asking, you will be helped in undertaking it.”

“Treat this world as I do, like a wayfarer; like a horseman who stops in the shade of a tree for a while, and then moves on.”

“Trust God, but tie your camel first.”

“Die before your death.”

“The ink of a learned man is holier than the blood of the martyr.”

Challenge of Diversity

“Unto every one of you have We appointed a different law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but He willed it otherwise in order to test you by means of what

He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.” (Qur’an 5:48)

Knowledge

The Prophet said: “There will be a time when knowledge will be absent.” Ziad (adopted son of the Prophet) said: “How could knowledge disappear, when we have the Qur’an, and teach it to our children, and they will teach it to their children, until the day of requital?” Prophet Muhammad (saw) answered: “You amaze me, O Ziad, for I thought that you were the chief of the learned of Medina. Do the Jews and Christians not read the Torah and the Gospels without understanding anything of their real meaning?”