

Mohammed (PBUH)

(570 - 632 e.v.)

Muhammad ibn Abdallah was born into the Bani Hashim branch of the powerful Quraysh tribe, which had historically ruled the pagan city of Mecca (Makkah). Mecca was an important city even in those days, pilgrims from all over Arabia made pilgrimage to Mecca to circumambulate the Kaaba and kiss the Black Stone, which was then consecrated to the moon-god Hubal. Mohammed's father died before Mohammed was born. Mohammed was brought up first by his mother, Amina, then by his Grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, later by his uncle, Abu Talib. Throughout his childhood he was attracted to the world of the spirit. He was drawn to solitary contemplation, and he often experienced visions.

At the age of thirty-five, Mohammed began taking retreats to a cave in Mount Hira, in the desert hills outside Mecca, to meditate in solitude. It was during one of these retreats that Mohammed received his Call. It was the year 610 e.v., one of the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan; and at that time, Ramadan occurred during the hottest part of the summer. He was sitting along in his cave in the darkness, wrapped in his shroud, when he was startled by a sound "like the reverberations of a bell." He realized that it was a voice, and the voice had exclaimed the word, "Iqraa!" ("Read!"). Mohammed falteringly replied that he could not read. The voice repeated its command. Mohammed protested that he did not know how to read, but the voice repeated its command a third time. Mohammed then asked what it was that he should read, and a luminous scroll, inscribed with letters of fire, appeared before him. He read the words, though he had never read before.

In further revelations, Mohammed's mission in life was clarified: he had been called upon to preach to the world the true Faith of the One God. At first he was reticent - he had doubts about the authenticity or source of his vision. But Khadija encouraged him, and soon his calling was confirmed by additional visions which revealed the terrible doom which lay in store for sinners and infidels. He began to preach to a small group of close associates. Khadija and Waraqa were his first disciples, then came his friend and business associate Abu Bakr, 'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, and Mohammed's slave Zayd ibn-Thabit.

Muslims do not consider Islam to be a new religion. Islam was intended to be a reform of the ancient religion of Abraham, of which Judaism and Christianity are branches. Islam confirms the truth of the Torah and the Gospels, but purports to clarify them, to correct a number of errors of interpretation, and to purify them from the accretions of rabbinical and priestly sophistries.

Mohammed could not read or write, but his followers recorded his teachings on the materials that were available. After his death, Abu Bakr commanded Zayd to gather together Mohammed's revealed teachings, recorded over a twenty-three year period from 609 e.v. to 632 e.v., into a single volume. This volume became the Qur'an, which constitutes the holy book of Islam. The Qur'an is organized into 114 Chapters in which each Chapter, called a Surah ('degree'), represents one (or more) of Mohammed's revelations; although they are not arranged in chronological order. 93 of the Surahs were received during the 13 years prior to the Hijra at Mecca; the remaining 21 were received later at Madinah.

Islam contains another tradition worth mentioning here: that of the Islamic mystics known as Sufis or Dervishes. Sufism is nearly as old as Islam itself, and, though primarily centered in Persia, the heart of Shi'ism,

crosses over all schismatic boundaries. The Sufis emphasize personal mystical experience over temporal power, and can in this way be considered the "Islamic Gnostics." They are generally detested by both the Shi'a and Sunni orthodoxies. Some scholars believe that Sufism developed through the assimilation into Islam of elements of Christianity and Neoplatonism, but such hypotheses are difficult to prove. Sufism has its own list of philosopher-poet-saints apart from the Caliphs and Imams, some of the greatest of which are Abu Yazid ("Bayazid," died 909 e.v.), Rabi'a al Adawiya (717-801 e.v.), Husayn ibn-Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 e.v.), Abu-Hamid Mohammed al-Ghazzali (1058-1111 e.v.), Fariduddin Attar (1110-1220 e.v.), Muhiyuddin Muhammad ibn-'Ali ibn-al-'Arabi (b. 1165 e.v.) and Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273 e.v.).

In Muslim understanding the origins of Islamic mysticism in the form of Sufism lie in the life of Muhammad. His earliest biographies emphasize his habit of meditating in a cave and living a life of material simplicity bordering on asceticism, both of which are seen as prototypes of mystical belief and practice in Islam. As an organized movement, Sufism too owes its official origins to Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, who is viewed by the majority of Sufis as the first of their kind. Ali was the first male convert to Islam and the man closest to Mohammed in his private life. As such, he is said to have received levels of spiritual guidance from Muhammad that were not available to anyone else. Part of this was a body of mystical knowledge that was passed down through Ali to future generations. The concept of esoteric or mystical knowledge ('ilm al-batin, al-'ilm al-batini, or simply al-batin) became central to the theology of Shiism, one of the two main sectarian divisions in Islam. It also remains at the center of Sufi understanding.

The historically traceable origins of Sufism begin approximately a century after Ali's death. Very little biographical information is available on some of the earliest Muslim ascetic and mystical figures, but they are important for their impact on the development of Sufism. By the late eighth century, members of the school of a famous mystical ascetic named Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) had established a convent (ribat) at Abadan, and others had composed important treatises on Sufi etiquette. Important mystical figures of this period include Dhu'l-Nun Misri (d.c. 859), an Egyptian figure who is of importance to the development of Sufism in western Asia because later Sufis quote him frequently, seeing him as a Muslim exponent of the Hellenistic tradition. An Iranian Sufi names Bayazid Bistami (d. 874) became famous for ecstatic utterances (shathiat), which he was the first to use consistently as an expression of Sufi mystical experience. These somewhat scandalous declarations were dramatic statements made to demonstrate the merging of Bistami's individuality with the divine identity. This sense of union with God was the result of a life-long process of self-purification at both physical and a spiritual level. In his practice of prayer and meditation Bayazid showed strong ascetic tendencies while at the same time ridiculing traditional asceticism because he felt that trying to renounce the physical world was to afford the physical realm an existence that it did not actually possess. The theme of asceticism appears frequently in Iranian Sufism in the ninth century even though many Sufis, like Bistami, rejected the outward trappings of an ascetic life.

The end of the tenth century marks a transition in the development of Sufism from the early formative period that was characterized by a high degree of individualism in practice and a central focus on asceticism to a classical age wherein there is greater emphasis on organization and systematization. This is also a time when

Sufism in western Asia appears somewhat divided between two schools, the first being the Iraqi one (which was transplanted to Nishapur in Iran) and the second being the Khurasani one, centered in northeastern Iran and Afghanistan. The differences between these two schools are not altogether clear and at times appear to have more to do with the theological and legal affiliations of Khurasani Sufis than with any major differences over mystical theory and practice.

Those who are familiar with yogic doctrine will find Advaita (non-duality) proclaimed in the Koran verse: 'He is God alone, God the eternal. He begets not, nor is He begotten, and there is no other like unto Him.' Another verse: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah' teaches that God or Reality is immanent in every part of His creation. However, as in Vedanta, all names and forms are passing and unreal; this is conveyed in the verse: 'Everything is perishing except His countenance.' Muhammad, like the holy Rishis of the Upanishads, instructed his inner circle in the yogic doctrine that the reality in God and in man is one and the same, and that the soul of man has to discover this and return to the bosom of God or his true Self. On this point, two important Hadiths ascribed to Muhammad are 'Heaven and earth contain Me not, but the heart of My believing servant contains Me,' and 'He who knows himself knows God.' KNOW (experience)-THY-SELF...as eternal spirit.

Meditation is the practice of surrendering, i.e., one surrenders one's identification and attachment to the physical body-brain-mind and returns to God (SELF).

The true teaching of Mohammed (PBUH) is not to worship any image in material form or even in the mind, not even his own picture. All forms of worship are dual in nature, i.e., they keep the one who worships separated and distinct from that which is being worshiped.

The true teaching of Mohammed (PBUH) is the practice of God-union, at-onement as described in ancient mysticism (meditation). This is the true esoteric teaching that Mohammed (PBUH) was taught and tried to pass on to the world. Everything is God, not just one God among the many other gods. All human beings are the manifestation of God who must "overcome" (the true and only holy war) the illusion of separateness through the practice of meditation (not just prayer, worship and exoteric practices).

God is the "eternal flame" which is on every candle (human being). All flames are the same divine flame as the original "Father Flame" (God). The problem (downfall or sin for humanity) is when the individualized flames on the candles become "identified" with the candle (the physical body-brain-mind). This causes the fall from grace and the "true knowledge" that they are and always have been eternal flames (eternal spirit). The meditation of Mohammed (PBUH) removes the ignorance and illusion of separateness and brings the "remembrance" of that which has been forgotten, i.e., the prior true knowledge of the spirit, also known as "wisdom" and "revelation" (the sudden experience that one is and always has been eternal spirit) nothing has to be added...only remove the ignorant separate state of mind, the ego-I.



This page has a place provided for a picture of Mohammed.
But out of respect for his teaching, no picture will be displayed.