#### **Islamic studies**

### The 'Year of the Elephant'

The Ethiopian governor of Yemen, Abraha al-Ashram, envied the reverence in which the Ka'bah was held by the Arabs. Being a staunch Christian, he built a big cathedral in Sanaa (the capital of Yemen) and ordered the Arabs to go there for pilgrimage instead. The order was ignored. Not only that; someone entered the cathedral and made it unclean.. In his fury, Abraha decided to avenge it by desecrating the Ka'bah itself. He advanced with a large army towards Macca.

There were many elephants in his army; he himself rode a huge elephant. It was an animal which the Arabs had not seen before, thus the year came to be known as 'Amul-Fil (the year of the elephant), and it started an era for reckoning the years in Arabia. This remained in use until the days of 'Umar ibn al Khattab when, on the advice of Hazrat 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, he replaced it with the era of Hijra.

When news of the advance of Abraha's army came, the Arabian tribes of Quraish, Kinanah, Khuza'ah and Hudhayl joined together to defend the Ka'bah. Abraha sent a small contingent towards Mecca to capture the camels and young people.

Meanwhile,a man from the tribe of Himyar was sent by Abraha to Quraish to advise them that Abraha had not come to fight them: his only aim was to demolish the Ka'bah. But if the Quraish resisted, they would be crushed. Then followed a frightening description of his huge army, which, admittedly, was much larger and better equipped than all the tribes put together.

'Abdul-Muttalib replied to this ultimatum in these words: "By Allah, we do not want to fight him. So far as this House (the Ka'bah) is concerned, it is the House of Allah; if Allah wants to save His House, He will save it, and if He leaves it unprotected, no one can save it."

Then' Abdul-Muttalib, with 'Amr ibn Lu'aba and some other prominent leaders, went to see Abraha. Abraha was informed beforehand of the prestige and position of 'Abdul-Muttalib. Also the personality of 'Abdul-Muttalib was very impressive and awe inspiring.

When he entered Abraha's tent, the latter rose from his throne, warmly welcomed him, and seated him beside him on the carpet. During the conversation, 'Abdul-Muttalib requested him to release his camels. Abraha was astonished. He said: "When my eyes fell upon you, I was so impressed by you that had you requested me to withdraw my army and go back to Yemen, I would have granted that request. But now, I have no respect for you. Why? Here I have come to demolish the House which is the religious center of yours and of your forefathers and the foundation of your prestige and respect in Arabia, and you say nothing to save it; instead, you ask me to return your

few camels back to you?"

'Abdul-Muttalib said: "I am the owner of the camels, (therefore, I tried to save them), and this House has its own Owner Who will surely protect it." Abraha was stunned by this reply. He ordered the camels to be released, and the deputation of Quraish returned.

On the second day, Abraha issued orders to his army to enter Mecca. 'Abdul-Muttalib told the Meccans to leave the city and to seek refuge in the surrounding hills. But he, together with some leading members of Quraish, remained within the precincts of the Ka'bah. Abraha sent someone to warn them to vacate the building. When the messenger came, he asked the people who their leader was. All fingers pointed towards 'Abdul-Muttalib. He was again invited to go to Abraha where he had a talk with him. When he came out, he was heard saying: "The Owner of this House is its Defender, and I am sure He will save it from the attack of the adversaries will dishonor of His House." and not the servants

'Abdul-Muttalib then took hold of the door of the Ka'bah and, crying to Allah prayed in the following words (of poetry):

(O Allah! Surely a man defends his own home, therefore, Thou shouldst protect Thy Own House. Their cross and their wrath can never overcome Thy wrath. O Allah, help Thy Own people against the fellows of the cross and its worshippers).

Then he, too, went to the summit of the hill, Abu Qubays. Abraha advanced with his army. Seeing the walls of the Ka'bah, he ordered its demolition. No sooner had the army reached near the Ka'bah than an army of Allah appeared from the western side. A dark cloud of small birds (known in Arabic as Ababil) overshadowed the entire army of Abraha. Each bird had three pebbles: two in its claws and one in its beak. A rain of the pebbles poured down from the birds, and in a few minutes, the whole army was destroyed. Abraha himself was seriously wounded. He fled towards Yemen but died on the way.

It is to this important event that Allah refers in Chapter 105:

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the Elephant? Did He not make their treacherous plan go astray? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of baked clay, so He rendered them like straw eaten up. (Qu'ran, 105).

It was in the same year that the prophet was born to `Abdullah and Amina.

### **Questions:**

- What is the year of the elephant in Islam?
- -What is the importance of this event for Muslims?
- What can be learnt from this pre-birth event?
- What was the society like at the time?

# **Early Life of the prophet**

- Muhammad was born in or around the year 570 CE to the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe, one of Mecca's prominent families.
- Muhammad was orphaned at an early age and brought up under the care of his paternal uncle Abu Talib.
- Muhammad worked mostly as a merchant, as well as a shepherd, and married Khadijah, a 40-year-old widow, in 595 CE when he was twenty-five.
- In 605 CE, Muhammad honored all the Meccan clan leaders and set the Black Stone back into the correct spot in the Ka'aba.

## 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 (Halimah Assadia), 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.

Q1- When was prophet Muhammad born? And Where?

Q2- What is the prophet's full name?

# **Early Adulthood**

As the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be upon him) grew up, he surpassed everyone in intelligence, modesty and truthfulness. He was known for moderation, honesty and a serious sense of responsibility. In his early youth, he was known to be a thoughtful boy. He worked as a shepherd and played with other children. Even before he received his first revelation, Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) believed in One God, the God of Ibrāhīm (blessings and peace be upon him) and never fell into the common practices of his people of worshipping idols. He believed that there was only one God, and only He was truly worthy of worship. He never gambled nor did he drink alcohol. He did not engage in gossip and backbiting. He gave charity to the poor and looked after the needy. He never lied, never broke a promise and never bore false witness. Everyone respected him, and the people addressed him as "Al-Amīn", which means "the trustworthy one". He was also known as "As- Sadiq" or "The Truthful" for he never told a lie.

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 Allah.

Q1: Everyone respected the prophet, and addressed him as "Al-Amīn", and "As-Sadiq", WHY? Explain.

### His Marriage to Khadijah

When the Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) was twenty-five years old, he married Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, an honorable Qurayshī woman of exceptional character. She was a successful businesswoman with fine intellect and great wealth. When Khadijah was informed about the Prophet's behavior, truthfulness and outstanding ability, she expressed a wish to marry him. Soon afterwards, Khadijah married the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) and the marriage proved a very successful one. Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) was the first woman that the Messenger of God married, and she bore him all his children except for Ibra im. Khadijah bore the Prophet four daughters: Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah and two sons: al-Qasim and 'Abdullah who was also known as at-Tayyib and at-Tāhir.

Q3- How old was the prophet when he married Khadihah?

Q4- Why did Khadihah express to marry the prophet?

Q5- How many children did Khadijah have with the prophet? And who were they?

#### Rebuilding the Ka'bah

When the Messenger of God (blessings and peace be upon him) was thirty-five years old, the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Ka`bah, after a sudden flood had shaken its foundations and cracked its walls. When the rebuilding had reached the stage where the Black Stone (al-Hajar al-Aswad) had to be put in its place, a dispute arose and they began to argue fiercely, each clan wanting the honor of carrying out the noble task of placing the stone. The people were about to fight one another, when one of the elders suggested a solution: "Make the first person to enter the gate your judge", he said. They all looked, and to their immense delight, Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) entered. "It's al-Amīn, the trustworthy one", they cried, "We are content to follow his verdict.". The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) saw what was happening and asked for a piece of cloth. He then took the Black Stone and placed it in the center of the cloth. Thereafter, he told each clan leader to take a corner of the cloth and lift it together. They did this, bringing it to its position. He (blessings and peace be upon him) then put the Black Stone in its place with his own hands. Thus, a bloody conflict was prevented and the dispute was resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Q1: Why did the Quraysh decide to rebuild the Ka`bah?

Q2: Why was it important for the Quraysh clans to put the black stone in its place? How did the prophet help them do so?