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**Introduction**

On the outer edge of the Latin world, in Spain, Sicily, and North Africa, and surrounding Byzantium in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, was the world of Islam. For centuries, Islam was both a threat and the source of new ideas to the Greek East and Latin West. Between the 7th and 12th centuries, Islam became the center of a brilliant civilization and of a great scientific, philosophic, and artistic culture.

Islam is a religion for all people from whatever race or background they might be. That is why Islamic civilization is based on a unity which stands completely against any racial or ethnic discrimination. Such major racial and ethnic groups as the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Africans, Indians, Chinese and Malays in addition to numerous smaller units embraced Islam and contributed to the building of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Islam was not opposed to learning from the earlier civilizations and incorporating their science, learning, and culture into its own world view, as long as they did not oppose the principles of Islam. Each ethnic and racial group which embraced Islam made its contribution to the one Islamic civilization to which everyone belonged. The sense of brotherhood and sisterhood was so much emphasized that it overcame all local attachments to a particular tribe, race, or language--all of which became subservient to the universal Brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam.

The global civilization thus created by Islam permitted people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to work together in cultivating various arts and sciences. Although the civilization was profoundly Islamic, even non-Muslim "people of the book" participated in the intellectual activity whose fruits belonged to everyone. The scientific climate was reminiscent of the present situation in America where scientists and men and women of learning from all over the world are active in the advancement of knowledge which belongs to everyone.

The global civilization created by Islam also succeeded in activating the mind and thought of the people who entered its fold. As a result of Islam, the nomadic Arabs became torch-bearers of science and learning. The Persians who had created a great civilization before the rise of Islam nevertheless produced much more science and learning in the Islamic period than before. The same can be said of the Turks and other peoples who embraced Islam. The religion of Islam was itself responsible not only for the creation of a world civilization in which people of many different ethnic backgrounds participated, but it played a central role in developing intellectual and cultural life on a scale not seen before. For some eight hundred years Arabic remained the major intellectual and scientific language of the world. During the centuries following the rise of Islam, Muslim dynasties ruling in various parts of the Islamic world bore witness to the flowering of Islamic culture and thought. In fact this tradition of intellectual activity was eclipsed only at the beginning of modern times as a result of the weakening of faith among Muslims combined with external domination. And today this activity has begun a new in many parts of the Islamic world now that the Muslims have regained their political independence.

Fundamental to Islam was its religion - this, of course, is true for the medieval west as well. The great unifying agent in Islamic civilization was clearly that of the Prophet [Muhammad](http://www.muhammad.net/) “Peace Be Upon Him,” as the final and greatest prophet from God to humans. The basic beliefs of Muhammad's religion were (1) that God is good and omnipotent, (2) that God will judge all men on the last day and assign them their place in either Heaven or Hell, (3) that men should thank God for making the world as it is, (4) that God expects men to be generous with their wealth, and (5) that Muhammad was a prophet sent by God to teach men and warn them of the last judgment. For him, there were also five obligations which were essential to his faith: (1) *shahada :* the profession of faith – there is no God but Allah and Muhammad was the last prophet, (2) *salah :*prayers had to be uttered five times daily, (3) *zakat :* the giving of alms, or charity, (4) *sawm :*fasting, and (5) *Hajj :*the pilgrimage to Mecca. These laws are recorded in the Qur'an, a book which contains all of the revelations of Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.

Despite the faith of his flock, Muhammad met with disappointment as he preached his religion at Mecca.  Jews and Christians failed to convert. The authorities tried to quiet Muhammad and so he left for the northern city of Medina in the year 622. The journey to Medina – the Hegira (the "breaking of former ties") – became the true foundation of the Islamic faith. The hegira also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

At Medina, Muhammad created an Islamic community. Besides the profession of faith, Muhammad also specified that at his community there would be strict rules governing diet; wine, gambling and usury were prohibited; he set up his own legal system; and prohibited infanticide. After settling in Medina, his followers began to attack the caravans on their way to and from Mecca. By 624 his army was powerful enough to conquer Mecca and make it the center of the new religion.

Muhammad died in 632 and his death presented his followers with a series of profound problems. He never claimed to be of divine origin yet his loyal followers saw no reason to separate religious and political authority. Submitting to the will of Allah was no different than submitting to the will of Muhammad. Unfortunately, Muhammad never named a successor. Who would lead the faithful? Soon after his death, some of his followers selected [Abu Bakr](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/abubakr.htm), a wealthy merchant and Muhammad's father-in-law as caliph, or temporal leader.

In the early 7th century, Muhammad and successive caliphs, took up the Arabic custom of making raids against their enemies. The Qur'an called these raids the *jihad* ("striving in the way of the Lord"). The *jihad* was not carried out as a means to convert others for the simple reason that acts of conversion to the Islamic faith were voluntary. The Byzantines and Persians were the first to feel the pressure of Arab raids. At [Yarmuk](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/yarmuk.html) in 636, the Muslims defeated the Byzantine army. Syria fell in 640. A decade later, the Muslims had conquered the entire Persian empire. [Egypt](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/642Egypt-conq2.html), North Africa and [Spain](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/conqspain.html) (with its center at Córdoba) were all conquered and under Muslim rule by the 720s. In 732, a Muslim army was defeated at the [Battle of Tours](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/732tours.html), and Muslim expansion in Europe came to an abrupt halt.

**Islamic civilization**

Within a very short period of time after the birth of Islam in the 7th century, the Arabs built a vast empire that stretched from Spain and Portugal (Andalusia) in the west all the way to the Indian subcontinent in the east. Covering almost half of the old known world, the Arab empire was one and a half times the size of the Roman Empire at its peak. Unlike earlier civilizations, the Arab civilization dominated the Mediterranean and made it practically an Arab lake. The Arabs occupied Spain and Portugal in 711 and were on the verge of engulfing all of France in 732 when Charles Martel stopped their advances in the heart of Western Europe in the Battle of Tours, about 100 miles south of Paris.

Between the 7th and 15th centuries, the Arabs established a brilliant civilization the like of which was not contemporaneously found anywhere in the world. However, since Islam united all Arabs for the first time in their history, and rejected nationalism and secularism (Islam united Arabs and non-Arabs under the banner of Islam), Arab civilization and Islamic civilization were one and the same. The two could not be separated. Several Arab powerful states were established each with its own distinct Arab civilization. The most important of these are the following three, the last two of which are considered to be the Arab golden age. These are: The Omayad State with its capital city in Damascus (661-750); the Abbasid State with its capital city in Baghdad (750-1258); and Arab Andalusia (711-1492) in the European Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal (a continuation of the Omayad State) with its capital city first in Cordoba and later in Granada. For centuries Arab Andalusia represented Europe's main cultural center. Although the Arab Abbasid State of the east and Arab Andalusia of the west existed at the same time, they were not united because of the rivalry between their Arab leaders.

In all of the above-mentioned three major Arab States, Arabic was the official language and Islam was the official religion. However, Arabs, half-Arabs, and non-Arabs of all the three Semitic religious faiths lived together in racial and religious harmony. There was a great deal of tolerance towards Christians and Jews whether they were Arabs or not. Within all Arab/Islamic empires, Arabs played the major role in all of the political, economic, social, cultural, educational, and scientific affairs. Non-Arabs were deeply Arabized both emotionally and culturally. In short, these three Islamic civilizations (Omayad, Abbasid, and Andalusia) were by and large Arab.

However, after the destruction of the Arab Abbasid State in 1258 at the hands of the Mongols and their ruthless leader Hulagu (a crushing defeat that the Arabs have never completely recovered from), the Muslim Turks took over the leadership of the Muslim world. In an affirmation of the political unity of the Islamic nation or “Ummah” (because Islam rejects nationalism), the Turks established their Muslim Ottoman State (1258-1922) with its capital first in Bursa and later in Istanbul (Constantinople), the former capital city of the Holy Eastern Roman Empire (or the Byzantine Empire). It was only in this last major Muslim Turkish State, which did not include either Persia or Andalusia, that the Arabs did not play a dominant role in the political or cultural affairs of the Islamic State. Nor was Arabic the official language of the Ottoman Empire in its last days.

Nonetheless, inspired by numerous exhortations of Prophet Mohammad to Muslims such as: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave"; "Search for knowledge, even if you must go to China to find it"; and "The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr", the Arabs excelled in science and art and provided the world with a brilliant and unique civilization. Arab civilization contributed a great deal to the world in general and to the West in particular by helping bring about the European Renaissance, first in Spain and Portugal and later in Italy. As will be explained shortly, the West is immensely indebted to the Arabs for many scientific, technological, and artistic inventions as well as philosophical concepts. As the contemporary Western civilization has enlightened the world, so did the old Arab/Islamic civilization.

However, while the brilliant ancient civilizations of Iraq and Egypt, and the Jewish and Christian religions that emerged from Palestine, are all acknowledged in the West but only as a part of what is strangely called "Western civilization", the great Arab/Islamic civilization (like Islam itself) that emerged from the same Arab region is either ignored in the West or, if mentioned, distorted and belittled by many European and American "scholars" and "experts". In fact, these so-called "Arabists" or "Orientalists" cannot hide their hatred, resentment, racism, and patronizing attitudes towards the Arabs and Islam.

Because Arab civilization - especially that of the Abbasid State - included some contributions from half-Arab and non-Arab Muslims as well as from Arab Jews and Arab Christians, many American "scholars", who like to demean or insult the Arabs, downplay the vital Arab role in the Arab/Islamic civilization. They argue that Arab civilization was copied from the Greeks and/or was nothing more than the civilization of Persians, Turks and other non-Arab Muslims. Even the so-called American "left" and "open-minded scholars" argue in a racist way that Arab contribution to the Islamic civilization was minimal. For example, the following citation is a typical example of Western distortion of Arab contribution to Islamic civilization. In an address given at a symposium on the history of philosophy of science held at Boston University on September 22, 1994, Mr. Dirk Struik said the following, which appeared in the American Monthly Review, the so-called "left-wing and socialist" periodical: "Incidentally, we often speak of the Arabs. But these "Arabs" were Persians, Tadjiks, Jews, Moors, etc., seldom Arabs. What they had in common was their use of the Arabic language." Also, Mr. Struik wrongly referred to the Jews as a distinct nationality, forgetting the elementary fact that "Jews" are nothing but the adherents of the Jewish faith regardless of their race or language, and disregarding the basic fact that Arab Jews have always existed even up to the present time. He also wrongly implied that Moors are not Arabs, dismissing the simple fact that Moors are indeed Arabs. In addition, Mr. Struik even ridiculed and belittled Arab contribution to human civilization by saying: "...the Arabs, who were so kind [my underlining] as to keep the torch of Greek science ablaze to pass it over to the Europeans..."

However, unlike Mr. Struik and the many Western "scholars" like him who distort Arab intellectual and scientific contributions to humanity, Professor Briffault in his book Making of Humanity simply stated the basic facts: "Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world." In addition, historians Edward Burns and Philip Palph concluded that: “The intellectual achievements of the …[Arabs] were far superior to any of which Christian Europe could boast before the twelfth century." They also correctly acknowledged that: "In no subject were the [Arabs] farther advanced than in science. In fact, their achievements in this field were the best the world had seen since the end of the Hellenistic civilization." In addition, Burns and Palph wrote that Arabs:

"…were brilliant astronomers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and physicians. Despite their reverence for Aristotle, they did not hesitate to criticize his notion of a universe of concentric spheres with the earth at the center, and they admitted the possibility that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun... [The Arabs] were also capable mathematicians and developed algebra and trigonometry... [Arab] physicists founded the science of optics and drew a number of significant conclusions regarding the theory of magnifying lenses and the velocity, transmission, and refraction of light...[Arab] scientists were the first to describe the chemical processes of distillation, filtration, and sublimation...The accomplishments in medicine were just as remarkable...[The Arabs] discovered the contagious nature of tuberculosis, described pleurisy and several varieties of nervous ailments, and pointed out that the disease can be spread through contamination of water and soil."

In fact, the Arabs were the world's pioneers in establishing the first major institutions of higher learning. Arabs established the oldest universities in the world. The University of Qeirawan in Fez, Morocco was founded in 859, and the al-Azhar Mosque-University was established in 970 in Cairo. On the other hand, the oldest university in Europe is the University of Bologna in Italy, which was founded in 1088.

**Islamic conquest in North Africa and Spain**

When the Abbasids captured Damascus, one of the Umayyad princes escaped and made the long journey from there to Spain to found Umayyad rule there, thus beginning the golden age of Islam in Spain. Cordoba was established as the capital and soon became Europe's greatest city not only in population but from the point of view of its cultural and intellectual life. The Umayyads ruled over two centuries until they weakened and were replaced by local rulers.

Meanwhile in North Africa, various local dynasties held sway until two powerful Berber dynasties succeeded in uniting much of North Africa and also Spain in the 12th and 13th centuries. After them this area was ruled once again by local dynasties such as the Sharifids of Morocco who still rule in that country. As for Spain itself, Muslim power continued to wane until the last Muslim dynasty was defeated in Granada in 1492 thus bringing nearly eight hundred years of Muslim rule in Spain to an end.

**Islamic History after the Mongol Invasion**

The Mongols devastated the eastern lands of Islam and ruled from the Sinai Desert to India for a century. But they soon converted to Islam and became known as the Il-Khanids. They were in turn succeeded by Timur and his descendants who made Samarqand their capital and ruled from 1369 to 1500. The sudden rise of Timur delayed the formation and expansion of the Ottoman empire but soon the Ottomans became the dominant power in the Islamic world.

From humble origins the Turks rose to dominate over the whole of Anatolia and even parts of Europe. In 1453 Mehmet the Conqueror captured Constantinople and put an end to the Byzantine empire. The Ottomans conquered much of eastern Europe and nearly the whole of the Arab world, only Morocco and Mauritania in the West and Yemen, Hadramaut and parts of the Arabian peninsula remaining beyond their control. They reached their zenith of power with Suleyman the Magnificent whose armies reached Hungary and Austria. From the 17th century onward with the rise of Western European powers and later Russia, the power of the Ottomans began to wane. But they nevertheless remained a force to be reckoned with until the First World War when they were defeated by the Western nations. Soon thereafter Kamal Ataturk gained power in Turkey and abolished the six centuries of rule of the Ottomans in 1924. While the Ottomans were concerned mostly with the western front of their empire, to the east in Persia a new dynasty called the Safavids came to power in 1502. The Safavids established a powerful state of their own which flourished for over two centuries and became known for the flowering of the arts. Their capital, Isfahan, became one of the most beautiful cities with its blue tiled mosques and exquisite houses. The Afghan invasion of 1736 put an end to Safavid rule and prepared the independence of Afghanistan which occurred formally in the 19th century. Persia itself fell into turmoil until Nader Shah, the last Oriental conqueror, reunited the country and even conquered India. But the rule of the dynasty established by him was short-lived. The Zand dynasty soon took over to be overthrown by the Qajars in 1779 who made Tehran their capital and ruled until 1921 when they were in turn replaced by the Pahlavis.

As for India, Islam entered into the land east of the Indus River peacefully. Gradually Muslims gained political power beginning in the early 13th century. But this period which marked the expansion of both Islam and Islamic culture came to an end with the conquest of much of India in 1526 by Babur, one of the Timurid princes. He established the powerful Mogul empire which produced such famous rulers as Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan and which lasted, despite the gradual rise of British power in India, until 1857 when it was officially abolished. Farther east in the Malay world, Islam began to spread in the 12th century in northern Sumatra and soon Muslim kingdoms were established in Java, Sumatra and mainland Malaysia. Despite the colonization of the Malay world, Islam spread in that area covering present day Indonesia, Malaysia, the southern Philippines and southern Thailand, and is still continuing in islands farther east.

As far as Africa is concerned, Islam entered into East Africa at the very beginning of the Islamic period but remained confined to the coast for some time, only the Sudan and Somali land becoming gradually both Arabized and Islamized. West Africa felt the presence of Islam through North African traders who traveled with their camel caravans south of the Sahara. By the 14th century there were already Muslim sultanates in such areas as Mali, and Timbuctu in West Africa and Harar in East Africa had become seats of Islamic learning. Gradually Islam penetrated both inland and southward. There also appeared major charismatic figures who inspired intense resistance against European domination. The process of the Islamization of Africa did not cease during the colonial period and continues even today with the result that most Africans are now Muslims caring on a tradition which has had practically as long a history in certain areas of sub-Saharan Africa as Islam itself.

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### *Geographical, Historical, Political and Cultural Backgrounds of the Arabian Peninsula before the Rise of Islam*

Arabia is the south-western peninsula of Asia. It is bounded respectively: on the west, south and east by the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Gulf . Arabia is a block of the earth's crust tilted so that its western edge stands much higher than the eastern side, the elevation being greatest towards its south-western corner, while eastwards the plateau slopes gradually to the lowlands of Mesopotamia in the north east and to the Arabian Gulf further south. Geographically the Arabian Peninsula may be divided- into five main contrasting geographical regions, these being (i) the western highlands; (ii) the southern coastlands; (iii) the Oman region; (iv) the eastern coastlands; and (v) the interior deserts.

The setting in which Prophet Muhammad  appeared in the early 600s proved to be perfectly suited for the arrival of Islam. Geographically isolated from the major superpowers of the day, culturally ready for the tumultuous life of the Prophet , and linguistically prepared for the divinely poetic Quran, there was no place or time in the world that was a more perfect environment for Islam to take root. For Muslims, all of this serves as proof that the arrival and expansion of Islam was no accident, but was perfectly set up by God. Non-Muslim historians, however, have trouble explaining the rapid growth and spread of Islam in secular terms. It simply does not fit in the with the typical pattern seen in the growth of other religions in world history. There can be no denying, however, the perfection of the setting, culture, and political landscape that Islam was born into in the early 600s. When a respected man of the tribe of Quraysh began to preach a new, monotheistic religion in the year 610 in Makkah, no one could have imagined how the geographic, political, and cultural setting was perfect for this message to spread. Within a few years, however, the unique nature of this message, coupled with the environment it came down into, left no doubt in the hearts of believers of the divinely-planned setting that sprung Islam to be the leading religious and political force of the world within 100 years.

Geopolitically, the Arabian isolation from the Romans and the Persians created the perfect environment for Islam to grow in before being exposed to the outside world. Had Makkah been dominated by the Romans or Persians during the life of Prophet Muhammad , his ability to spread the message would have been severely hampered. Before the arrival of Islam, there was no major world power that dominated the Arabian Peninsula. The Romans dominated the Mediterranean Sea, and were by far the most powerful empire in the ancient world, and if anyone could have conquered Arabia, it would have been them. They attempted to expand their realm in 24 B.C. with an invasion of the Arabian Peninsula, but it turned out to be an utter failure. The famed Roman legions could be effective in Mediterranean climates, but not the deserts of Arabia. The Romans never managed to extend their control past the northern border lands of the Arabian Desert. The other major power of the pre-Islamic world was the Persian Empire. Situated to the North and East of the Arabian Peninsula, it also attempted to dominate the area, which brought it into almost constant conflict with the Romans. In this epic back-and-forth between the Romans and the Persians, the lands of Syria and Iraq served as the front lines. Because each side was able to check the advance of the other, neither was able to extend control into Arabia itself. With their northern neighbors constantly at war, the Arabs were for the most part, independent. This isolation meant that the Arabs did not have to deal with the political issues of far-off empires. They could live without any overlordship and create their own political institutions. What developed was a decentralized nature to Arab political control that maximized individual and family freedom. Tribal allegiance was the strongest political force of the peninsula, and the dozens of tribes that roamed the desert managed to live a simple lifestyle based on nomadic grazing, trading, or both. The Romans were (in the 7th century) strongly Christian, with little toleration for other faiths. Conversely, the decentralized nature of Arab politics allowed the Prophet  to preach without having to deal with a strong political authority that opposed him. Although Quraysh attempted to stifle the message in the early years, they were one tribe among many, and all Prophet Muhammad  had to do was escape to Madinah in 622 (where the Arab rules of hospitality protected him), far from Quraysh’s political authority. The geographic and thus political isolation ofthe Arabian Peninsula, the Island of the Arabs, could not have been more suited for the controversial and radically different message of the Prophet .Furthermore, after the death of Prophet Muhammad , as the early Muslims began to expand northwards, they encountered two crumbling empires. Both the Romans and the Persians were depleted by years of warfare, and their control over their territory was fragile at best. Economic, political, and military weakness meant the new Muslim armies could easily defeat the established empires and expand Muslim political authority to new lands in the Middle East and beyond.

The Arabian Peninsula was also culturally a perfect place for Islam to spread. Ties of family were the strongest bonds to be found in Makkah in the early 600s, so when Muhammad incurred the displeasure of the polytheists, he relied on the protection of his family, particularly his uncle, Abu Talib. The culture of the Arabs was intimately attached to the geographic realities they were living in. The harsh desert was not a place to be alone in. Reliance on relatives was the first line of defense against the famine and heat that constantly threatened survival. As such, the family (and by extension, the tribe) served as the most important unit within Arab society.  Also as a reaction to the desert, hospitality played a major role in Arab culture. Guests were to be given automatic protection if they ask for it, even if fleeing from an enemy. The cultural norms of protecting your family and providing for guests were well established in Arab culture by the early 600s A.D.

Despite never believing the message of Islam, Abu Talib considered it his familial duty to protect his nephew from those that wanted to cause him harm. Had it not been for this cultural norm dictating the protection of family members, Prophet Muhammad  could have been silenced by the Qurayshi polytheists who felt threatened by the new religion in the early years of his prophet hood. As was previously stated, the Arabs were polytheists up until the arrival of Islam, yet they still had some understanding of the monotheistic message of Prophet Ibrahim. Thus, when Prophet Muhammad  came with the monotheistic message, it recalled to the Arabs their previous monotheistic beliefs they learned from Prophet Ibrahim. However, the Muslim profession of faith, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger” demanded they rid themselves of their idols and revert back to pure monotheism. As it turned out, doing so was not very difficult for many of them. It re-instilled in them a sense or original purity of faith, that they had lost over the centuries.

At the same time, the polytheistic nature of the Arabs confirmed a miraculous aspect of the revelation. Although far removed from the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, which were primarily found in the Roman Empire, the holy book that was sent to Prophet Muhammad , the Quran, had the same stories and prophets detailed in it. Without divine-inspiration, there could be no way for Muhammad  to know about people such as Adam, Musa (Moses), Yusuf (Joseph), and Isa (Jesus). And yet, in the middle of the polytheistic idol-worshiping Arab world, came a prophet who had knowledge of earlier prophets and was the final one in that chain. For many, particularly the Jews of the Hejaz, this message in this setting proved to be miraculous, especially since there was no way Prophet Muhammad  could have read their Torah, on account of him being unable to read, and their unwillingness to share their books with outsiders.

Lastly, The Arabs’ greatest cultural jewel, however, was their language. In the desert, there was limited opportunity for artistic expression. Unlike the Romans and Greeks, sculpture and painting simply wasn’t practical, and was not practiced except for the creation of idols. the poetic nature of the Quran fit perfectly in with the poetic nature of the Arabs. For a society which prized poetic ability more than anything else, and where poets constantly competed with each other in writing perfectly rhythmical verses, the Quran proved to be far superior to any poetic ability of any human. Had the Quran been sent to a group of people who were not as poetically inclined, it would not have been seen as a miracle worth following. But for the Arabs, there was no doubting the divine nature of the holy book, which created a strong fervor in their hearts to spread this message that they wholeheartedly believed to be true.

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**Islamic Foundations “Civilization” courses (Master II)**

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**The rise of Islam and the Period of Righteous Caliphs**

**Introduction**

The Islamic state expanded very rapidly after the death of Muhammad through remarkable successes both at converting unbelievers to Islam and by military conquests of the Islamic community's opponents. Expansion of the Islamic state was an understandable development, since Muhammad himself had successfully established the new faith through conversion and conquest of those who stood against him. Immediately after the Prophet's death in 632,

the new religion of Islam was at a crossroads. Having unified the tribes of Arabia and solidified Mecca as the capital of their faith, the followers of Islam were faced with their first leadership crisis. Who would take up the mantle of Mohammed and lead? The death of Muhammad created confusion in the nascent Muslim community, for Muhammad had left no details as to who should succeed him.

The first right caliphs, who truly followed the Quran and the *Sunnah,* are known as the ‘Rightly Guided Caliphs’. They are Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and Ali. Main characteristics of their rule are:

• assumed office only with the consent of the people and never imposed themselves through force and fraud;

• governed the people through *‘shura’* (consultation) and were not inclined toward tyranny, oppression and dictatorship;

• state and its functionaries were committed to the establishment of a just moral order;

• committed to the rule of law and the constitutional order. They publicly announced that so long as they adhere to the Quran and the *Sunnah* expect the masses to assist them in the conduct of the affairs of the state;

• acknowledged that the community has a watch-dog role and if they somehow departed from the Quran and the Sunnah, they would be straightened out by the community;

• acknowledged supremacy of judiciary and took even their own cases to the courts for adjudication;

• honoured sanctity of treasury and never used a single cent for the promotion of personal cause;

• dignity and divinity of man was taken as the foundational stones of the socio-political and moral order.

**Meaning of the Word 'Caliph'**

The word 'Caliph' is the English form of the Arabic word 'Khalifa,' which is short for **Khalifatu Rasulil-lah**. The latter expression means **Successor to the Messenger of God**, the Holy Prophet Muhammad . The title 'Khalifatu Rasulil-lah'. was first used for Abu Bakr, who was elected head of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet.

**The Significance of the Caliphate**

The mission of Prophet Muhammad, like that of the earlier messengers of God, was to call people to the worship of and submission to the One True God. In practice, submission to God means to obey His injunctions as given in the Holy Qur'an and as exemplified by Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet). As successor to the Prophet, the Caliph was the head of the Muslim community and his primary responsibility was to continue in the path of the Prophet. Since religion was perfected and the door of Divine revelation was closed at the death of the Prophet, the Caliph was to make all laws in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He was a ruler over Muslims but not their sovereign since sovereignty belongs to God alone. He was to be obeyed as long as he obeyed God. He was responsible for creating and maintaining conditions under which it would be easy for Muslims to live according to Islamic principles, and to see that justice was done to all. Abu Bakr, at the time he accepted the caliphate, stated his position thus:

"The weak among you shall be strong with me until their rights have been vindicated; and the strong among you shall he weak with me until, if the Lord wills, I have taken what is due from them... Obey me as long as I obey God and His Messenger. When I disobey Him and His Prophet, then obey me not."

**The Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun)**

Those Caliphs who truly followed in the Prophet's foot steps are called 'The Rightly-Guided Caliphs' (Al-Khulafa-ur Rashidun in Arabic). They are the first four Caliphs: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman and Ali; Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz; and seven Caliphs who did [not](http://www.islamicweb.com/history/khalifas.htm) appear yet, the last one of them is [Al-Mahdi](http://www.islamicweb.com/history/mahdi.htm). All the fist four were among thc earliest and closest Companions of the Prophet. They lived simple and righteous lives and strove hard for the religion of God. Their justice was impartial, their treatment of others was kind and merciful, and they were one with the people - the first among equals. After these four, the later Caliphs assumed the manners of kings and emperors and the true spirit of equality of ruler and ruled diminished to a considerable extent in the political life of Muslims.It should be clearly understood that the mission of Prophet Muhammad , and hence that of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, was not political, social or economic reform, although such reforms were a logical consequence of the success of this mission, nor the unity of a nation and the establishment of an empire, although the nation did unite and vast areas came under one administration, nor the spread of a civilization or culture, although many civilizations and cultures developed, but only to deliver the message of God to all the peoples of the world and to invite them to submit to Him, while being the foremost among those who submitted.

***The First Caliph, Abu Bakr (632-634 A.C.)***

"If I were to take a friend other than my Lord, I would take Abu Bakr as a friend." *(Hadith)*

**Election to the Caliphate**

The Prophet's closest Companion, Abu Bakr, was not present when the Holy Prophet  breathed his last in the apartment of his beloved wife of later years, Aisha, Abu Bakr's daughter. When he came to know of the Prophet's passing, Abu Bakr hurried to the house of sorrow.

"How blessed was your life and how beatific is your death,"

he whispered as he kissed the cheek of his beloved friend and master who now was no more.

When Abu Bakr came out of the Prophet's apartment and broke the news, disbelief and dismay gripped the community of Muslims in Medina. Muhammad  had been the leader, the guide and the bearer of Divine revelation through whom they had been brought from idolatry and barbarism into the way of God. How could he die? Even Umar, one of the bravest and strongest of the Prophet's Companions, lost his composure and drew his sword and threatened to kill anyone who said that the Prophet was dead. Abu Bakr gently pushed him aside, ascended the steps of the lectern in the mosque and addressed the people, saying

"O people, verily whoever worshipped Muhammad, behold! Muhammad is indeed dead. But whoever worships God, behold! God is alive and will never die."

And then he concluded with a verse from the Qur'an:

"And Muhammad is but a Messenger. Many Messengers have gone before him; if then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels?"[*[3:144]*](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/003.qmt.html#003.144)

On hearing these words, the people were consoled. Despondency gave place to confidence and tranquility. This critical moment had passed. But the Muslim community was now faced with an extremely serious problem: that of choosing a leader. After some discussion among the Companions of the Prophet who had assembled in order to select a leader, it became apparent that no one was better suited for this responsibility than Abu Bakr. A portion of the speech the First Caliph gave after his election has already been quoted in the introduction.

**Abu Bakr's Life**

Abu Bakr ('The Owner of Camels') was not his real name. He acquired this name later in life because of his great interest in raising camels. His real name was Abdul Ka'aba ('Slave of Ka'aba'), which Muhammad later changed to Abdullah ('Slave of God'). The Prophet also gave him the title of 'Siddiq' - 'The Testifier to the Truth.'Abu Bakr was a fairly wealthy merchant, and before he embraced Islam, was a respected citizen of Mecca. He was three years younger than Muhammad  and some natural affinity drew them together from earliest child hood. He remained the closest Companion of the Prophet all through the Prophet's life. When Muhammad first invited his closest friends and relatives to Islam, Abu Bakr was among the earliest to accept it. He also persuaded Uthman and Bilal to accept Islam. In the early days of the Prophet's mission, when the handful of Muslims were subjected to relentless persecution and torture, Abu Bakr bore his full share of hardship. Finally when God's permission came to emigrate from Mecca, he was the one chosen by the Prophet to accompany him on the dangerous journey to Medina. In the numerous battles which took place during the life of the Prophet, Abu Bakr was always by his side. Once, he brought all his belongings to the Prophet, who was raising money for the defense of Medina. The Prophet asked "Abu Bakr, what did you leave for your family?" The reply came: "God and His Prophet."Even before Islam, Abu Bakr was known to be a man of upright character and amiable and compassionate nature. All through his life he was sensitive to human suffering and kind to the poor and helpless. Even though he was wealthy, he lived very simply and spent his money for charity, for freeing slaves and for the cause of Islam. He often spent part of the night in supplication and prayer. He shared with his family a cheerful and affectionate home life.

**Abu-Bakr's Caliphate**

Such, then, was the man upon whom the burden of leadership fell at the most sensitive period in the history of the Muslims.As the news of the Prophet's death spread, a number of tribes rebelled and refused to pay Zakat (poor-due), saying that this was due only to the Prophet . At the same time a number of impostors claimed that the prophethood had passed to them after Muhammad and they raised the standard of revolt. To add to all this, two powerful empires, the Eastern Roman and the Persian, also threatened the new-born Islamic state at Medina.

Under these circumstances, many Companions of the Prophet, including Umar, advised Abu Bakr to make concessions to the Zakat evaders, at least for a time. The new Caliph disagreed. He insisted that the Divine Law cannot be divided, that there is no distinction between the obligations of Zakat and Salat (prayer), and that any compromise with the injunctions of God would eventually erode the foundations of Islam. Umar and others were quick to realize their error of judgment. The revolting tribes attacked Medina but the Muslims were prepared. Abu Bakr himself led the charge, forcing them to retreat. He then made a relentless war on the false claimants to prophethood, most of whom submitted and again professed lslam.

The threat from the Roman Empire had actually arisen earlier, during the Prophet's lifetime. The Prophet had organized an army under the command of Usama, the son of a freed slave. The army had not gone far when the Prophet had fallen ill so they stopped. After the death of the Prophet , the question was raised whether the army should be sent again or should remain for the defence of Medina. Again Abu Bakr showed a firm determination. He said, "I shall send Usama's army on its way as ordered by the Prophet, even if I am left alone."

Abu Bakr had proven himself to be a military genius. Abu Bakr immediately called for a military expedition against the Byzantine empire, in part to revenge an earlier Islamic defeat and in part to focus Islamic and Arabian attention.However, as soon as the Arabian tribes heard of the death of Muhammad, the Islamic peace and most of the alliances broke down. Several tribes revolted—some of these tribes revolted under the leadership of rival prophets. This began the period the Muslims call al-Ridda, or "The Apostasy." All of Abu Bakr's energy in the first years would be focussed on quelling these rebellions and tenuously re-establishing the Islamic peace.Once the rebellions had been put down, Abu Bakr began a war of conquest. Whether or not he intended a full-out imperial conquest is hard to say; he did, however, set in motion a historical trajectory that in just a few short decades would lead to one of the largest empires in history. Abu Bakr began with Iraq, but before he could attack the Persian empire itself, he died—his death came only two years after he had been named the successor of Muhammad.

The final instructions he gave to Usama prescribed a code of conduct in war which remains unsurpassed to this day. Part of his instructions to the Muslim army were:

"Do not be deserters, nor be guilty of disobedience. Do not kill an old man, a woman or a child. Do not injure date palms and do not cut down fruit trees. Do not slaughter any sheep or cows or camels except for food. You will encounter persons who spend their lives in monasteries. Leave them alone and do not molest them."

Khalid bin Waleed had been chosen by the Prophet  on several occasions to lead Muslim armies. A man of supreme courage and a born leader, his military genius came to full flower during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr. Throughout Abu Bakr's reign Khalid led his troops from one victory to another against the attacking Romans.

Another contribution of Abu Bakr to the cause of Islam was the collection and compilation of the verses of the Qur'an. Abu Bakr died on 21 Jamadi-al Akhir, 13 A.H. (23 August 634 A.C.), at the age of sixty-three, and was buried by the side of the Holy Prophet . His caliphate had been of a mere twenty-seven months duration. In this brief span, however, Abu Bakr had managed, by the Grace of God, to strengthen and consolidate his community and the state, and to secure the Muslims against the perils which had threatened their existence.

***The Second Caliph, Umar (634-644 A.C.)***

"God has placed truth upon Umar's tongue and heart." *(Hadith)*

**'Umar's Life**

During his last illness Abu Bakr had conferred with his people, particularly the more eminent among them. After this meeting they chose 'Umar as his successor. 'Umar was born into a respected Quraish family thirteen years after the birth of Muhammad . Umar's family was known for its extensive knowledge of genealogy. When he grew up, 'Umar was proficient in this branch of knowledge as well as in swordsmanship, wrestling and the art of speaking. He also learned to read and write while still a child, a very rare thing in Mecca at that time. 'Umar earned his living as a merchant. His trade took him to many foreign lands and he met all kinds of people. This experience gave him an insight into the affairs and problems of men. 'Umar's personality was dynamic, self-assertive, frank and straight forward. He always spoke whatever was in his mind even if it displeased others.'Umar was twenty-seven when the Prophet  proclaimed his mission. The ideas Muhammad  was preaching enraged him as much as they did the other notables of Mecca. He was just as bitter against anyone accepting Islam as others among the Quraish. When his slave-girl accepted Islam he beat her until he himself was exhausted and told her, "I have stopped because I am tired, not out of pity for you." The story of his embracing Islam is an interesting one. One day, full of anger against the Prophet, he drew his sword and set out to kill him. A friend met him on the way. When 'Umar told him what he planned to do, his friend informed him that 'Umar's own sister, Fatima, and her husband had also accepted Islam. 'Umar went straight to his sister's house where he found her reading from pages of the Qur'an. He fell upon her and beat her mercilessly. Bruised and bleeding, she told her brother, "Umar, you can do what you like, but you cannot turn our hearts away from Islam." These words produced a strange effect upon 'Umar. What was this faith that made even weak women so strong of heart? He asked his sister to show him what she had been reading; he was at once moved to the core by the words of the Qur'an and immediately grasped their truth. He went straight to the house where the Prophet  was staying and vowed allegiance to him.

Umar made no secret of his acceptance of Islam. He gathered the Muslims and offered prayers at the Ka'aba. This boldness and devotion of an influential citizen of Mecca raised the morale of the small community of Muslims. Nonetheless 'Umar was also subjected to privations, and when permission for emigration to Medina came, he also left Mecca. The soundness of 'Umar's judgment, his devotion to the Prophet , his outspokenness and uprightness won for him a trust and confidence from the Prophet which was second only to that given to Abu Bakr. The Prophet gave him the title 'Farooq' which means the 'Separator of Truth from False hood.' During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, 'Umar was his closest assistant and adviser. When Abu Bakr died, all the people of Medina swore allegiance to 'Umar, and on 23 Jamadi-al-Akhir, 13 A.H., he was proclaimed Caliph.

**'Umar's Caliphate**

After taking charge of his office, 'Umar spoke to the Muslims of Medina:

"...O people, you have some rights on me which you can always claim. One of your rights is that if anyone of you comes to me with a claim, he should leave satisfied. Another of your rights is that you can demand that I take nothing unjustly from the revenues of the State. You can also demand that... I fortify your frontiers and do not put you into danger. It is also your right that if you go to battle I should look after your families as a father would while you are away.   
  
O people, remain conscious of God, forgive my faults and help me in my task. Assist me in enforcing what is good and forbidding what is evil. Advise me regarding the obligations that have been imposed upon me by God..."

The most notable feature of 'Umar's caliphate was the vast expansion of Islam. Apart from Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine and Iran also came under the protection of the Islamic government. But the greatness of 'Umar himself lies in the quality of his rule. He gave a practical meaning to the Qur'anic injunction:

"O you who believe, stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it concerns rich or poor, for God can best protect both."[*[4:135]*](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/004.qmt.html#004.135)

Once a woman brought a claim against the Caliph 'Umar. When 'Umar appeared on trial before the judge, the judge stood up as a sign of respect toward him. 'Umar reprimanded him, saying, "This is the first act of injustice you did to this woman!"

He insisted that his appointed governors live simple lives, keep no guard at their doors and be accessible to the people at all times, and he himself set the example for them. Many times foreign envoys and messengers sent to him by his generals found him resting under a palm tree or praying in the mosque among the people, and it was difficult for them to distinguish which man was the Caliph. He spent many a watchful night going about the streets of Medina to see whether anyone needed help or assistance. The general social and moral tone of the Muslim society at that time is well-illustrated by the words of an Egyptian who was sent to spy on the Muslims during their Egyptian campaign. He reported:

"I have seen a people, every one of whom loves death more than he loves life. They cultivate humility rather than pride. None is given to material ambitions. Their mode of living is simple... Their commander is their equal. They make no distinction between superior and inferior, between master and slave. When the time of prayer approaches, none remains behind..."

Umar continued the war of conquests begun by Abu Bakr. He pressed into the Persian Empire itself, but he also headed north into Syria and Byzantine territory and west into Egypt. By 640, Islamic military campaigns had brought all of Mesopotamia and most of Syria and Palestine under the control of Abu Bakr. Egypt was conquered by 642 and the Persian Empire by 643. These were some of the richest regions in the world guarded by powerful militaries—and they fell into Islamic hands in a heartbeat.

'Umar, however, was one of the great political geniuses of history. While the empire was expanding at a mind-numbing rate beneath his leaderhsip, he also began to build the political structure that would hold together the vast empire that was being built. 'Umar did not require that non-Muslim populations convert to Islam nor did he try to centralize government, as the Persians had done. Instead, he allowed subject populations to retain their religion, language, customs, and government relatively untouched. The only intrusion would be a governor (**amir**) and, sometimes, a financial officer called an **'amil**, or agent.

His most far-reaching innovations were in the area of building a financial structure to the empire. He understood that the most important aspect of the empire was a stable financial structure for the government. To this end, he built an efficient system of taxation and brought the military directly under the financial control of the state. He also founded the **diwan**, a unique Islamic institution. The *diwan*consisted of individuals that were important to the Islamic faith and the Islamic world, such as the followers of Muhammad. Their contribution to the faith was so great that they were given pensions to live off of—this freed them up to pursue religious and ethical studies and so provide religious or ethical leadership to the rest of the Islamic world.

It was 'Umar that fixed many Islamic traditions and practices and he began the process of producing the Qur'an.His most lasting tradition, however, was establishing the Muslim calendar. The Muslim calendar, like the Arabian calendar, remained a lunar calendar—however, he fixed the beginning of the calendar at the year in which Muhammad emigrated to Medina. This, as far as 'Umar was concerned, was the turning point in Islamic history.

'Umar gave his government an administrative structure. Departments of treasury, army and public revenues were established. Regular salaries were set up for soldiers. A popuation census was held. Elaborate land surveys were conducted to assess equitable taxes. New cities were founded. The areas which came under his rule were divided into provinces and governors were appointed. New roads were laid, canals were lug and wayside hotels were built. Provision was made for the support of the poor and the needy from public funds. He defined, by precept and by example, the rights and privileges of non-Muslims, an example of which is the following contract with the Christians of Jerusalem:

"This is the protection which the servant of God, 'Umar, the Ruler of the Believers has granted to the people of Eiliya [Jerusalem]. The protection is for their lives and properties, their churches and crosses, their sick and healthy and for all their coreligionists. Their churches shall not be used for habitation, nor shall they be demolished, nor shall any injury be done to them or to their compounds, or to their crosses, nor shall their properties be injured in any way. There shall be no compulsion for these people in the matter of religion, nor shall any of them suffer any injury on account of religion... Whatever is written herein is under the covenant of God and the responsibility of His Messenger, of the Caliphs and of the believers, and shall hold good as long as they pay Jizya [the tax for their defense] imposed on them."

Those non-Muslims who took part in defense together with the Muslims were exempted from paying Jizya, and when the Muslims had to retreat from a city whose non-Muslim citizens had paid this tax for their defense, the tax was returned to the non-Muslims. The old, the poor and the disabled of Muslims and non-Muslims alike were provided for from the public treasury and from the Zakat funds.

**'Umar's Death**

In 23 A.H., when Umar returned to Medina from Hajj;, he raised his hands and prayed, "O God! I am advanced in years, my bones are weary, my powers are declining, and the people for whom I am responsible have spread far and wide. Summon me back to Thyself, my lord!" Some time later, when 'Umar went to the mosque to lead a prayer, a Magian named Abu Lulu Feroze, who had a grudge against 'Umar on a personal matter, attacked him with a dagger and stabbed him several times. Umar reeled and fell to the ground. When he learned that the assassin was a Magian, he said, "Thank God he is not a Muslim."

'Umar died in the first week of Muharram, 24 A.H., and was buried by the side of the Prophet .

***The Third Caliph, Uthman (644-656 A.C.)***

"Every Prophet has an assistant, and my assistant will be Uthman." *(Hadith)*

**Uthman's Election**

When 'Umar fell under the assassin's dagger, before he died the people asked him to nominate his successor. 'Umar appointed a committee consisting of six of the ten companions of the Prophet  about whom the Prophet had said, "They are the people of Heaven" - Ali, Uthman, Abdul Rahman, Sa'ad, Al-Zubayr and Talha - to select the next Caliph from among themselves. He also outlined the procedure to be followed if any differences of opinion should arise. Abdul Rahman withdrew his name. He was then authorized by the committee to nominate the Caliph. After two days of discussion among the candidates and after the opinions of the Muslims in Medina had been ascertained, the choice was finally limited to Uthman and Ali. Abdul Rahman came to the mosque together with other Muslims, and after a brief speech and questioning of the two men, swore allegiance to Uthman. All those present did the same, and Uthman became the third Caliph of Islam in the month of Muharram, 24 A.H.

**Uthman's Life**

Uthman bin Affan was born seven years after the Holy Prophet . He belonged to the Omayyad branch of the Quraish tribe. He learned to read and write at an early age, and as a young man became a successful merchant. Even before Islam Uthman had been noted for his truthfulness and integrity. He and Abu Bakr were close friends, and it was Abu Bakr who brought him to Islam when he was thirty-four years of age. Some years later he married the Prophet's second daughter, Ruqayya. In spite of his wealth and position, his relatives subjected him to torture because he had embraced Islam, and he was forced to emigrate to Abyssinia. Some time later he returned to Mecca but soon migrated to Medina with the other Muslims. In Medina his business again began to flourish and he regained his former prosperity. Uthman's generosity had no limits. On various occasions he spent a great portion of his wealth for the welfare of the Muslims, for charity and for equipping the Muslim armies. That is why he came to be known as 'Ghani' meaning 'Generous.'

Uthman's wife, Ruqayya was seriously ill just before the Battle of Badr and he was excused by the Prophet from participating in the battle. The illness Ruqayya proved fatal, leaving Uthman deeply grieved. The Prophet was moved and offered Uthman the hand of another of his daughters, Kulthum. Because he had the high privilege of having two daughters of the Prophet as wives Uthman was known as '**The Possessor of the Two Lights.**'

Uthman participated in the Battles of Uhud and the Trench. After the encounter of the Trench, the Prophet  determined to perform Hajj and sent Uthman as his emissary to the Quraish in Mecca, who detained him. The episode ended in a treaty with the Meccans known as the Treaty of Hudaibiya.

The portrait we have of Uthman is of an unassuming, honest, mild, generous and very kindly man, noted especially for his modesty and his piety. He often spent part of the night in prayer, fasted every second or third day, performed hajj every year, and looked after the needy of the whole community. In spite of his wealth, he lived very simply and slept on bare sand in the courtyard of the Prophet's mosque. Uthman knew the Qur'an from memory and had an intimate knowledge of the context and circumstances relating to each verse.

**Uthman's Caliphate**

During Uthman's rule the characteristics of Abu Bakr's and Umar's caliphates - impartial justice for all, mild and humane policies, striving in the path of God, and the expansion of Islam - continued.

Despite internal troubles, 'Uthman continued the wars of conquest so brilliantly carried out by 'Umar. The Islamic empire conquered Libya in North Africa and fully conquered the eastern portions of the Persian Empire. Uthman's realm extended in the west to Morocco, in the east to Afghanistan, and in the north to Armenia and Azerbaijan. During his caliphate a navy was organized, administrative divisions of the state were revised, and many public projects were expanded and completed. Uthman sent prominent Companions of the Prophet  as his personal deputies to various provinces to scrutinize the conduct of officials and the condition of the people.

Uthman's most notable contribution to the religion of God was the compilation of a complete and authoritative text of the Qur'an. A large number of copies of this text were made and distributed all over the Muslim world.

Uthman ruled for twelve years. The first six years were marked by internal peace and tranquility, but during the second half of his caliphate a rebellion arose. The Jews and the Magians, taking advantage of dissatisfaction among the people, began conspiring against Uthman, and by publicly airing their complaints and grievances, gained so much sympathy that it became difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

It may seem surprising that a ruler of such vast territories, whose armies were matchless, was unable to deal with these rebels. If Uthman had wished, the rebellion could have been crushed at the very moment it began. But he was reluctant to be the first to shed the blood of Muslims (especially Sahaba), however rebellious they might be. No one would ever expected what happend later. He preferred to reason with them, to persuade them with kindness and generosity. He well remembered hearing the Prophet  say, "Once the sword is unsheathed among my followers, it will not be sheathed until the Last Day."

The rebels demanded that he abdicate and some of the Companions advised him to do so. He would gladly have followed this course of action, but again he was bound by a solemn pledge he had given to the Prophet. "Perhaps God will clothe you with a shirt, Uthman" the Prophet had told him once, "and if the people want you to take it off, do not take it off for them." Uthman said to a well-wisher on a day when his house was surrounded by the rebels, "God's Messenger made a covenant with me and I shall show endurance in adhering to it."

After a long siege, the rebels broke into Uthman's house and murdered him. When the first assassin's sword struck Uthman, he was reciting the verse,

"Verily, God sufficeth thee; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing"[*[2:137]*](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/002.qmt.html#002.137)

Uthman breathed his last on the afternoon of Friday, 17 Dhul Hijja, 35 A.H. (June. (656 A.C.). He was eighty-four years old. The power of the rebels was so great that Uthman's body lay unburied until Saturday night when he was buried in his blood-stained clothes, the shroud which befits all martyrs in the cause of God.

***The Fourth Caliph, Ali (656-661 A.C.)***

"You [Ali] are my brother in this world and the next." *(Hadith)*

**Ali's Election**

After Uthman's martyrdom, the office of the caliphate remained unfilled for two or three days. Many people insisted that Ali should take up the office, but he was embarrassed by the fact that the people who pressed him hardest were the rebels, and he therefore declined at first. When the notable Companions of the Prophet  urged him, however, he finally agreed.

**Ali's Life**

Ali bin Abi Talib was the first cousin of the Prophet . More than that, he had grown up in the Prophet's own household, later married his youngest daughter, Fatima, and remained in closest association with him for nearly thirty years.

Ali was ten years old when the Divine Message came to Muhammad . One night he saw the Prophet and his wife Khadijah bowing and prostrating. He asked the Prophet about the meaning of their actions. The Prophet told him that they were praying to God Most High and that Ali too should accept Islam. Ali said that he would first like to ask his father about it. He spent a sleepless night, and in the morning he went to the Prophet and said, "When God created me He did not consult my father, so why should I consult my father in order to serve God?" and he accepted the truth of Muhammad's message.

When the Divine command came, "And warn thy nearest relatives" [[26:214]](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/026.qmt.html#026.214), Muhammad  invited his relatives for a meal. After it was finished, he addressed them and asked, "Who will join me in the cause of God?" There was utter silence for a while, and then Ali stood up. "I am the youngest of all present here," he said, "My eyes trouble me because they are sore and my legs are thin and weak, but I shall join you and help you in whatever way I can." The assembly broke up in derisive laughter. But during the difficult wars in Mecca, Ali stood by these words and faced all the hardships to which the Muslims were subjected. He slept in the bed of the Prophet when the Quraish planned to murder Muhammad. It was he to whom the Prophet entrusted, when he left Mecca, the valuables which had been given to him for safekeeping, to be returned to their owners.

Apart from the expedition of Tabuk, Ali fought in all the early battles of Islam with great distinction, particularly in the expedition of Khaybar. It is said that in the Battle of Uhud he received more than sixteen wounds.

The Prophet  loved Ali dearly and called him by many fond names. Once the Prophet found him sleeping in the dust. He brushed off Ali's clothes and said fondly, "Wake up, Abu Turab (Father of Dust)." The Prophet also gave him the title of 'Asadullah' ('Lion of God').

Ali's humility, austerity, piety, deep knowledge of the Qur'an and his sagacity gave him great distinction among the Prophet's Companions. Abu Bakr, 'Umar and Uthman consulted him frequently during their caliphates. Many times 'Umar had made him his vice-regent at Medina when he was away. Ali was also a great scholar of Arabic literature and pioneered in the field of grammar and rhetoric. His speeches, sermons and letters served for generations afterward as models of literary expression. Many of his wise and epigrammatic sayings have been preserved. Ali thus had a rich and versatile personality. In spite of these attainments he remained a modest and humble man. Once during his caliphate when he was going about the marketplace, a man stood up in respect and followed him. "Do not do it," said Ali. "Such manners are a temptation for a ruler and a disgrace for the ruled."

Ali and his household lived extremely simple and austere lives. Sometimes they even went hungry themselves because of Ali's great generosity, and none who asked for help was ever turned away from his door. His plain, austere style of living did not change even when he was ruler over a vast domain.

**Ali's Caliphate**

As mentioned previously, Ali accepted the caliphate very reluctantly. Uthman's murder and the events surrounding it were a symptom, and also became a cause, of civil strife on a large scale. All governors gave the pledge to Ali except Muawiya, the governor of [Sham](http://syria.arabicnet.com/sham.html) (Great Syria). Muawiya declined to obey until Uthman's blood was avenged. His decision was based on the fact that he is not required to obey the Caliph until he (Ali) is able to enforce the rule of Allah. Muawiya was the cuisine of 'Uthman, so he was the responsible of asking Ali to bring the murderers to trial. The Prophet's widow Aisha also took the position that Ali should first bring the murderers to trial. Due to the chaotic conditions during the last days of Uthman it was very difficult to establish the identity of the murderers, and Ali refused to punish anyone whose guilt was not lawfully proved.

The pretext for the meeting of the armies on the day of the Camel and the day of Siffin was the demand for `Uthman's killers on the part of `A'isha and Mu`awiya, but the winds of war were fanned by the followers of Abdullah bin Saba' the Jew, from inside all three camps until events escaped the control of the Companions. It is related that `Ali, `A'isha , and Mu`awiya often expressed astonishment at the dissension and opposition that surrounded them.

However, even though the era of Ali's caliphate was marred by civil strife, he nevertheless introduced a number of reforms, particularly in the levying and collecting of revenues.

It was the fortieth year of Hijra. A fanatical group called Kharijites, consisting of people who had broken away from Ali due to his compromise with Muawiya, claimed that neither Ali, the Caliph, nor Muawiya, the ruler of Syria, nor Amr bin al-Aas, the ruler of Egypt, were worthy of rule. In fact, they went so far as to say that the true caliphate came to an end with 'Umar and that Muslims should live without any ruler over them except God. They vowed to kill all three rulers, and assassins were dispatched in three directions. While `Ali, `A'isha , and Mu`awiya were all fighting in the cuase of Allah and did not want to shed any blood, Kharijites on the other side were dissenters who love to kill innocent Muslims. It is important to notice that there was no Sahaba at all in the army of Kharijites.

The assassins who were deputed to kill Muawiya and Amr did not succeed and were captured and executed, but Ibn-Muljim, the assassin who was commissioned to kill Ali, accomplished his task. One morning when Ali was absorbed in prayer in a mosque, Ibn-Muljim stabbed him with a poisoned sword. On the 20th of Ramadan, 40 A.H., died the great Companion. May God Most High be pleased with them and grant to them His eternal reward.

**Conclusion**

With the death of Ali, the first and most notable phase in the history of Muslim peoples came to an end. All through this period it had been the Book of God and the practices of His Messenger - that is, the Qur'an and the Sunnah - which had guided the leaders and the led, set the standards of their moral conduct and inspired their actions. It was the time when the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, were uniformly subject to the Divine Law. It was an epoch of freedom and equality, of God-consciousness and humility, of social justice which recognized no privileges, and of an impartial law which accepted no pressure groups or vested interests.After Ali, Muslims agreed to give the caliphate to Muawiya. Muawiya tried to continue on the same way as The Rightly-Guided Caliphs, but he was ruling a different generation of people.