

Sarva- Dharma: ISLAM

Activity One

The following are two lists of facts. Tie the facts in list A with the corresponding fact in list B

A	B
Islam	570AD
Founder of Islam	Surrender to God and Peace
Holy Book	Religion
Birth of Prophet Muhammed	
Followers of Islam	Koran
Message of Islam	Allah
	Prophet Mohammed
Name of God	Muslims

Activity Two

Listen to the story of Muhammed's Life and about his nature and answer the following questions in a debate.

1. What was Mecca's religious belief before Muhammed began to preach?
2. Where did Muhammed go to be by himself?
3. Who came to Muhammed whilst he was there?
4. Why did the person in question 3 come to Muhammed and what message was given to him?
5. What do you think that message meant?
6. What kind of a person was Muhammed?
7. What was the message of the story about the old woman?

Life Story of Prophet Mohammed

(Source: "The Path Divine," Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Education Trust, 2nd Edition, 1983)

About the time of Mohammed's birth in Mecca, in 570 A.D. Arabia was in a state of religious unrest. Its native and wandering inhabitants were mainly idolaters, worshipping stars, stones and fetishes. There were many Jewish colonies in Arabia at that time which had been established after the destruction of Jerusalem five centuries earlier. Some Christian settlements were also there. Among the Arabs, different practices of religious worship were in vogue, with no coherence. Very much need was there for moral reform. Indeed, a widespread expectation was in the air that time was approaching when an Arabian Messiah should appear and teach them the true religion; and verily a Messiah did appear in the person of Mohammed.

Mohammed was the posthumous son of Abdullah-bin-Abdul-Muttalib of the tribe of Quraysh. He was born in Mecca, about the year 570 A.D. His mother Aminah dies when he was still a child and he was brought up by his grandfather and later by his uncle Talib.

At the age of twenty-five, after being employed by a wealthy widow by name Khadija to look after her camels trading with Damascus, Mohammed so impressed her by his abilities and honesty that she proposed to marry him. She was fifteen years his senior. With this marriage he became a man of wealth and position.

But after the marriage he did not pay much attention to his business. He used to retire to the caves in the mountains in order to give himself up to solitary prayer and meditation. On night in Ramadan, about the year 610 A.D. as he was asleep or in a trance, the Angel Gabriel came to him and said, "**Recite.**" Mohammed replied: "**What shall I recite?**" The Angel repeated the order three times and then said:

**"Recite in the Name of thy Lord and Cherisher and creator
Who created man out of clotted blood.
Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Beautiful;
It is He Who has created man to use the pen (the word)
Taught man that which he knew not."**

(The Koran XCVI)

When Mohammed woke up, these words were still ringing in his ears and seemed as if they were indelibly inscribed upon his heart.

Mohammed, who disclaimed power to perform miracles, firmly believed that he was the messenger of God sent forth to confirm previous scriptures, and proclaimed that "God has revealed His will to the Jews and the Christians through chosen apostles, but they disobeyed God's Commandments and divided themselves into schismatic sects. Allah accuses the Jews of corrupting the scriptures and the Christians for worshipping the Trinity viz. Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, although God had expressly commanded them to worship none but Him. Having thus gone astray, they must be brought back to the right path, to the true religion preached by Abraham. This was Islam which means "absolute submission or resignation to the will of Allah."

Thereafter, further revelations followed at brief intervals. Then onwards Mohammed took to spreading the message of Koran, for uplifting the people from the depth of moral degradation and for freeing them from their superstitions. When he began to denounce idolatry and superstitious practices followed by his countrymen, he was subjected to great persecution by the people of Mecca and suffered every kind of indignity. But still he preserved for some time in his God-ordained mission resolutely.

But as the persecution by the Meccans mounted up, he fled to Medina where he was received warmly and where many took to his religion. The Muslim era of Hijra dates from this event. Mohammed grew in popularity and the once-despised teacher was now recognised as the ruler of a city and of powerful tribes. Missionaries were sent to all parts of Arabia and even to neighbouring countries, including Egypt and Persia, and a year later the Prophet celebrated his pilgrimage in peace to the holy city of his enemies. The final conquest of Mecca was followed later, in the year 630 A.D.; the entire population of Mecca took to Islam and the Ka'ba (the chief place of worship, believed to have been built by Abraham) was made the religious centre of Islam.

In 632 A.D., Mohammed made his pilgrimage to Mecca for the last time, and after his return to Medina, fell ill and lay sick for several days. One day he got up to attend to his prayers at the mosque, and while doing his prayers he died. It is believed that Angel Gabriel came to receive him and escorted him to Heaven.

Khadija died in 619 A.D. thirteen years earlier than Mohammed. She bore him two sons and four daughters. The boys died in infancy. After the death of Mohammed. Abu Bakr, the faithful friend of Mohammed became the Caliph. Caliph means 'deputy' or 'representative,' but actually the religious and secular head of the community. Umar was the second and Uthman was the third Caliph; all the three were related to Mohammed through marriage alliance. Ali was the fourth, he was the son-in-law of Mohammed, married to Fatima, the Prophet's third daughter. Ali was murdered; his son Hasan resigned his claim to the Caliphate; he died a few years later. It was suspected he was poisoned. His younger brother Husayan who was till then living quietly at Medina, came out to oppose the new Caliph. But his force, consisting of merely 200 men, was surrounded by vastly superior forces at Karbala, and, as he refused to surrender, he along with his men were slaughtered. The enemies cut off the head of Husayan, the Prophet's grandson and sent it to Damascus. It was afterwards buried with his body in Karabula, now one of the great sanctuaries of the Shias. The tenth day of Muharram, the day of the slaughter of Husayan (and his followers) makes the culmination of the ten days lamentation, which is observed every year by the Shias. Shias revere Hasan and Husayan as martyrs who were wrongfully deprived of the Caliphate for which they were the true heirs, being in the direct line of descent from the Prophet.

The light which Mohammed lit, spread all over the world in the times that followed, and it is one of the major religions of the world today.

It is said of Mohammed that he was a man of amazing ability in winning men's hearts by persuasion and in coercing and disarming his opponents. He was a man of great compassion, radiating peace and love always. He was of course an embodiment of wisdom.

Mohammed's uniquely loving nature could be understood by the following anecdote. There used to be one lonely old woman who used to stay in the upper floor or the room (of the *chawel*). Mohammed was still young and poor at the time. The old woman, for no reason, developed a hatred for him. She used to choose the time for throwing out the rubbish from her room, whenever Mohammed was either going out of his room or was returning to his room, so that the filthy heap would fall straight on his head. This became an almost daily routine. But Mohammed never raised even a word of protest or resentment against her. He used to put up with it all as if nothing ever had happened. It later happened that for a day or two the woman was not noticed to be coming out. Mohammed knew that the woman hated him intensely, but even then, he began to feel worried as to what could have happened to her. Anxiously he went up to her room, and knocked at the door. The old woman, with great difficulty, opened the door. She was seriously ill, with none to attend to her. Mohammed asked, "Mother, why did you not call me, your son, when you are not well." He immediately moved her to his room, and lovingly served her for days and nourished her back to health, as if her were her son. The old woman realised what a great soul Mohammed was.

This was an instance of the Biblical Commandment "Love thy neighbour as thyself" lived in practice. Such was the nature of the Religion, which he founded.

The *Hadis* contains the sayings of Prophet Mohammed on various subjects and aspects, and *Sirat* is the bibliography of the Prophet (and other saints). These texts are also valued as much as *Koran* and portray the *Islamic ideology* as lived and exemplified in the life of the Prophet Mohammed.

The daily life of Prophet Mohammed was a unique example of simplicity and service to fellow-beings. He was an embodiment of compassion and mercy. It is said that he even forgave the person who killed his beloved daughter, such was his merciful nature. He showed by practice whatever he preached. His life itself was his Message. He used to eat very little; he fasted often, his clothes were simple and often patched. He used to sleep on an old mattress. Day-time he used to spend mostly in doing service and helping others, and in preaching moral and spiritual truths. His nights were spent mostly in mystic communion with God and in prayers. It is aptly said by his wife Ayesha that:

"The character of Mohammed was the Koran."