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The Story of Abraham

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the

land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation.”

Genesis 12:1-2

The beginning of the Jewish religion goes back to the time of a Prophet called Abraham

whose name means “ancestor of a multitude”. He may well have been the first human being to

believe in one God. Abraham lived in the city of Ur in today’s Iraq. The people in Ur

worshipped natural forces, like the sun and moon. They also worshipped idols, which were

statues and other images of gods that were used as objects of worship.

According to Midrash, which are commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, Abraham's father was an idol-maker. One day, Abraham destroyed his father's idols. When his father asked the young Abraham who had destroyed the idols, Abraham said that they had fought and destroyed each other. His father told him that the idols were objects made out of clay and didn't have any power of their own. Abraham asked, "If they don't have any power of their own, then why do you worship them?" The story of Abraham destroying the idols is also mentioned in the Holy Book of the Muslims called the Qur'an. God ordered Abraham to move to the land of Canaan, known today as Israel. There, he and his family could live a happy and comfortable life and with the freedom to worship their God. When Abraham and his followers arrived at Canaan, the people there called them "Hebrews", which means "the other side", because they had come from the other side of a river called Euphrates. Many years after the death of Abraham, a terrible famine broke out and the Hebrews had to move from Canaan to Egypt. In Egypt, they were forced to work for the pharaoh (king) who began using them as slaves to build cities and huge temples. Because the Hebrews were suffering in Egypt, the pharaoh was afraid that at some point in the future they would support his enemies and overthrow him. As a result, he ordered that every boy born to the Hebrews be thrown into the Nile River.

The Story of Moses

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Deuteronomy 6:5

In Egypt, the story of the prophet Moses begins with his family leaving their baby son in a basket on the Nile River to protect him from being killed because he was a Hebrew. Since it was God's plan for Moses to live and become the next prophet, the basket miraculously ended up in the pharaoh's house. The basket was discovered by the pharaoh's daughter, who adopted the baby and called him "Moses", which means "taken from the water." Moses grew up in the

palace as an Egyptian prince surrounded by wealth and luxury. One day, Moses saw one of the pharaoh's soldiers beating a Hebrew slave. Moses, who by then had learned that he himself was a Hebrew, went to help the slave. As he was trying to save the slave, the pharaoh's soldier was killed. Moses was frightened and fled from Egypt. He went towards the east to a land called Midian, the present-day country of Saudi Arabia. There, he joined the family of a priest by the name of Jethro. Later, he married Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and began working for her father as a shepherd. One day, as Moses was tending Jethro's flock on a mountain called Sinai, an Angel of God appeared to him in the form of a burning bush. That was when Moses learned that God had chosen him as a new prophet. His mission was to free the Hebrews from slavery and to take them back to Canaan, the land of their ancestors. There, like their forefathers, they could live a free, happy, and comfortable life. At first, Moses could not convince the pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt because he wanted to keep the Hebrews there as his slaves. Because of this, God sent a series of disasters such as severe infestations of locusts, flies, and frogs; animal diseases; a terrible storm; and darkness that even the sun couldn't penetrate. Finally, the pharaoh agreed to let his slaves leave Egypt, and with that the Hebrews began their 40 year-long journey to Canaan.

A Jewish Synagogue

During this time, God spoke with Moses on many occasions. He gave Moses many teachings that improved the life of the Hebrews and taught them to love, worship, and obey God. He taught them to respect their parents. He told them not to steal and to avoid hurting other people. He taught them to be honest and to avoid being greedy. He told them to love their neighbors as much as they love themselves. Moses died at the age of 120. Later, his people came to be known as the Jews. The words of God that were spoken to Moses were gathered into a book called the Bible. The Bible not only includes the teachings of Moses, but also has many stories and teachings from other

great teachers who were guided by God.

The Story of Zoroaster

“May the true-spoken word triumph over the false-spoken word.”

Yasna 60: 5

The Prophet Zoroaster is the founder of a religion called Zoroastrianism. He is thought to have lived sometime between 1,700 and 660 B.C.E (“Before Common Era” or before Christ) in the northwestern part of a country known as Persia, now called Iran. According to some Zoroastrian books, when Zoroaster’s mother was five months pregnant, she had a dream in which she saw the world being destroyed. She was very scared, but an angel appeared to her in that dream and told her that the baby she was carrying was going to be a great prophet who would save the world from destruction. Zoroaster came from a noble family. As a child, he had every comfort in his home, which was near a beautiful lake. At the age of 20, Zoroaster left his parents’ house to search for truth and peace in the world. He spent the next 10 years of his life in a cave on a mountain called Ushidam (“divine intellect”). There, he spent his time in prayer and meditation and tried to find a solution to the many problems of his time, such as lying, war, and corruption. At the age of 30, Zoroaster had a vision. A gigantic, shining being appeared before him -- the archangel of “Good Thought” that the Zoroastrians call Vohu Mana. The archangel led the Zoroaster into the presence of God, where he learned that he was a new prophet and that his mission was to guide his people. Later, he went back home to share this wonderful news with his family and his people. He then spent the next 10 years of his life teaching the Message that God had given him. But like all other prophets, Zoroaster was rejected by the people of his time. Even his own father did not support him in the beginning. His main enemies were the priests of the land who made fun of him, as they usually do when a new prophet comes. Finally, after 10 years of hard work, Zoroaster had his first follower, who was his own cousin, Metyoma.

Because he did not have much success with his own people, Zoroaster decided to share his message with the people of other towns. He left his family and home behind and moved to a city called Balk where King Vishtaspa, the ruler of Iran, lived. Zoroaster hoped to share his wonderful Message with this king and his people.

Zoroastrian Temple

But much like the people in Zoroaster's hometown, the people of Balk had no interest in the Prophet's Message. They preferred their old ways of statue and idol-worshiping and didn't want to hear about Zoroaster's God and his religion. King Vishtaspa was surrounded by a

number of corrupt priests and religious leaders who spent their time in witchcraft and animal sacrifice. These men were jealous of Zoroaster and wouldn't let the king listen to his Message.

The priests finally managed to have Zoroaster thrown into prison. During the time that Zoroaster was in jail, he had a life-changing experience. King Vishtaspa had a black horse, which he loved very much. This horse fell gravely ill and no one could treat it.

Zoroaster had some experience with medicine and offered to help. When he succeeded in curing the horse of the deadly disease, the King was very happy with the Prophet. He decided to listen to Zoroaster's Message, with which he fell in love, and became his follower.

Then the Queen also became a follower and eventually most of Persia became followers of Zoroaster. Zoroaster taught his followers to believe in only one God. He called this God

"Ahura Mazda", which means "The Wise Lord."

At the time of Zoroaster, the people of his land believed in many gods. They made statues of these gods and worshiped the statues. Zoroaster taught them to believe in one God

Who was the true God; the God Who created them and loved them.

He also taught them about the virtues such as love, truth, and service to other human

beings. He had great respect for agriculture and encouraged his followers to raise grain, grow fruits, root out weeds, and cultivate the land. He told them to treat animals with kindness,

especially the cows that were of great service to the farmers. He also stressed the cleanliness of the body, soul, and home. His wonderful message of “good words, good deeds, and good thoughts” is still a great source of guidance for his followers to this day.

The Story of Krishna

“He whose peace is not shaken by others, and before whom other people find peace, beyond excitement and anger and fear; he is dear to me.”

Hinduism. Bhagavad Gita 12:15

In Hinduism, Krishna is known as an Avatar of Lord Vishnu (God). An Avatar is like a

perfectly clean and polished mirror Who reflects all of the virtues and characteristics of God on

earth. The word Krishna means dark or blue. In the Hindu works of art,

Krishna’s face and his

skin are often blue. Blue is the color of the sky and heaven, which indicates Krishna’s true

spiritual nature. The complex life and story of Krishna is a mixture of facts and myths. Some

sources consider him a mere legend, while others view Krishna as a real historical figure.

Generally, two completely different personalities appear out of the stories surrounding

Krishna.

Krishna of the Puranas (“Legends”)

The Krishna of the Puranas is much-loved by the Hindus and plays a major role in the

folklore of India. Hindus believe that Krishna came from the ancient city of Mathura in India

where the ruler, King Kamsa, was so cruel that he had thrown out his own father in order to

rule in his place. According to the legends, wise men warned the evil king that one day the son

of his cousin (Vasudeva) would take his place. King Kamsa therefore ordered that his cousin

and his cousin’s wife, Devaki, be put into prison together. The king made sure that every time

Devaki gave birth to a son, that son was immediately killed. This happened seven times. The

eighth time, the guard who was watching for the next birth fell asleep.

As soon as Vasudeva realized he had a son (Krishna) and that the guard was asleep, he

crossed the river to a nearby village and switched his son with a baby girl.

This trick saved

Krishna’s life. He grew up among the farmers and became a kind and gentle young man whose

skill in playing the flute was unmatched. Krishna's reputation for goodness and his unbelievable skill as a musician spread far and wide. This led King Kamsa to discover Krishna's true identity. The king remembered the wise men's predictions and tried several times to kill Krishna, but all of these attempts failed. At last, when the king tried to kill Krishna himself, the king was killed in the attack.

Hindu Temple

After King Kamsa's death, the people offered his crown to Krishna, who was 12 years old. But Krishna refused to accept it. In His kindness, He gave the crown to King Kamsa's father, who had been overthrown by his own son. As for Krishna, he went back to live in the village where had had been raised.

Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita ("The Songs of the Blessed Lord")

The Bhagavad Gita is a part of a very long poem (100,000 verses) called the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata tells the story of a battle between the Pandava brothers and their cousins, the Kauravas, for control of the northwestern kingdom of Hastinapura in India.

The Bhagavad Gita forms only a small portion of the Mahabharata, but it is the most favorite

Holy Book of many Hindus. The Bhagavad Gita is written in the form of a dialogue between

two figures: a prince, Arjuna, and his charioteer and advisor Krishna. Arjuna is a member of

the Pandava family. His royal power is threatened by his cousins, the Kauravas. He has to

decide whether to fight against his cousins to restore his throne or to accept their rule. Arjuna

is not willing to go into the war mainly because he doesn't want to kill his close family members.

Krishna tries to encourage the prince to fight this battle. In the course of their dialogue,

Krishna reveals His divine nature to Arjuna. His revelation is described as the light of a

thousand suns in the sky. As Arjuna looks at Krishna, he sees the entire world, all the gods,

and the One. Filled with awe, Arjuna agrees to fight. Many people believe that the battle in the

Bhagavad Gita is not a real battle but only a "symbolic" one. It is a

battle between good and evil. They say that there are two forces within each human being that are always at work in opposition to each other. One is the force of the animal nature, which tends to drag him down into the animal kingdom. The other is the force of the spiritual nature, which elevates him to great heights of nearness to God. These two natures are always in combat. That is the kind of battle that Krishna encourages Arjuna to fight. This can be seen in the following verse from the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna tells Arjuna to: “Be a warrior and kill desire, the powerful enemy of the soul”. (3:43) So here, Krishna is not telling Arjuna to kill his cousins, but rather his desire for the wrong things in life. This idea is supported by one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century,

Mahatma Gandhi. He said that in the Bhagavad Gita the call to arms is not about real war but is a call to fight against dangerous moral and psychological forces, such as ignorance, selfishness, and anger. In the battle of the Bhagavad Gita there is a great symbol of hope: that he who has a good will and strives is never lost. And that in the battle for eternal life, there can never be defeat unless we run away from the battle.

The Story of the Buddha

“Never speak harsh words, for once spoken they may return to you. Angry words are painful and there may be blows for blows.”

The Dhammapada 10:133

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was the founder of a religion called Buddhism. He was born about 563 B.C.E. (“Before Common Era”, or before Christ was born) in a country now

known as Nepal. According to the Buddhist tradition, his father, Suddhodana, was a king.

Before Siddhartha’s birth, his mother, Queen Maya, dreamed that a white elephant entered her

womb. The Hindu priests interpreted this dream to mean that a son would be born to her who

would either become a king of India, or turn to religion and become a monk who spent his time in meditation.

When the baby was born, they called him Siddhartha, which means “He who has reached his goal”. According to Buddhist legends, Siddhartha’s father hoped that his son

would not turn to religion and would grow up to become the king of India. He built his son three palaces, gave him fine clothes, many dancing girls, and several female musicians. He thought that with all these luxuries and comfort, Siddhartha would not have time to turn to religion and become a monk. When Siddhartha was 19, he married a princess called Yasodhara. They had a baby boy whom they called Rahula (“fettters”). But Siddhartha found out that worldly pleasures alone could not bring happiness. Although his father had ordered Siddhartha to stay in his palaces, he rode out one day into the world and, for the first time, saw an old man. The next day he went out, he saw a sick man, and on the third day, he saw a dead person. Thus he realized that all human beings were subject to suffering and death.

Buddhist Temple

When he left the palace for a ride on the fourth day, he saw a monk who looked very peaceful to him. So Siddhartha decided to live like the monk. One night, at the age of 29, he left his palace, his wife, and baby boy behind to find a solution to the problem of suffering in this world. First, he studied with two masters of meditation, called yoga masters. When that did not increase his understanding, he began to deprive his body of food and comfort. During this period of his life, he became very thin. His bones could be seen under his skin, but he still could not find the way to happiness. This was because when the body gets weak, the mind loses its ability to think clearly. One day, due to this starvation, Siddhartha fainted in a river. After coming to, he decided to end his fasting and to start eating again. It was then that a Hindu girl offered him a bowl of rice cooked in milk, which Siddhartha accepted. Later, he went and sat down under a fig tree. The Buddhists call this tree the Bodhi tree, which means the “Tree of Knowledge”. That’s because Buddhists believe that it is under this tree that Siddhartha found the answer to the problem of suffering and thus became the Buddha, which means “the Enlightened One.” He decided that he would not get

up until he had found the answer to his quest for happiness and the end of misery in this world.

According to the Buddhist legends, as he was sitting under the Bodhi Tree and was wrapped in meditation, an evil force named the Tempter Mara (or the evil one) attacked him with storms, rain, rocks, and blazing weapons. But Siddhartha did not move. Then, Mara tried to tempt him by offering him the wealth of the world so that he would give up his goal. But Mara's effort had no effect on Siddhartha.

It was then that Siddhartha received the answer he was looking for. He learned that if we are going to be free from pain and suffering in this world, we need to learn to become detached. In other words, we need to free ourselves from attachment to material things in the world. We have to learn to focus our lives on developing such virtues as love, kindness, generosity, truthfulness, and honesty. This was a turning point in the life of Siddhartha and the people of his time. He was now referred to as the "Buddha", which means the Enlightened One. For the next 45 years, the Buddha traveled through the northern Indian countryside teaching people about the virtues, which he called "the true treasures of life." He taught them to love and not to hate. He spoke to them about the importance of living together in peace and harmony. He also taught them to avoid fighting with each other. He advised his followers to be wise, to be generous, and to avoid jealousy, lying, and selfishness. Many people of various sects and classes joined his religion. That included most of his family members, such as his father, his son, Rahula, and his wife. Through his wonderful teachings, the Buddha helped millions of people of various nations to live a happy and peaceful life.

The Story of Jesus

"Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you."

Gospel of Matthew 5:44

The founder of Christianity is known by the title of Christ or the "Chosen One." At birth, he was named Jesus, which means "God is help." The Holy Book of the

Christians is the Bible, which consists of the Old Testament (the Jewish Bible) and the New Testament. The New Testament is a collection of stories and letters about Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. The Bible tells us that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in the Holy Land, which is called Israel today. It does not give the exact date of his birth. Jesus came from a religious Jewish family that lived a very simple life. His mother, Mary, was married to Joseph, a carpenter who raised Jesus as his own son. In the Bible, a story called "the Annunciation" describes how an angel appeared to Mary and told her that she would have a son conceived by the Holy Spirit. It also describes how Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus, and that he was therefore conceived through the heavenly intervention of the Holy Spirit. Before the Birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had to travel to the city of Bethlehem on the order of the Roman government which ruled over the Holy Land. The rulers had wanted to conduct a census, which is a count of the number of people who were living there. When Jesus' parents arrived at Bethlehem, they could not find a room in which to stay, so the baby Jesus was born in a stable and cradled in the feedbox of a donkey. The Bible describes how a group of Bethlehem shepherds came to see baby Jesus to pay their respects to him. These shepherds said that many angels had appeared to them and had given them the good news of the birth of a Savior, one who would free people from their suffering and would bring peace and happiness to the world. The Bible also speaks of a few Zoroastrian priests called the "Magi" who had followed a star and had arrived at Bethlehem to pay their respects to this Savior, bringing him gifts including gold. It is believed that the Magi were searching for the Saoshyant or "Savior," who was an ideal king-figure hoped for by both Persians and Jews. Jesus grew up in a large family in which there were at least six other children, including James, Joses (Greek for Joseph), Jude, and Simon, and at least two sisters. His

parents traveled to Jerusalem each year to observe the Jewish Passover celebration. Jesus became so familiar with the Hebrew Bible that he was able to quote its passages easily. The Bible includes a story about how, at the age of 12, Jesus went with his family to the city of Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. On the way back home, Mary and Joseph noticed suddenly that Jesus was not with them. Frightened, they began searching for him and found him, still in the Jewish Temple, talking to the rabbis, Jewish religious leaders, about the “Torah”, the Jewish scriptures. The rabbis were amazed at his knowledge and understanding. As a young boy, Jesus learned carpentry and began to help Joseph with his work. When Joseph died, Jesus, as the oldest son of the family, took over the management of Joseph’s carpentry business. When Jesus was 30 years old, his cousin, John the Baptist, baptized him in the River Jordan. John the Baptist was a holy man who brought the good news to the people of his time that a Messenger of God was going to come to free them from all of their sorrows. People from all parts of the Holy Land would come to hear John and be baptized by him. This baptism, which involved immersing people in the river, had a symbolic meaning. It symbolized the washing away of their sins and mistakes and the chance for them to start a new spiritual life.

Christian Church

It was during his baptism by John the Baptist that Jesus learned that he was a Messenger of God for his time. He was given a very important and difficult task and he needed time to think about it. He left his home and went into the desert, where he spent 40 days to think about the mission he had been given by God. Like the Buddha under the fig tree, Jesus also faced a lot of temptations to turn away from God and busy himself with the things of this world. At the end, he overcame the temptations and began sharing the great message that he had received from God with his people.

The first follower of Jesus was a fisherman by the name of Simon. Jesus gave Simon the

name of Peter, which means “the rock”. Later, another 11 men, along with some women such as Mary Magdalene, recognized Jesus as the new Messenger of God for their time. The number of his followers gradually increased. Jesus spent his days talking to his followers about God and about living a life that was pleasing to God. He taught them how to love other human beings and how to be patient, forgiving, honest, and generous. His popularity made the priests of his time very jealous. They did not want their followers to be attracted to this new prophet. They knew that if that happened, they would lose their own position and popularity among the people. When Jesus told these priests that he was their spiritual King, the one that the Bible had promised was coming, they did not believe him. That was because they expected their king to be a person with worldly power and wealth, while Jesus did not own much of the things of this world. His kingdom was not of this world. Jesus’ mission lasted for about three years before he was arrested and put to death. He was nailed to a cross, between two thieves who were also put to death in this way. Jesus had so much love and forgiveness that even on the cross, he prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies. His crucifixion took place on a Friday. Later, a wealthy Jewish disciple by the name of Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus’ body in a tomb he had reserved for his own burial. After Jesus’ death, his early followers, who were mostly fishermen, ordinary clerks and farmers, spread Jesus’ wonderful message of love, compassion, and tolerance throughout the world.

The Story of Muhammad

“When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed Close to them. I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls on Me.”
Qur’an 2:186

Muhammad is the founder of a religion called Islam. His name means “The Praised One”[, and] Islam means “submission unto the Will of God.” Muhammad was born in about 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca, which is in today’s Saudi Arabia. It is a land

that is mostly desert, lacking in water, and very hot. Muhammad's father died before Muhammad was born. When he was only six years old, Muhammad lost his mother, so his grandfather took care of him for the next two years. Then his grandfather passed away and Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib, raised him. Muhammad was well-known among his people for his honesty. In fact, he was called "al-Amin", which means "one who is trustworthy." As a young man, Muhammad was in charge of caravans and took camel-loads and goods from his town to sell in other places. Because of his honesty, he soon became the leader of many caravans. When he was 25, he married a wealthy widow named Khadija and they had four daughters. Muhammad lived among tribes of Arabia who were always fighting with each other. Most of the people of Arabia were polytheists, meaning they worshipped many gods. Just like the people before the time of Zoroaster, the Arabs mostly worshipped gods that they had made out of stone and wood. There were about 360 of these idols inside a small building called the Ka bah, located in Mecca. Because there were so many images of various gods in the Ka bah, it had become the holiest place for the Arabs. People would come from all parts of Arabia to worship their gods there. Muhammad did not believe in these gods. In fact, he wished that his people would give up the worship of many gods and also stop fighting and killing each other. Like many other prophets, Muhammad spent a good part of his time in prayer and meditation. There was a mountain called Mt. Hira that was a few miles north of the city of Mecca.

Muhammad used to go there regularly and spend hours or even days in a cave there praying, meditating, and seeking to find a solution for the problems of his people. Then one night, when he was 40 years old, God spoke to Muhammad through an angel named Gabriel ("God is strong") while he was meditating in the cave. Gabriel told Muhammad that he was a new prophet and that his mission was to teach people about God and His teachings and to help them live a better life. When Muhammad went back home to his wife,

Khadija, and shared his experience with her, she understood what had happened and became his first follower. At first he shared the Message only with his friends and relatives and gained some new followers. Later, he went to the other people of Mecca with the Message he had received from God. He told them to stop worshipping the idols they had built and to believe in the One True God. But the people had no interest in Muhammad's Message. They ridiculed him, threw stones at him, and called him names. Finally, the enemies of Muhammad decided to kill him.

However, God had other plans for his Messenger. Right around that time, some men came from the city of Medina to the city of Mecca where Muhammad lived. They were tired of constant battles among the different tribes in their city. They were hoping that Muhammad would come to their city to put an end to these wars and to help them live in peace. They asked for Muhammad's help because he was known as someone who could bring peace to warring tribes and could teach them to live in harmony. The timing was perfect for Muhammad and he accepted their invitation and left the city of Mecca to travel to Medina. Muhammad brought peace to the warring tribes of Medina and became very popular among the people. In the first year of his stay there, he set up a confederation of all the groups who lived in Medina. This alliance involved a commitment to fight together against outside enemies, not to make a separate peace with outside enemies, and not to give refuge to anyone who had committed a crime or an act of aggression or had caused disunity among the tribes.

The treaty of alliance made the city of Medina a safe place. In Medina, Muhammad's house became a place of worship where many of his followers gathered and prayed together on Fridays. This practice of praying together on Fridays still continues among the Muslims today. Many years later, Muhammad and some of his followers returned to the city of Mecca where Muhammad had been born. There, the Prophet went inside the Ka bah and destroyed all of the idols and made that place a sacred shrine for Muslims. Today, the Ka bah is the holiest place for Muslims and

the place that the
Muslims face when they pray five times a day.

Dome of the Rock

The following story shows how the Prophet Muhammad taught the importance of the
love of

God to one of his followers:

A man once came to Muhammad with a bundle and said; 'O Prophet, I passed
through a wood and heard the voice of the young birds; I took them and put them
in

my carpet, and their mother came fluttering round my head.' Muhammad said,
'Put

them down.' When the man had put them down, the mother joined her young. And
the

Prophet said, 'Do you wonder at the affection of the mother towards her
young? I

swear by Him who has sent me, verily God is more loving to His servants than
the

mother to these young birds. Return them to the place from which ye took them,
and let

their mother be with them.'¹

The Message that Muhammad received from God was later gathered together in a
Book

called the Qur'an, which means "to recite or read." The Qur'an is the
holy Book of the

Muslims. In the Qur'an, we find the belief in the One True God who is called
Allah, which

actually means "God." In this Book, God invites the Muslims to live in
peace together, to give

to the poor and needy, and to treat others as they would like to be treated by
them.

Like all other prophets, Muhammad encouraged his followers to live a life of
virtues.

He told them to acquire knowledge, to be thankful to God, to be peaceful and
kind, to respect

their parents, to pray, and to avoid gossip. After the death of Muhammad, his
successors

spread Islam's Message to different parts of the world including Syria,
Persia, Iraq, India,

Mongolia, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain.

The Story of the Báb

"If thou art a believer, thy faith shall be sufficient for thee above all
things that exist on earth, even
though thou possess nothing."

Selections from the Writings of the Báb. p. 123

On October 20, 1819, a child named 'Alí-Muhammad was born to a family of
merchants

in the Persian city of Shiraz. Later, he took the title the Báb (the Gate).
The Báb's father died soon after his birth. So, like Muhammad, the Báb was raised by his uncle. From childhood, the Báb was different from other children. While they were busy playing, he would be found sitting under the shade of a tree or in some other quiet place praying and meditating. As a child, the Báb was sent to a teacher called Shaykh `Abid in order to study the Qur'an, reading, and writing. But his God-given knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence astonished his teacher, who one day took him back to his uncle and told him that this child was in no need of teachers like him. The Báb's uncle, however, still sent him back to school. One day when the Báb had come late to school, his teacher asked him why he had been late. The Báb said quietly that he had been in the house of his "Grandfather". By the term grandfather, he was referring to the prophet Muhammad, who was his ancestor. The teacher told the Báb that he was only 10 and he didn't need to spend so much time in prayer and meditation. The Báb answered: "I wish to be like my grandfather." Later on, both Shaykh `Abid and the Báb's uncle became followers of the Báb. There are many other stories that show how extraordinary the Báb was even as a child. It is said that one day the Báb's mother scolded a servant just after the mother had performed her ablution (washing her hands and feet) in preparation for her daily prayer. The Báb, who was only six years old at the time, told his mother, "My beloved mother, wouldn't it have been better if you had done the purifying ablution right before the prayer so that the rebuke would not have tarnished your prayer? 2"

The Báb was only 25 when he announced that he was the Promised One of Islam. He also said that he had come to prepare the way for an even greater Prophet of God who was going to appear soon and would end wars and bring peace to the world. The Báb called himself the Gate (in Arabic, the Báb) to that great Prophet. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Jesus, the Báb was also getting his followers ready for the coming of the

next prophet.

At first 18 people listened to the Message of the Báb. His first follower was a pious and knowledgeable young man by the name of Mullah Husayn. Through his research of the Muslim Holy Writings, he had come to the conclusion that the Promised One of Islam was going to appear in the year 1844. The year 1844 is also very important in the Christian calendar.

There are many prophecies in the Bible that point to this year for the Second Coming of Christ.

Mullah Husayn spent many days in prayer and fasting and his meditation led him to the city of Shiraz where the Báb was living. Mullah Husayn was welcomed by the Báb into his house and became convinced that the Báb was the Promised One of Islam. That meeting took place on May 23 1844. Later, 17 other people came to recognize the station of the Báb as the

Promised One of Islam and the founder of a new religion called the Bábí Faith. Soon the Báb's

Message gained widespread support. Thousands of people joined his religion and became

known as Bábís. The fame of the Báb scared some of the religious leaders of Iran who were afraid of losing power and prestige if more people were to accept the Báb's message. These leaders feared and resented the new Faith of the Báb and began killing and torturing thousands of his followers.

As for the Báb himself, he was arrested and locked away in prisons in the mountains

and was finally put to death on July 9th, 1850 at the age of 30. Just like Christ, the Báb also knew

that he would be martyred in the path of God. On the morning of the day of his martyrdom,

the officer who had been ordered to carry out the execution of the Báb went to bring him out

from the prison. The Báb was talking to his secretary, who was writing down the Báb's last

instructions. The officer told the Báb that it was time for him to leave the prison and go to the

place of his execution. The Báb said that he needed to finish his conversation with his secretary.

The officer laughed and said that he was a prisoner and that he could not choose to do as he

pleased.

As the Báb was being taken to the place of his execution, he told the officer that no power on earth could do him any harm until he had finished what he intended to say to his secretary and had completed his mission on earth. The officer ignored the Báb's comment and took him to the public square where he was going to be put to death. At that time, one of his followers by the name of Anis came running up to the Báb. He threw himself at his feet and begged to be allowed to die with him. The officer tried to push Anis away but he cried and pleaded so much that the officer took him, also.

Shrine of the Báb

Thousands of people had gathered in the public square where the soldiers were waiting to execute the Báb. All of them watched as the Báb and Anis were tied in such a way that the head of Anis rested on the chest of his beloved Master, the Báb. Then the hundreds of soldiers fired their guns. When the smoke cleared, people saw that Anis was standing there unharmed, and there was no trace of the Báb. People said that a miracle had happened. The officer who had taken the Báb to his place of execution went to look for him and found him sitting calmly in the same place as before, finishing his conversation with his secretary. The Báb looked at the officer and told him that his mission on earth was now completed and that he was ready to die in the path of God.

When the Báb was brought to the square for the second time, the commander of the soldiers said that he didn't want to have anything to do with the Báb's execution. He ordered his soldiers to leave and swore that nothing would make him take the life of the Báb or his followers.

Another group of soldiers was brought in to carry out the execution. This time, 750 bullets hit their target and the Báb and Anis were killed. The soldiers threw the bodies of the Báb and Anis into a ditch outside the city. But the followers of the Báb managed to place the bodies in a wooden box and hide them for many years. Eventually, they brought

these remains
to Haifa in the Holy Land and buried them in a shrine on Mount Carmel.
The Báb wrote many books. In his Writings, he set a new system of laws and religious principles. He also said that the main purpose of his mission was to announce the coming of the Promised One of all ages. In his book, the Persian Bayán, the Báb described this new prophet as “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest.” He told his followers that when this New Prophet appeared, they would have to put aside everything else and follow him as soon as they heard His Message. He even made reference to his name, “Bahá’u’lláh”, in some of his books. The Báb said that the mission of this new prophet was to help humanity live like one large family and to establish peace on earth.

The Story of Bahá’u’lláh

“That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. P. 250

Bahá’u’lláh (Glory of God) is the founder of a religion called the Bahá’í Faith. He was born on November 12, 1817 in Tehran, the capital of Persia, known today as Iran. His parents called him Husayn-‘Alí but he later came to be known as Bahá’u’lláh, which means “the Glory of God.” Like Buddha and Zoroaster, Bahá’u’lláh’s childhood was happy and comfortable. His family lived in a mansion with beautiful furniture and many fine things. Bahá’u’lláh’s father was a nobleman who was so respected for his wisdom, talents, generosity, and courage that the King gave him the title “Buzurg”, which means “the great one”, and made him a vizier. From the time of his childhood, Bahá’u’lláh was different from other children. His mother used to say that her son never cried or made a fuss about anything.

He was also very kind and generous. Like most other children of noble families, Bahá'u'lláh had a tutor at home for a while but he never attended any school. His vast, God-given knowledge amazed everyone who came into contact with him. When Bahá'u'lláh was only five or six, his father had a strange dream that he was in a garden where huge birds were flying over his head and attacking him. But they could not harm him in any way. Then he went on to take a bath in the sea and again, he was attacked, but this time by fish. Like the birds, the fish also could not harm him. Bahá'u'lláh shared this dream with his father, who asked a wise man to interpret the dream. Just like in the story of Buddha, the wise man also predicted that this boy was going to be a great person. He said that the sea in the dream was this world and the huge birds and fish were the peoples of the world who would attack his son in the future. This was because Bahá'u'lláh was going to speak of something that was very important and had to do with the minds of people. But they would not be able to harm him, and he would live to achieve a great task. Bahá'u'lláh grew up and married a woman called Navváb, who, like him, came from a noble and wealthy family. She was kind, loving, and very beautiful. They had three children. When Bahá'u'lláh was 22 years old, his father died and the government offered him his father's position. But like Buddha and Zoroaster, Bahá'u'lláh had no interest in worldly things, so he rejected the offer. Instead, he spent his time in prayer and meditation and serving the poor. His charitable works earned him the title "the Father of the Poor." Bahá'u'lláh was 27 when he became aware of the Báb's message through another individual and immediately joined the new religion. Two years after the Báb's death, two young Bábís who were angry that the King of Persia had been responsible for the death of the Báb, decided to take revenge and kill the King. The assassination attempt failed and resulted in the death or arrest of hundreds of the Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh was among those wrongly accused of involvement in the

assassination plot.

He was arrested and thrown into an underground dungeon in Tehran called the "Black Pit." In

this dark and dirty dungeon, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned with murderers and thieves. Heavy

chains were put around his neck, chains so heavy he could not lift up his head.

Bahá'u'lláh

suffered four terrible months in this dungeon. One night, while a prisoner,

Bahá'u'lláh had a

vision. A beautiful angel (the Maiden of Heaven) appeared to him and told him that he was the

new Prophet of God. Once again, God had appointed a new messenger. This time, it was

Bahá'u'lláh who was chosen by God to help bring about the Promised Day.

In all of the

religions and their holy books, God had promised a Day in which all the people of the world

would put aside war and learn to live together in peace and harmony.

When Bahá'u'lláh's innocence was proven, he was freed from the dungeon but ordered

by the government to leave the country with his family. They were sent to Baghdad (in Iraq) in

the bitter cold of winter. Bahá'u'lláh, Navváb, and their young children had to travel hundreds

of miles during this long journey that took three months. They finally reached Baghdad, but

that was not the end of their suffering. When Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghdad, there was already

a small community of Bábís living there. Soon, Bahá'u'lláh noticed that the leaderless

community of the Bábís in Baghdad had sunk to depths of degradation. He decided to help

them, but he soon became the object of the envy of others who sought leadership within the

Bábí community.

To prevent disunity among the Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh decided to leave

Baghdad for the

mountains of Kurdistan. There, he stayed in small caves for about a year and lived on very

simple food. Just like the Buddha meditating under the Bodhi Tree, Zoroaster living in a cave

on Mount Ushidam, Jesus living in the desert for 40 days, and Muhammad meditating in the

cave on Mt. Hira, now Bahá'u'lláh spent this time in prayer and mediation. After a year in the

mountains, Bahá'u'lláh was seen by a Muslim mystic in the area who invited

him to move to a nearby city in Kurdistan. Bahá'u'lláh accepted the offer and stayed in the city for another year. Eventually, Bahá'u'lláh's family, who were looking for him, found some clues as to his whereabouts. They sent an intermediary after him who succeeded in convincing Bahá'u'lláh to return. In Bahá'u'lláh's absence, it had become clear to the Bábís that they needed his leadership to survive. Soon, Bahá'u'lláh's fame and reputation as a great religious teacher spread throughout Baghdad and other cities of Iraq and many came to him to listen to his words. This made his enemies very jealous and they asked the government to send him farther away, this time to the city of Istanbul (in Turkey). The government agreed. Before leaving Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh and his companions camped in a garden outside the city for 12 days. In this garden, which is called the Garden of Ridvan (or Paradise), Bahá'u'lláh announced to his followers that he was the Great Prophet that the Báb had spoken of earlier. He also told them that he was the Promised One of all religions. He was the prophet foretold by all the Holy Books of the past religions, the one who would bring teachings that would help humanity live in peace and unity.

In Istanbul, Bahá'u'lláh's wisdom and loving personality attracted many people. His jealous enemies again decided to send him away to another place called Adrianople. From there, the government sent him and his family and a few of his followers to the Prison City of 'Akká in the Holy Land, then called Palestine, and today known as Israel. At that time, the city of 'Akká was a very filthy place with an unhealthy climate. The whole city was a prison reserved for murderers and thieves who would spend the rest of their lives there. For nine years, Bahá'u'lláh could not leave this Prison City. But gradually everything changed and, as Bahá'u'lláh once again touched the hearts of the people, he was allowed to leave 'Akká. Altogether, Bahá'u'lláh spent 40 years of his life in exile. He loved children and was always very kind to them. The following story describes a young boy's

encounter with Bahá'u'lláh when He was in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyah:

Chicago Bahá'í Temple

While living on a mountain named Sar-Galu above Sulaymáníyyah, Bahá'u'lláh encountered one day a student from the school in Khaniqah [Sufi place for spiritual retreat] sitting by the road and weeping bitterly. When asked the reason for his sadness, the boy explained: 'Today, our schoolmaster gave all the other boys a copy* to practice their writing, but me he dismissed and I have no copy.' 'If you will bring your paper and pen,' Bahá'u'lláh suggested kindly, 'I shall set a copy for you.' When, on returning to his school, the child showed this specimen of Bahá'u'lláh's exquisite penmanship to the teachers and students, everyone was astonished... 3 Like all the former prophets, Bahá'u'lláh taught his followers, who are called the Bahá'ís, to live a holy life. He told them to be kind, generous, forgiving, caring, patient, honest, confident, strong, happy, and loving. He told them to respect their parents, to care for the poor, to visit the sick, and to pray and meditate every day. He taught them to love the great prophets of the past and to be kind, friendly, and respectful to their followers. He told them to study science, the arts, music, and, above all, to learn about God and to know why He created them. Bahá'u'lláh said that the reason for our lives here on earth is to learn the virtues. This will help us live a better life on earth and after we die. He also said that the education of children is very important. He told his followers to strive to remove all kinds of prejudice from their lives. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that are revealed in his many books and tablets (letters) are aimed at bringing about peace, harmony, and unity among all the people of the world.

*Copy: In the above story, a copy means "a penmanship tablet template" that a teacher would give students. The students were expected to imitate the style and beauty of the

teacher's penmanship.

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