

# **RE, Philosophy and Ethics (RPE) –**

## **Closure work for Year 8**

Continuing with this topic of Islam, Islamophobia and Islam in Britain, you are now going to investigate how Islam began.

### **Tasks:**

1. Read the knowledge on how Islam began
2. Summarise the knowledge in your books
3. Describe Muhammad's early life. Try and write at least four sentences
4. Explain what The Night of Power was and how it relates to the early life of Muhammad

## The early life of Muhammad

At the time of Muhammad, there were two main cities in central Arabia – **Medina** and **Mecca** (sometimes spelled 'Madinah' and 'Makkah'). Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 CE. His father, Abdullah, died before he was born and his mother, Amina, died when he was six, so Muhammad was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib, who was a trader. Muhammad would accompany his uncle on business trips across the Arabian desert to Syria and gained a reputation as an excellent trader. He was given the nickname al-Amin, which means 'the trustworthy'. At the age of 25, Muhammad married a wealthy businesswoman and widow called Khadija. She was 15 years older than him, but she admired the skills he had learned from his uncle.

## Arabia before Islam

Most people in Arabia at this time lived in tribes. Some of these people were followers of Judaism and Christianity, but many tribes were **polytheistic**. The gods they worshipped were often linked to nature and aspects of the environment that played an essential part in people's survival, such as the sun. The Arab tribes believed that these gods would look after and protect them. Muhammad was born into a polytheistic tribe called the Quraysh.

In the seventh century, there was much cruelty, violence and poverty in the city of Mecca. Muhammad disliked this, and he would often retreat to a cool, quiet cave in the mountains outside the city in order to think and pray. It was here in this cave, at the age of 40, that Muhammad had a religious experience that would change his life and the society of Mecca forever. The night on which this happened is called Laylat al-Qadr in Arabic, which can be translated as the Night of Power.

## The Night of Power

On this night, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) appeared to Muhammad and revealed a message from God. Jibril told Muhammad to recite words that were later recorded in the Qur'an.

Islamic scholars disagree about what exactly happened in the cave. According to one account, Jibril told Muhammad to read from a scroll. When Muhammad said that he could not read, Jibril told him three times 'iqra!' ('Read!'). On the third time, he placed his hands around Muhammad's waist and squeezed him until the words forced their way



The Arabian Peninsula, where Islam began. A peninsula is land that is surrounded by water on three sides.

### Fact

The Night of Power is celebrated by Muslims towards the end of the month of **Ramadan**. Muslims will often stay awake praying, as they believe that God is especially forgiving on this night.

into Muhammad's mouth. It was as though the words were being written on his heart and he would never forget them.

Muhammad was still shaking when he returned home to Khadija. She knew her husband was an honest man, so his words must truly be from God. She became the first believer of his message. The second person to become a Muslim was Muhammad's cousin, Ali, followed by one of Muhammad's closest friends, Abu Bakr.



A crowd of people visiting the cave where Muhammad is believed to have received his first revelation from Jibril.

### The Qur'an

The Arabic word '*qur'an*' means 'recitation' or 'that which is read or recited', because this is how Muhammad received the words. The Night of Power is recorded in **surah** 96 of the Qur'an, which is often known as the 'Blood Clot' chapter, because it says that God created humans from a blood clot. Over the next 23 years, Jibril visited Muhammad with more revelations that were remembered and recorded during his lifetime and collected together after his death, according to Islamic sources.

### The Night Journey

According to Islamic tradition, one night in approximately 620 CE Muhammad was in Mecca praying when Jibril suddenly appeared and flew him to Jerusalem on a winged horse. Muhammad prayed and spoke with all the prophets that have ever lived. He then ascended to the heavens and spent time with God, who told him that Muslims should pray five times a day. Muhammad then returned to Jerusalem and flew back to Mecca. Muslims disagree about whether the Night Journey really happened or whether Muhammad saw the events in a vision.

### Key vocabulary

**Mecca** A city in present-day Saudi Arabia; Muhammad was born here in 570 CE

**Medina** One of the main cities in Arabia in the time of Muhammad (originally called Yathrib)

**polytheism** Belief in many gods

**Ramadan** The ninth month of the Islamic year (which is based on the moon)

**surah** A chapter of the Qur'an; there are 114 surahs in total