

## Tawhid

### 1: *Muruwah*

The Meccan tribes, including Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh, were losing their old tribal values and making a god of money. Through trade these nomadic tribespeople had settled and become rich.

However Muhammad was extremely concerned that the tribal ethic of care and support was dying. He was convinced the tribes needed a new spiritual and ethical centre to their lives or their greed and selfishness would consume them.

The various Arab tribes worshipped at the shrines of several gods, but did not have strong beliefs in the soul, divine judgment or an afterlife, or any organized religion. Instead a communal ethic called '*murowah*' functioned almost as a religion. *Muruwah* required tribe members to show complete obedience to their chief, the *sayyid*, to protect the tribe with their life, avenge wrongs and support weaker and more vulnerable members. The *sayyid* shared all goods and wealth equally among all members.

*Muruwah* allowed a profound sense of equality, generosity and hospitality. All wealth was to be shared which guarded against greed and selfishness. This worked for centuries in a nomadic lifestyle where morality rates were high, food and goods were scarce and everyone relied on each other. However as the inhabitants of Mecca grew in wealth *murowah* no longer held the tribes together. There was spiritual and social restlessness. A new sense of meaning was required.

The Arabs were aware of Judaism and Christianity, their land bordering the Persian and Byzantium empires. They had heard of the Christian notion of an afterlife; that devotion to One God could mean eternal life in paradise. Muhammad and many other Arabs became convinced that the Arab high God *al-Lah*, was the same One God, seeking the same loyalty.

Muhammad received his first revelation when he was meditating on Mount Hira in 620 CE, and over the next 23 years received many more. The Arabs had a prophet of the One God and a message of their own.

### 2: Islam

While the Arabs did not doubt the *existence* of al-Lah, Muhammad's role was to bring to their attention quite how much they owed to God, and how ungrateful they appeared to be. Simply, all humanity and all life is a direct result of the creative powers of the One God.

The Arabs made pilgrimages to the Ka'aba, the shrine at the centre of Mecca. The Quraysh, as guardians of this shrine, had become rich partly through this inheritance. Yet Muhammad warned the Arabs that if they are not focusing on God as they pray, but their own material needs, they are failing to live up to the gift God has given them. If they fail to care for and support all members of their community they are failing God who created all people equal. After some time the new spiritual path Muhammad brought to the Arabs became known as '*islam*'; submission to God. A 'Muslim' is one who surrenders to God.

The signs of God can be seen constantly in the beauty and order of the natural world and especially through the revelation of the Qur'an.

For the first three years of his life as a teacher and prophet, Muhammad did not ask the Arabs to give up their allegiance to other gods (p. 171), but when he stated that worship of any other God but Allah was idolatrous, Islam became hated and persecuted, and lost many followers. Many people found this rupture with the old ways extremely upsetting. Islam demanded a choice was made. Within the Islamic community *shirk*, associating other beings with God, became the worst sin. Muhammad knew only One God could bind the tribes in a unifying spirit.

Although Muhammad was a pragmatic man who would always seek compromise as a solution to conflict, he insisted that Muslims must give their loyalty utterly to the One God. There could be no compromise when it came to *shirk*. To worship another god was pointless because only Allah had created the universe, all life and humans. All the other gods were nothing compared to the One God.