

The angel in the cave

A Muslim story

Key ideas: Ramadan, the Qur'an, Light, fasting, Eid

One afternoon towards the end of Ramadan, a boy toiled up a steep path on the mountainside above the city of Mecca where he lived. Ramadan is a very special month for Muslims. To bring themselves closer to God they neither eat nor drink during the hours of daylight.

The boy, whose name was Muhammad, was hungry and thirsty. He was also very hot for Mecca is in the great Arabian desert where the sun beats down so fiercely, hardly anything can live or grow.

Near the top of the mountain was little cave. Muhammad clambered inside and flung himself down upon the cool earthen floor. It took his eyes a little time to grow accustomed to the darkness. But when they did, he leaped to his feet in fright. For there leaning against the opposite wall of the cave was a dark figure. 'Don't be afraid Muhammad,' spoke a voice as clear and musical as running water.

The boy shrank into a corner. 'How do you know my name?' he demanded.

'Oh just a guess,' the shadow replied. 'You know, you're not the first Muhammad to shelter from the sun in this cave.'

'No?' The boy knew somehow that this mysterious stranger meant him no harm.

'Let me tell you a story,' said the shadow. 'A long time ago a young man called Muhammad lived, just like you, in Mecca. In those days, many of the people were poor and lived cruel, hard lives. This used to upset Muhammad and he would come often to this cave, high on the mountain and try to think of ways to help them.'

'One day, while he was thinking a great angel appeared and began to speak to Muhammad in beautiful poetry. He taught the young man how to live a good and useful life and explained that if everyone lived like this, the world would be a kinder and fairer place.'

'When Muhammad returned to Mecca, he recited the angel's poetry and when it was written down it became the Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims everywhere. It was the angel who taught us to fast during Ramadan, so that we know what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty like the poor people of the world.'

Young Muhammad felt suddenly sleepy. He could barely keep his eyes open. 'Beautiful story...', he murmured. With a great effort, he looked up – but the shadowy figure had vanished into thin air. When he woke Muhammad was alarmed to find that night had fallen. But he needn't have worried. His way was lit by the bright crescent of a new moon – the sign that Ramadan was over for another year and that all over the world, Muslims would be celebrating the festival of Eid. As he made his way down the mountain, the city below was ablaze with coloured lights.