

The Message of Quran



Muhammad Asad

Muhammad Asad (formerly **Leopold Weiss**) (1900–1992), an Austrian Jew who converted to Islam, was a 20th century journalist, traveller, writer, social critic, linguist, thinker, reformer, diplomat, political theorist, translator and scholar. He was one of the 20th century's **most influential European Muslims**.

Muhammad Asad was born as Leopold Weiss on 2 July 1900 in a **Jewish family** in what was then Lwów in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Lviv, Ukraine. Weiss was a descendant of a long line of Jewish rabbis. Weiss received a religious education. He was proficient in **Hebrew** from an early age and was also familiar with **Aramaic**. He studied the **Old Testament**, as well as the text and commentaries of the **Talmud**, the **Mishna** and **Gemara**. Furthermore, he delved into the intricacies of Biblical exegesis and the Targum. After abandoning university in Vienna, Weiss drifted aimlessly around 1920s Germany. Later he moved to the British Mandate of Palestine. Staying in **Jerusalem** he worked as a stringer for the Frankfurter Zeitung, selling articles on a freelance basis. His pieces were noteworthy for their understanding of Arab fears and grievances against the Zionist project. Eventually he was contracted as a full-time foreign correspondent for the paper.

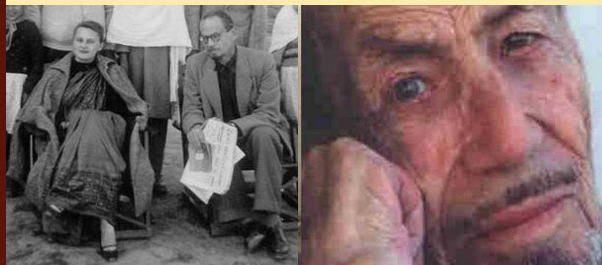
Weiss's assignments led him to an ever-deepening engagement with and understanding of Islam, which, after much thought and deliberation, led to his religious conversion in 1926 in Berlin and adopting the Muslim name, Muhammad Asad.

He spoke of Islam as:

"Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking; and the result is a structure of absolute balance and solid composure."



Muhammad Asad travelled through **Egypt**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Iran**, **Afghanistan** and the **southern Soviet Republics**. He then left Arabia and came to British India in 1932 where he met South Asia's premier Muslim poet, philosopher and thinker, Muhammad Iqbal, who had proposed the idea of an independent Muslim state in India, which later became Pakistan. Iqbal persuaded Asad to stay on in British India and help the Muslims of India establish their separate Muslim state. In 1947, Asad was given Pakistani citizenship by the newly established Muslim state of Pakistan and appointed the Director of the **Department of Islamic Reconstruction by the Government of Pakistan**, where he made recommendations on the drafting of Pakistan's first Constitution. In 1949, Asad joined Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as head of the Middle East Division and, in 1952, was appointed Pakistan's Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations in New York. Towards the end of his life, Asad moved to Spain and lived there with his third wife, Paula Hamida Asad, an American national of Polish Catholic descent who had also converted to Islam, until his death on 23 February 1992 at the age of 92. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery of Granada in the former Moorish province of Andalusia, Spain. Asad wrote several books. His autobiography, *The Road to Mecca* is an account of his Middle Eastern travels and his conversion, as well as his thoughts on the growing Zionist movement. He also wrote *The Message of The Qur'an*, a translation and commentary on the Muslim holy book based on his own knowledge of classical Arabic and on the authoritative classical commentaries. It is considered as one of the leading translations of the Qur'an. *Muhammad Asad's translation presents a rendering that is simple and straightforward and departs from the traditional exegetic approaches and reflects independent thought. Asad, was well-versed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and brought this knowledge to bear in the form of erudite footnotes. Muhammad Asad's translation remains one of the best translations available, both in terms of its comprehensible English and generally knowledgeable annotations.*



Muhammad Asad with wife Paula in 1957