

ITME FELLOWSHIP | 2025

BY AVI MELAMED

“TO UNDERSTAND ISRAEL. WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE MIDDLE EAST”

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SESSION ONE	Historical Framing of the Middle East ** (extended session 1:00 - 3:30 pm EST)
SESSION TWO	Nationalism In The Middle East
SESSION THREE	Islam is the Solution The Rise of Militant Islam
SESSION FOUR	Turkey and Neo-Ottomanism Erdogan and his Quest for Regional Power
SESSION FIVE	The Islamic Republic of Iran and its Pursuit of Hegemony Where are we now?
SESSION SIX	The Israeli Palestinian Conflict A view from the Region
SESSION SEVEN	The West Bank and Gaza An Insider's Perspective
SESSION EIGHT	Israel Path, Identity, Direction
SESSION NINE	Lebanon, Syria & Iraq Identity and the struggle for sovereignty ** (extended session 1:00 - 3:30 pm EST)
SESSION TEN	Jordan A Monarchy in Transition
SESSION ELEVEN	The Arab Gulf Monarchies and the Region Middle East Entering a New Era
SESSION TWELVE	Regional Update & Reflections ** (extended session 1:00 - 3:00 pm EST)

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| COURSE OVERVIEW

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SESSION #1 HISTORICAL FRAMING OF THE MIDDLE EAST

1/29/2025

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EDUCATOR | AVI MELAMED

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| INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST



CORE SHAPERS OF THE REGION

- **GEOGRAPHY**
- **DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL & ECONOMIC IDENTITIES**
- **MONOTHEISM**

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| **INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST**

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GEOGRAPHY

**A LAND AND SEA BRIDGE
CONNECTING EAST & WEST**

**DIVERSITY OF TERRAIN – MESOPOTAMIA,
THE ARAB PENINSULA – A HUB FOR
EMERGENCE OF DIFFERENT SOCIETIES
(AGRICULTURAL, URBAN, NOMADIC)**

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| INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST

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PRE-ISLAM | THE MIDDLE EAST GEOSTRATEGIC LANDSCAPE



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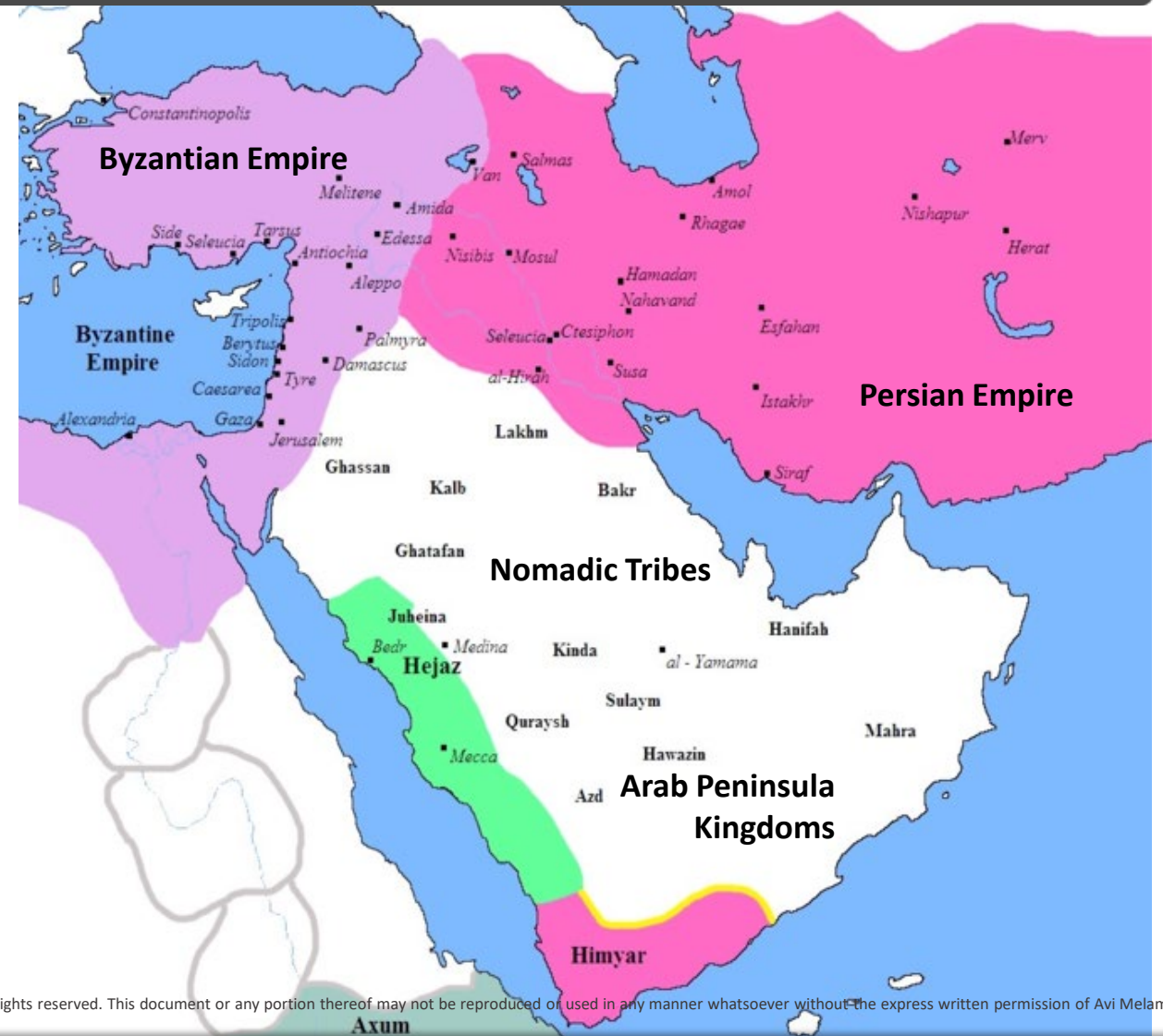
PRE-ISLAM | THE MIDDLE EAST GEOSTRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

NOMADIC TRIBES

ARAB PENINSULA KINGDOMS

PERSIAN EMPIRE

BYZANTIAN EMPIRE



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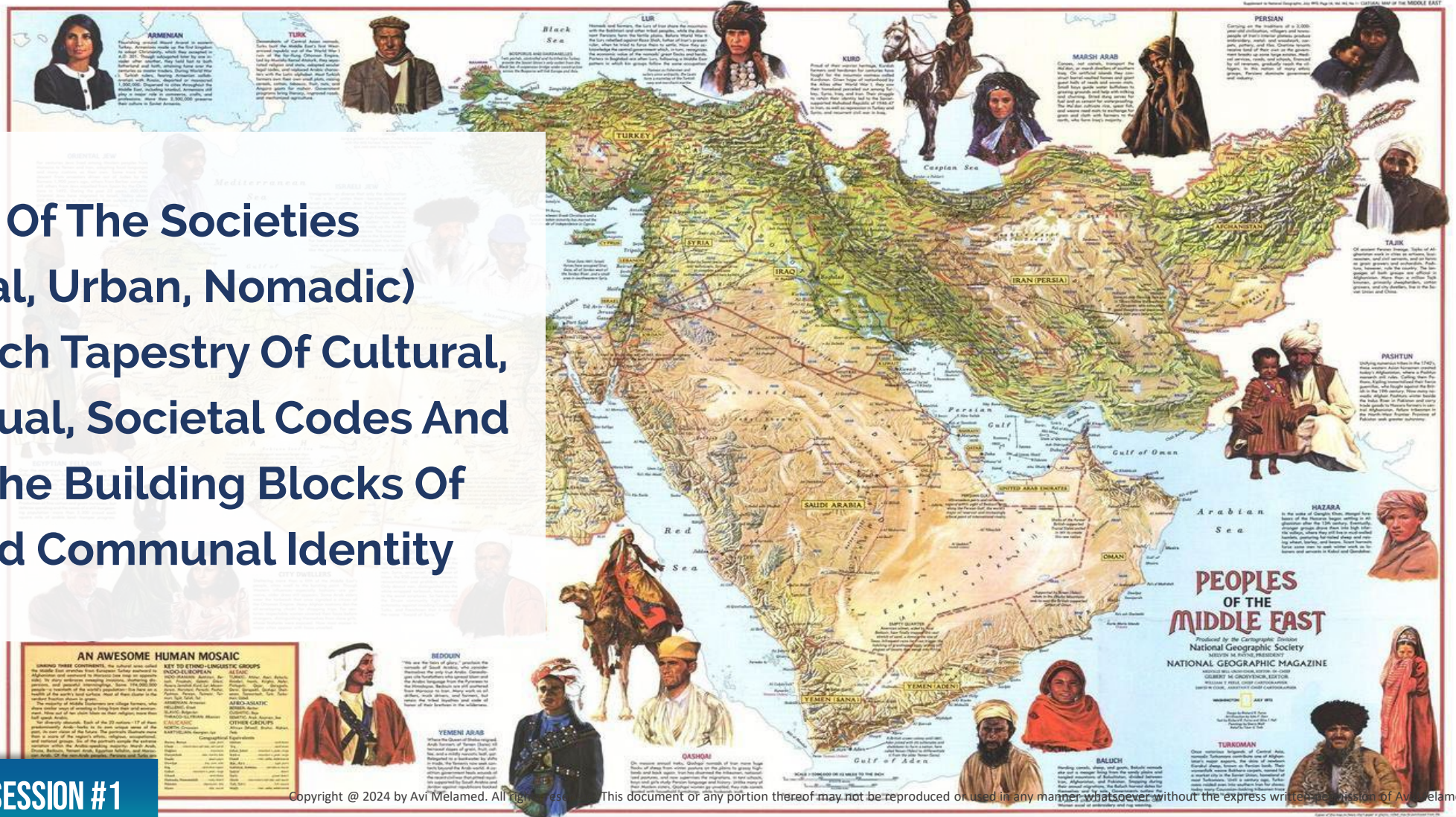
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DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL & ECONOMIC IDENTITIES



Diversity Of The Societies

(Agricultural, Urban, Nomadic)

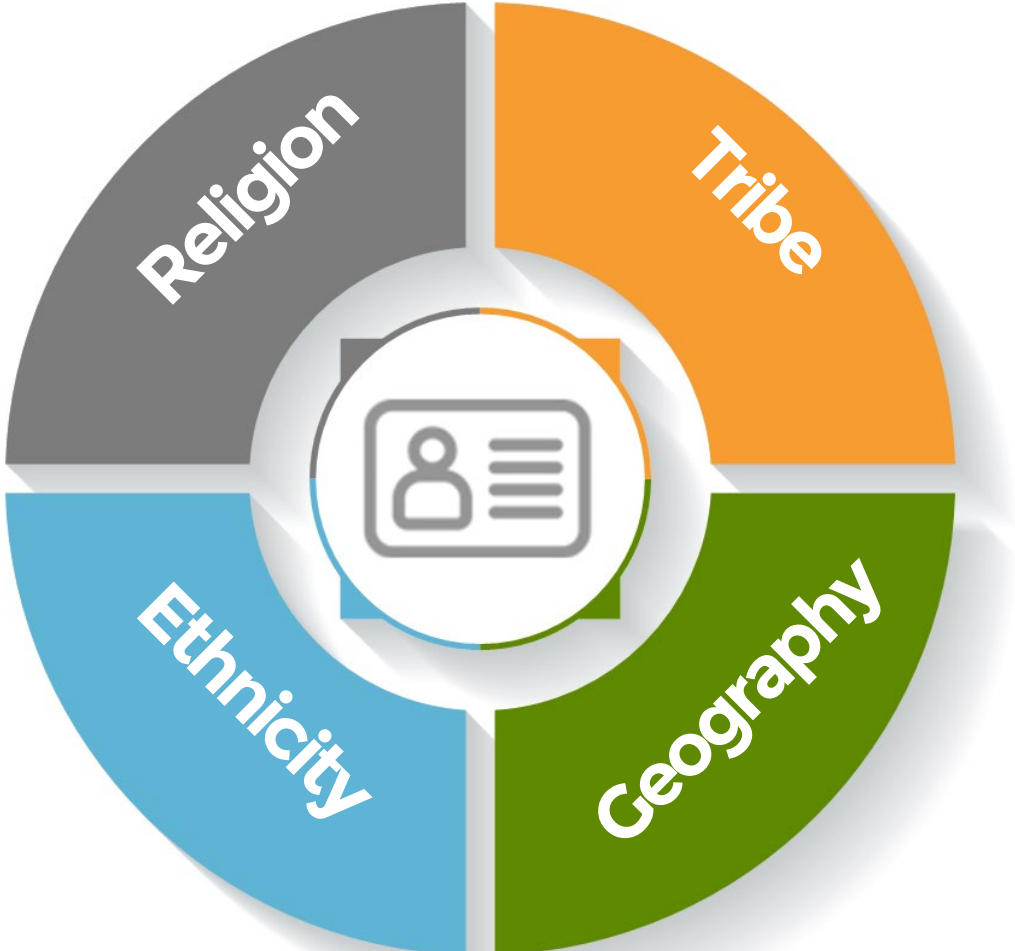
Gave Birth To Rich Tapestry Of Cultural, Religious, Spiritual, Societal Codes And Traditions – The Building Blocks Of Individual And Communal Identity

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CULTURE & RELIGION AND OTHER COMPONENTS OF PEOPLE'S IDENTITY



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ARAB CIVILIZATION | THE CRADLE OF ISLAM

Islam – the **third monotheistic religion** (after Judaism & Christianity) - appears on the stage of history in the **7th century AD**. **Islam** was born in the **Arab civilization** in the **Arabian Peninsula**.

The word *Islam* means the **total & complete submission to the rule of the one and only G-od – Allah** – “The God.” *Allah* was one of the gods & goddesses the tribes worshiped prior to the emergence of Islam.

Islam was **inspired by a combination of Arabian Peninsula tribal culture and codes**, as well as its **monotheistic predecessors** that already existed in the region - **Judaism** and **Christianity**.

➤ **Islam's core beliefs:**

Islam is a **comprehensive normative and moral interpretation** of the idea of the rule of one and one God only - **Allah**

Islam's mission is to **fully materialize** the rule of *Allah* through the establishment of a global political framework – the **Caliphate**.

Islam and the political framework (the Caliphate & the State) are **inseparable**



THE CROWN OF LEADERSHIP

Qurash قُرَيْشُ Tribe

Banu Hashim Clan

Named after Muhammad's great-grandfather
Hashim ibn Abd Manaf (464 - 497)



Prophet Muhammad's
(570 - 632)

Hashimids, Hashimites, or Hashemites, and often carry the surname al-Hāshimī



ISLAM EARLY ERA | THE FIRST FOUR CALIPHS

In its **early years** **Islam** was persecuted and on the run.

However, within a short period of time, **Islam** became a **conquering religion**, spreading in the region through military campaigns.

Sunni Islam refers to the first four *Caliphs* as **'The Righteous Caliphs - Al-Khulafa ar-Rashidun OR Rashidun**.

The word *Sunni* means 'the one following the path of the prophet Mohammed'

As **Islam** became an **empire** a **political and violent political power struggle** broke out over the leadership of the Islamic empire.

ISLAM'S FIRST FOUR CALIPHS

Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq
(632-634)

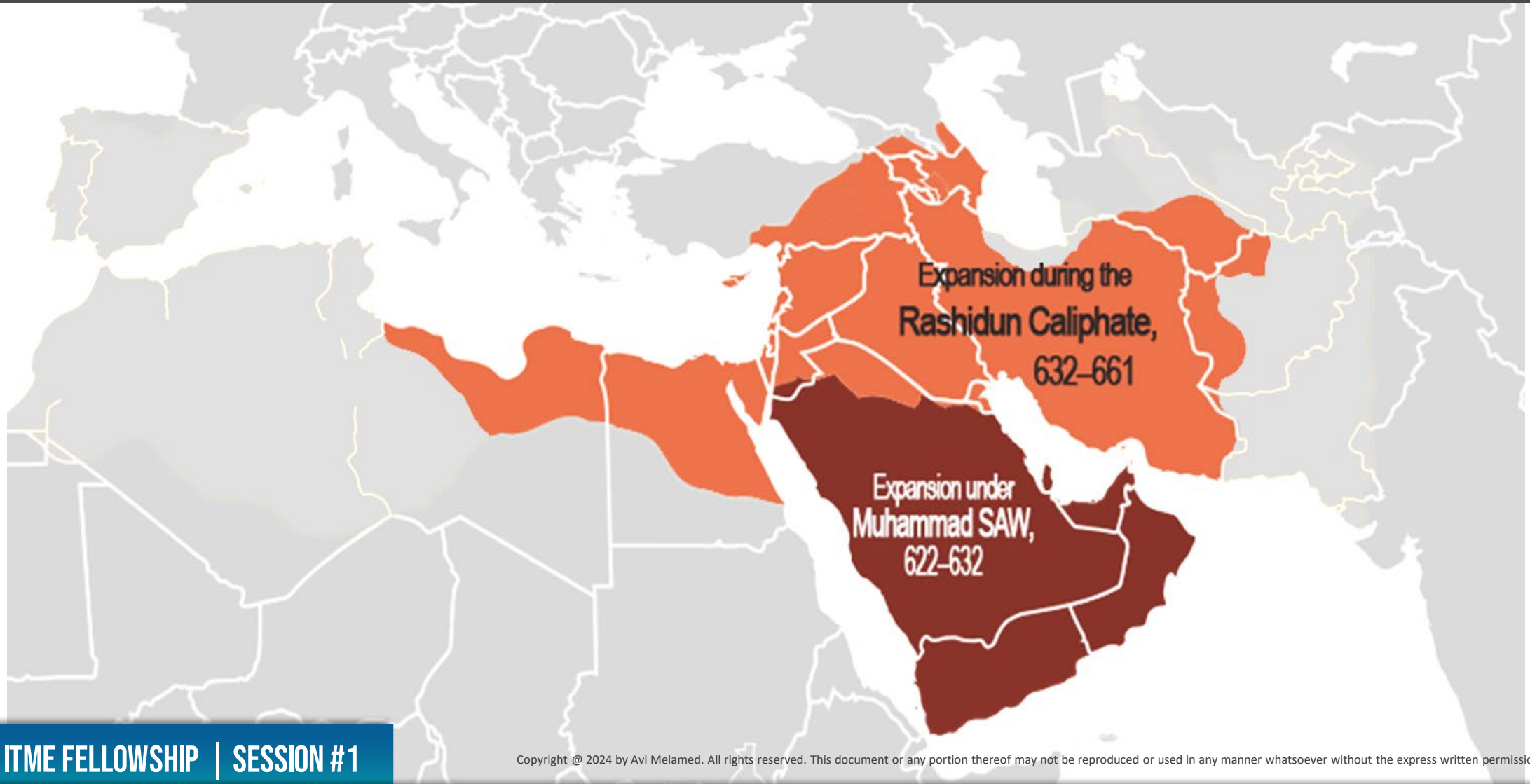
Ummar Bin Al-Khattab
(634 - 644)

Uthman Ibn Affan
(644 - 656)

'Ali Bin Abi Talib
(656 - 661)



THE FIRST FOUR CALIPHS | RASHIDUN CALIPHATE 632 - 661



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| THE RISE OF ISLAM & ISLAM'S INNER SUNNI-SHI'ITE POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE



680 | SUNNI-SHI'ITE SPLIT

SUNNI

MERIT BASED

The Best Man for the Position

SHIA

BLOODLINE

A Descendant of the 4th Caliph Ali,
the Son-in-Law and Cousin
Of the Prophet Muhammad

Caliphate

RESOLUTE ANIMOSITY & BLOODSHED SINCE 680

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THE ROOTS OF SUNNI - SHI'ITE RIVALRY

Quraysh Tribe

Bani Hashim



**Prophet Muhammad's
Family**

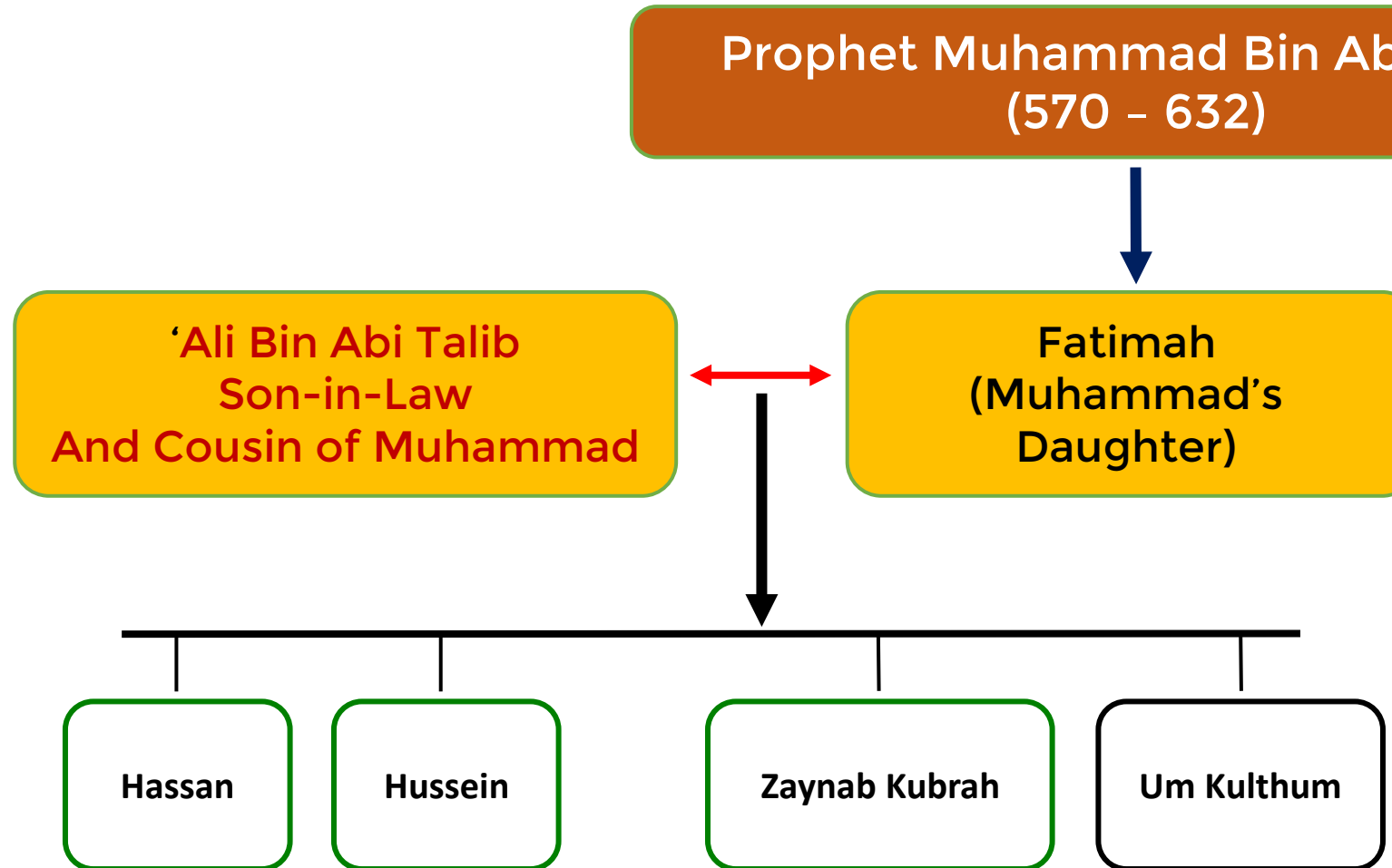
Bani Abd al Shams



**Umayyah
Family**



THE ROOTS OF SUNNI - SHI'ITE RIVALRY



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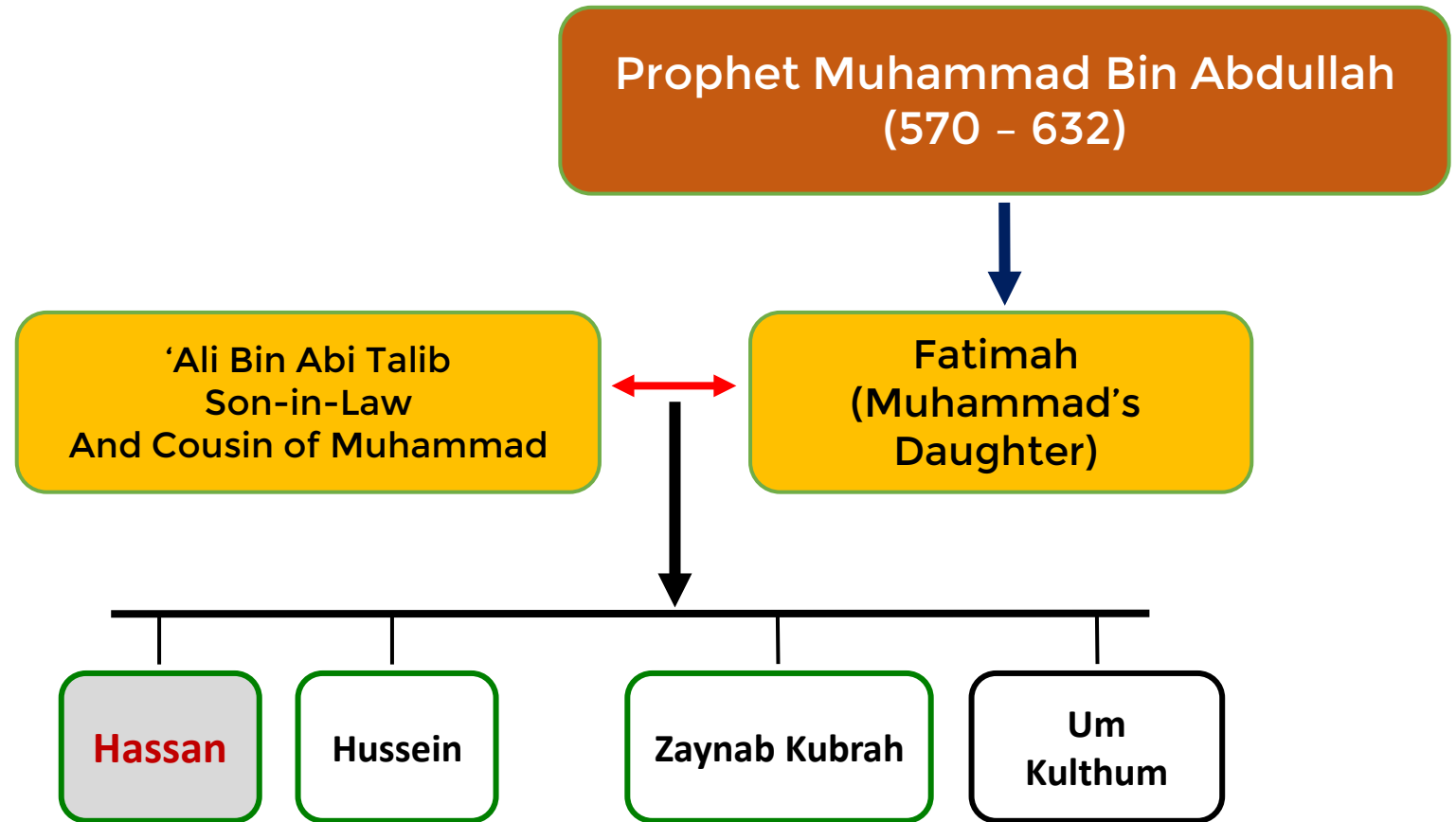
THE ROOTS OF SUNNI - SHI'ITE RIVALRY

'Ali Bin Abi Talib, the 4th Caliph,
was murdered in 661.

His oldest son, **Hassan** claimed
the crown of leadership.

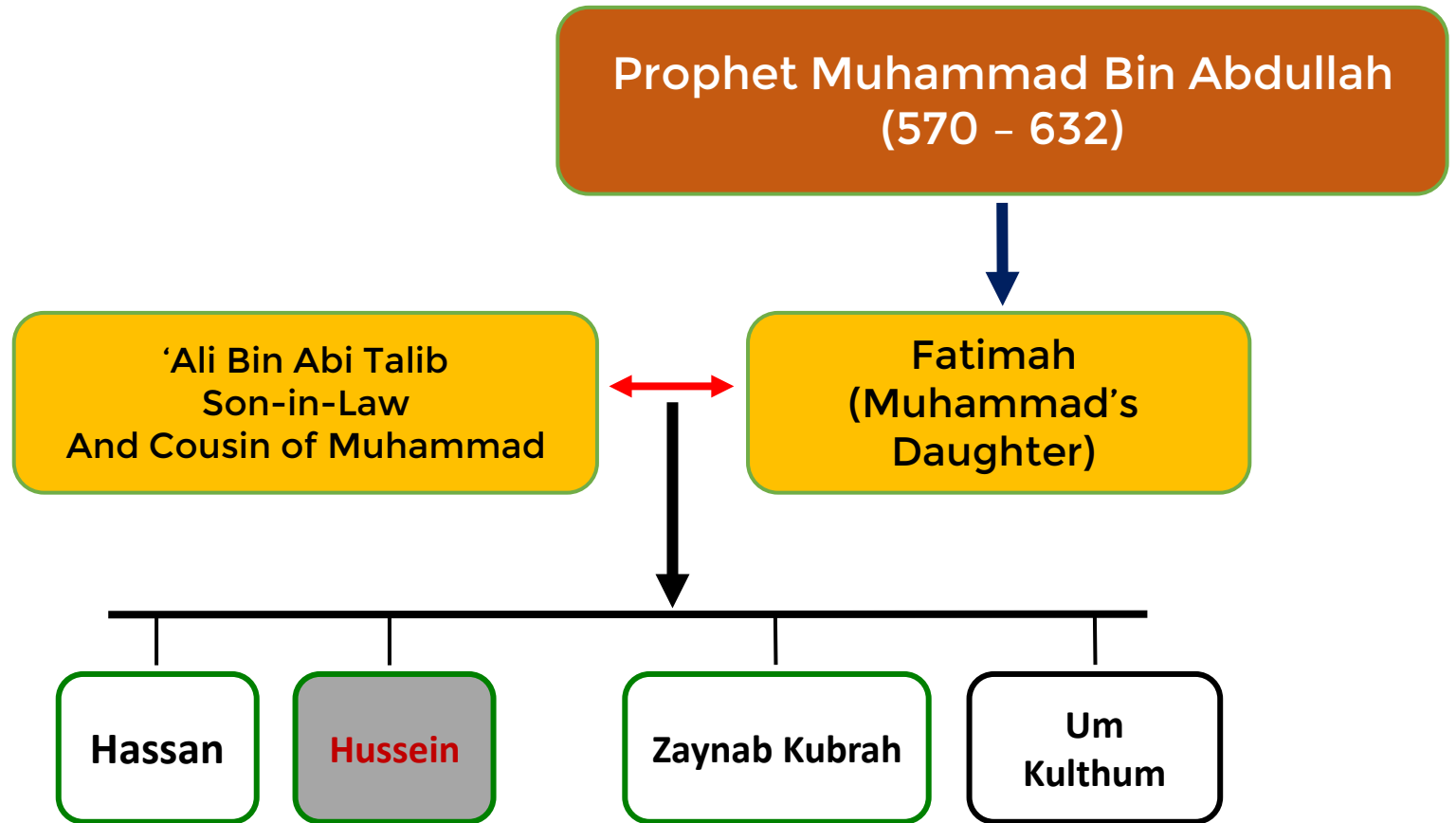
His opponent **Mu'awiyah Bin Abi
Sufyan** challenged him.

Hassan abdicated the throne and
gave up the crown of Caliph.



THE ROOTS OF SUNNI - SHI'ITE RIVALRY

After Hassan stepped down from being Caliph, Ali and Fatimah's second son - **Hussein** - claimed the crown of Caliph and the leader of the Muslims and the Muslim world.



FORMATIVE MOMENT OF SHIA ISLAM | THE BATTLE OF KARBALA



- On the 10th day of the month of 'Muharram, in the year 680, a battle took place in **Karbala, Iraq**.
- **Hussein Bin 'Ali Bin Abi Talib** and his followers clashed with the army of the Caliph **Mu'awiyah Bin Abi Sufyan** (the same ones who challenged Hassan) led by **Mu'awiyah Bin Abi Sufyan's** son **Yazid**.
- **In that battle, Hussein Bin 'Ali Bin Abi Talib and his followers were butchered. Hussein** was beheaded and his body was buried in Karbala.
- The Shia commemorate that day and they call it '**Ashura**'. The origins of the word are Aramaic and Hebrew and come from the word "*Eser*" meaning "ten" memorializing that he was killed on the tenth day of the month.

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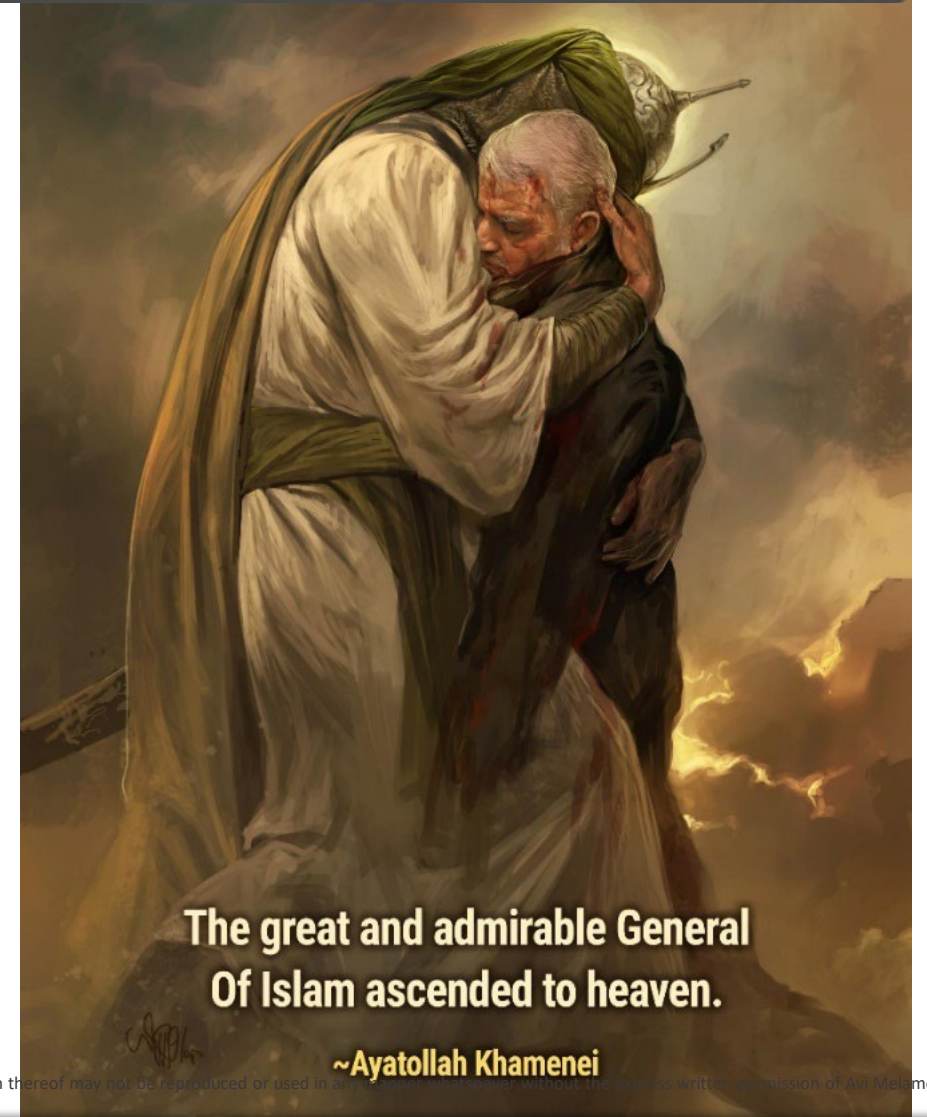


FORMATIVE MOMENT OF SHIA ISLAM | THE BATTLE OF KARBALA

The 'Lord of Martyrs' welcomes Major General Qasem Soleimani in heaven.

Soleimani was the former commander of the Iranian Al-Quds Force. He was killed by the US on January 3rd, 2020.

[This poster was published by the office of Iran's Supreme Leader.]



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THE SHIA / SHI'ITE CORE BELIEFS

- **Imam** is a person leading the religious rituals and prayers. The Shia believe the **Imam draws his knowledge from a divine source**, and therefore, he is immune from mistakes.
- **The Twelvers Shia** is the major Shia branch. A line of Twelve Imams that started **with 'Ali Bin Abi Talib**.
- **The Anticipated Imam (Al-Mahdi, the Messiah)**. The Shia believe that the twelfth and the last *Imam*, **Mohammad Bin al-Hassan al-Askari, who disappeared in the 9th Century, is not dead** but that he is waiting 'outside of time and history' to return and redeem mankind. In the Shia belief, he is known as **The Anticipated Imam**. That will return as **Al-Mahdi** "the one leading the path" - the Messiah. He is also described in Shia as **'The Master of Time'**.
- **Ashura** the day Hussein Bin 'Ali was killed. The word originated in Hebrew and Aramaic word "*Eser*" meaning "ten." Many Shi'ites commemorate this day by conducting a self-torture ritual known as *Ta'aziyah*. **Shia slogan "Every day is Ashura and every place is Karbala"**



SHI'ITE - SUNNI RIVALRY | THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Shia / Shi'ite

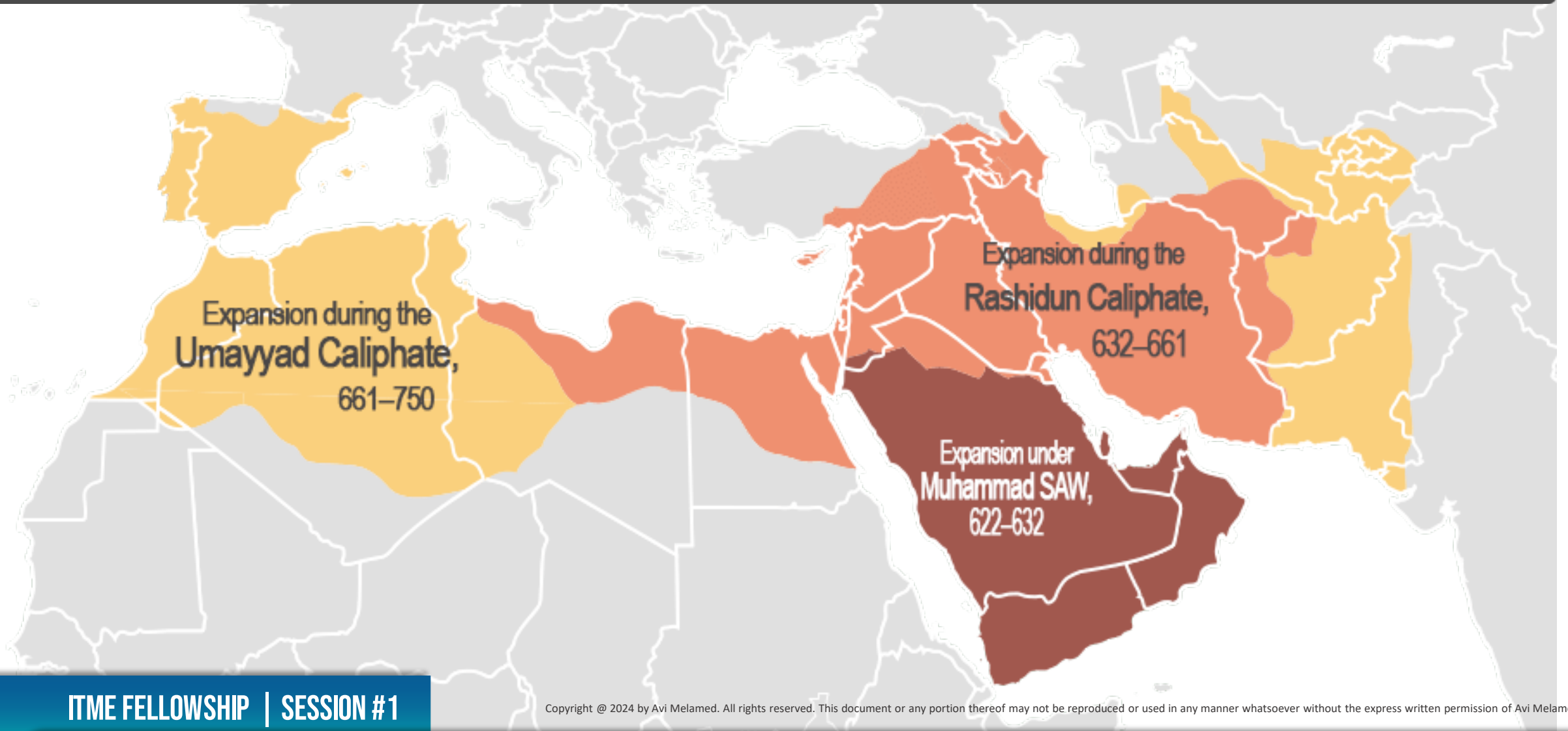
- Leading Islam is based on **bloodline**. Only a male descendant of 'Ali Bin Abi Talib is entitled to lead the Muslims and the Muslim world.
- The **Imam is connected to a Divine** entity. Therefore, he is immune from mistakes.
- The **Messiah's exact identity is known** (the "Anticipated Imam").
- The **unquestionable and complete authority and rule of the Islamic Jurist** (*Wilayat al-faqih*). (This is critical to understand the power of the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran today).
- The **Quran** is indeed Allah's words. However, the Shi'ites believe it is **only part of the story**. Shi'ites add the **Chain of Imams and the Mahdi**. These two elements PLUS the Quran are the **ultimate truth**.

Sunni

- Leading Islam is not based on bloodline. It is a **merit-based system**. The Leader of Islam and the Muslim world should be the **most suitable** person.
- **Reject** the concept of a person connected to a Divine source of knowledge.
- The **Messiah's identity is unknown**.
- **Reject** the concept of the rule of Islamic Jurist.
- The **Quran** is indeed Allah's words. Therefore, it is the **ultimate and complete truth** from A to Z. It tells the **entire history and the future of mankind**.



EXPENSION OF ISLAM | Umayyad Caliphate 661 - 750



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| ISLAMIC EMPIRE UNDER THE RULE OF THE ARAB DYNASTIES



EXPENSION OF ISLAM | ABBASID CALIPHATE 750 - 1258



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| ISLAMIC EMPIRE UNDER THE RULE OF THE ARAB DYNASTIES

ARAB - PERSIAN - TURKISH POWER STRUGGLE



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| ANCIENT ARAB - PERSIAN - TURKISH POWER STRUGGLE



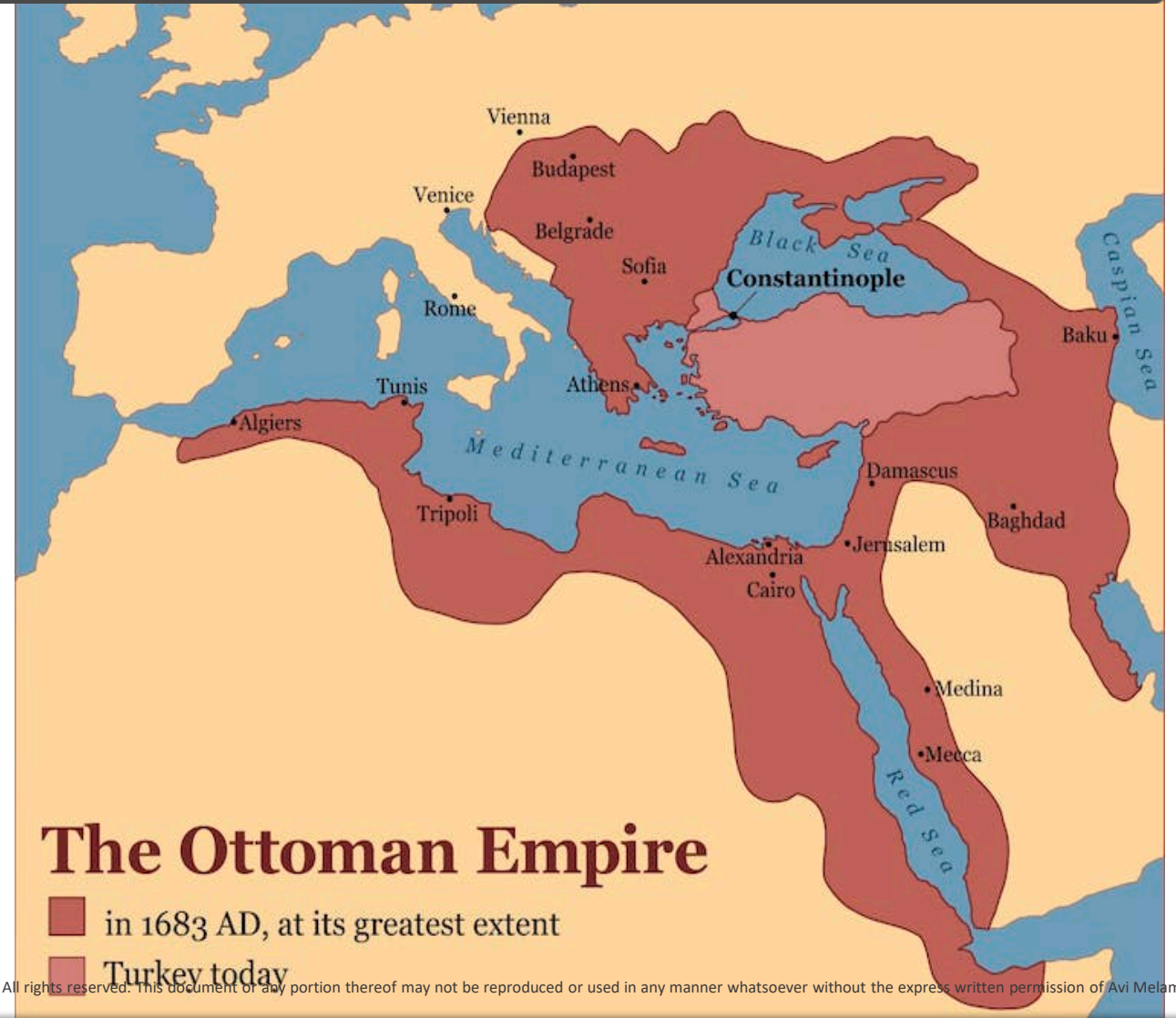
EXPANSION OF ISLAM | THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Towards the late 1200s', a Turkish prince named **Osman established his rule** in the area known as **Little Asia / Asia Minor**.

That was the beginning of the **Ottoman Empire**.

For 600 years (**from 1299 to 1920**) the **Ottoman Empire ruled over a vast area stretching from Europe to the Indian Ocean**. At its **peak (1683)** the **Ottoman Empire controlled much of southwest Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa**.

Following World War I, the Ottoman Empire formally ceased to exist. It **ended in 1924**.



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| ANCIENT ARAB - PERSIAN - TURKISH POWER STRUGGLE

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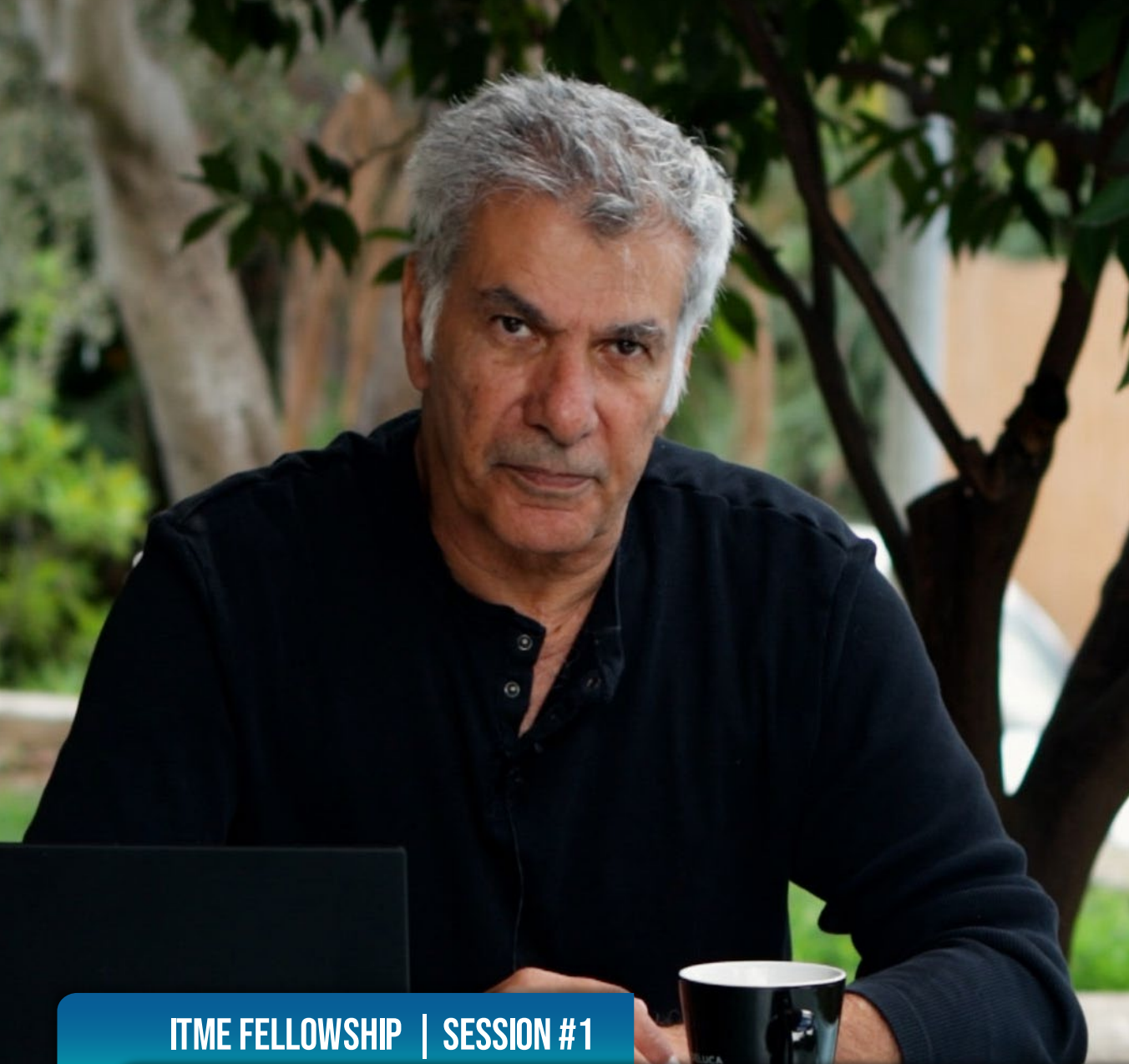
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| MARCH 2 | NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITH...

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Q & A

WITH AVI MELAMED

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| HISTORICAL FRAMING OF THE MIDDLE EAST

