The first 4 caliphs

The first four Caliphs who ruled after the death of Muhammad are often quoted as the Khulafah Rashidun.

The Rashidun were either elected by a council (see The election of Uthman and Islamic democracy) or chosen based on the wishes of their predecessor. In the order of succession, the rashidun were:

- Abu Bakr (632-634 A.D.)
- Umar ibn al-Khattab, (Umar I) (634-644 A.D.)
- Uthman ibn Affan (644-656 A.D.)
- Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-661 A.D.)

**Abu Bakr**

Soon after Muhammad's death a gathering of prominent Ansar and some of the Muhajirun, in Medina, acclaimed Abu Bakr as the successor to Muhammad or the Caliph.

Following his succession, various Arab tribes rebelled against Abu Bakr, refusing to pay the zakat, claiming that they would make the salah but wouldn't give charity. Abu Bakr insisted that the zakat and the salah both must be done to be a complete Muslim. This was the start of the Ridda wars (Arabic for the Wars of Apostasy).

After restoring peace in Arabia, Abu Bakr directed his generals towards the Byzantine and Sassanid empires.

Some traditions about the origin of the Qur'an say that Abu Bakr was instrumental in preserving it in written form, as he was the first to order the collection of the sacred revelations.

Abu Bakr died in 634 in Medina, naming Umar ibn al-Khattab as his successor shortly before his death.

**Umar ibn al-Khattab**

Umar was named caliph through the same deliberation process that had brought Abu Bakr into leadership. During Umar's reign Muslims conquered Mesopotamia, parts of Persia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Armenia.

The general social and moral tone of the Muslim society at that time is well-illustrated by the words of an Egyptian who was sent to spy on the Muslims during their Egyptian campaign. He reported:
"I have seen a people, every one of whom loves death more than he loves life. They cultivate humility rather than pride. None is given to material ambitions. Their mode of living is simple... Their commander is their equal. They make no distinction between superior and inferior, between master and slave. When the time of prayer approaches, none remains behind..."

Umar (in English usually called Omar) was known for his simple, austere lifestyle. Rather than adopt the pomp and display affected by the rulers of the time, he continued to live much as he had when Muslims were poor and persecuted. In 639, his fourth year as caliph and the seventeenth year 17 since the Hijra, he decreed that the years of the Islamic era should be counted from the year of the Hijraand. Umar died in 644, after he was stabbed by Abu-Lu'lu'ah in the Masjid al Nabawi mosque in Medina.

Whilst on his deathbed, he was urged to select a successor, which he refused to do. He did however put a process in place for selection of a successor. This comprised the remaining members of the ten companions promised paradise (Al-Asharatu Mubashsharun) to elect from amongst themselves a Caliph within 3 days. The result of this process following his death was Uthman ibn Affan.

**Uthman ibn Affan**

Uthman (in English often called Othman) also referred to as Usman or Osman in other dialects. reigned for twelve years, and during his rule, all of Iran, most of North Africa, the Caucasus and Cyprus were conquered and incorporated into the Islamic empire. His rule was characterized by increasingly centralized control of revenues from the provinces, aided by governors drawn largely from his kinsmen in the Umayyad clan. Uthman appointed many of his kinsmen as governors of the new domains. Some of his governors were accused of corruption and misrule.

Uthman is perhaps best known for forming the committee which compiled the basic text of the Qur'an as it exists today. During the end of his reign, Uthman ordered the compilation of the text. He sent copies of the sacred text to each of the Muslim cities and garrison towns, and destroyed alternative versions.

**Ali ibn Abi Talib**

After the death of Uthman, Medina was in political chaos for a number of days. Many of the companions approached Ali to take the role of Caliph, which he refused to do initially. [citation needed]

After his appointment as caliph, Ali dismissed several provincial governors, some of whom were relatives of Uthman, and replaced them with trusted aides such as Malik ibn Ashter. Ali then transferred his capital from Medina to Kufa, the Muslim garrison city in what is now Iraq. The capital of the province of Syria, Damascus, was held by Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria and a kinsman of Uthman, Ali's slain predecessor. [3]

His caliphate coincided with the First Fitna. The First Fitna, 656–661 CE, followed the assassination of the third caliph, Uthman Ibn Affan, continued during the caliphate of Ali, and
was ended, on the whole, by Muawiyah's assumption of the caliphate. This civil war is often called the Fitna, and regretted as the end of the early unity of the Islamic ummah (nation). This civil war created permanent divisions within the Muslim community and Muslims were divided over who had the legitimate right to occupy the caliphate.[4]

Ali is most well known for his enormous contributions to Islam due to the wisdom imparted from his numerous sermons and sayings, many of which have been compiled in a book titled "Nahj Al-Balaghah" or "Peak of Eloquence".

According to tradition, three Muslim zealots (purists later termed Kharijites) attempted to assassinate Ali, Mu'awiyah and 'Amr, as the authors of disastrous feuds among the faithful. However, only the assassination of Ali succeeded. He died on the 21st of Ramadan in the city of Kufa (Iraq) in 661 CE.