

[Home](#) > [The Truth about the 'Companions'](#) > [A Look at the Term 'Suhbah'](#) > What is the Shia view about the companions of the Prophet (S)?

A Look at the Term 'Suhbah'

Literal meaning of 'Suhbah'

It is important to emphasize that the word *suhbah* literally means "accompany", "keep company with" or "associate with". It is said that "ashabtuhu or sahibtuhu suhbatan fa anaa sahib" [I have accompanied him, so I am a companion." The plural forms of the word 'suhbah' are *sahb*, *ashaab* and *sahabah*.¹

Raghib Isfahani writes in his *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an*:

In the eye of custom, only that individual is considered to be a companion who is often in the company of someone.

Based on the literal and conventional meaning of the word 'sahib' (companion), the companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, is one who associated and kept company with him irrespective of whether he is Muslim or non-Muslim; good or wicked; faithful and practicing or a hypocrite. According to Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Fayyumi, the word principally and primarily applies to anyone who has seen the Prophet and has been in his company.²

Technical meaning of 'Sahabi'

Having elaborated on the term 'suhbah', it is now appropriate to provide the technical definition of the term 'sahabi'. Scholars of *Ilm al-Usul* and experts in the field of prophetic tradition agree that a person is said to be 'sahabi' only if he is Muslim but when it comes to the definition of this term, scholars specializing in the two fields have discrepant views.

Sahabi as Defined by Scholars of Ilm al-Usul

The most widespread definition of *sahabi* is someone who saw the Prophet, associate with him and was in his company for a long time in such a way that he followed him and learned something from him.

Those who saw the Prophet (S) when invited as guests and who did not keep company of him and did

not follow him either are not considered as sahaba (companions).[3](#)

Sahabi as Defined by Traditionists

Most experts in the field of hadith or prophetic tradition say that one who sees the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, and dies a Muslim is considered to be a sahabi.[4](#)

Other experts have defined sahabi as such:

"Whoever believes in Islam and lives in the time of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, is a sahabi even though he does not see him."[5](#)

Some others define sahabi as follows:

"Sahabi is someone who saw the Prophet and believed in him as well as died a Muslim even though he may have apostatized during the Prophet's life."[6](#)

Certainly, there are other definitions for the term sahabi which have been marked as rare and uncommon.[7](#)

The Status of the Companions

There are three different views among Muslims regarding the Holy Prophet's companions in terms of their being just or unjust:

All the companions are infidels

A fraction of Muslims called Kamiliyah and those who share with them the same extremist views and attitudes maintain that all the companions are infidels.[8](#) Obviously, this viewpoint is not worth investigation and critical assessment. There is no benefit in studying this view and the corroborating arguments as well as the refutations.

Probity of companions

This view has become popular among Sunni scholars who believe that all the companions are just, reliable, perfect and without any negative aspects in their personalities. Thus, it is not permissible to refute or disprove traditions narrated by them nor is it permissible to criticize their reports. It is as though they became inerrant and immune to all kinds of mistakes and errors as and when they met the prophet and started to accompany him.

Mazni says in this regard: "All of the companions are reliable and honest."[9](#)

Khatib Baghdadi says: "The fact that the companions (of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family) are just is proven and clear."[10](#)

Ibn Hazm Andulusi says: "Surely, all of the companions will abide in Paradise."[11](#)

It is pertinent to mention that people like Ibn Abd al-Barr, Ibn Athir Jazri, Ghazzali and other Sunni scholars have similar sayings about the companions.[12](#) Moreover, some Sunni scholars like Ibn Hajar Asqalani and Ibn Abd al-Barr have claimed that this opinion is agreed upon by all scholars. [13](#)

Obviously, statements made by many other Sunni leaders are in contravention with what some other scholars claim to be a matter of consensus among all scholars because they have ascribed this statement to most scholars, not all of them. Discussing the issue of justice in regards to the companions of the Holy Prophet (S), Ibn Hajib says:

"Most scholars are of the view that the companions of the Prophet (S) are just. Some have said that the companions are like regular people; others have said that the companions are just insofar as they have not committed seditious acts. As for those who entered sedition and took part in the disturbances, they are not considered to be just because they are corrupt. Mu'tazilites, however, have said that all the companions are just except those who fought against Ali, peace be upon him..."[14](#)

It has also been said in Jam' al-Jawami' and the commentary of the same book that most of the scholars believe in the companions of the Prophet (S) as being just and there is no need for any narration or evidence to be reported or narrated. These two books have made mention of the views of some other scholars in this connection.[15](#)

Certainly, there is a group of Sunni scholars who have explicitly stated that the companions are like all other people, some of whom are just and others are unjust. Some of the important figures in this group of people are Sa'ad al-Din Taftazani, Mazari, the annotator of Al-Burhan, Ibn Imad Hanbali and other renowned figures like Showkani, the Chief Judge, Sheikh Mahmood Abu Rayyah, Sheikh Muhammad Abdu, Sayyid Muhammad bin Aqil Alawi, Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Reza the writer of Al-Manar fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, Sheikh Muqbili, the writer of Al-Ilm al-Shamikh and Sheikh Mustafa, the writer of E'jaz al-Qur'an. [16](#)

Obviously, this opinion is in accordance with the opinion of Imamiyah Shia. The Shiite scholars also maintain that some of the companions of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, are just and some are hypocrites and unjust as shall be explained below.

What is the Shia view about the companions of the Prophet (S)?

I shall now discuss the Shia view on the companions of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family. As mentioned briefly earlier, Shia scholars unanimously agree that the companions of the Prophet (S) are regular people acting and behaving in the same way as the rest of the people.

Thus, there are just, hypocrite, faithful, honest, corrupt and mischievous people amongst them. Being in the company of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, does not make a person infallible or immune to errors and abominable deeds, though one should be proud of being in his company.

Indeed, there are many verses in the Quran which speak of hypocrite companions, those who with their words, conducts and behavior tormented the Prophet (S) and caused him a great deal of pain and inconvenience.

There are also a lot of traditions from the Holy Prophet (S) which clearly indicate that the Prophet (S) reprimanded and scorned some of the companions. The hadith and history books are replete with reports about the companions quarrelling with each other, rejecting and speaking ill of each other.

The great scholars of hadith and their followers have made a lot of remarks and comments about the companions which have been recorded in biographical and historical sources. Instances of those comments follow as under:

Malik bin Anas was asked: "Two different traditions are reported from the Holy Prophet (S) by two reliable narrators. In your opinion, which of those traditions can we act upon?"

Malik answered: "No, by God, you cannot act upon any one of them unless he makes sure which one is true, and only one of them is true. Can two differing statements be true? Only one of those traditions is true."[17](#)

As well, elsewhere Anas bin Malik was asked about the companions having different views and he answered that only one of them was right and that precaution had to be exercised in that respect.[18](#)

There is another report which says that Abu Hanifa said about the companions as such: "All the companions are just except a few specific individuals."

Thereupon he named some of those people who could not be trusted including Abu Hurairah and Anas bin Malik.[19](#)

Shafi'ei has been reported to have said to Rabi': "The testimony of four companions is not acceptable. They are Mu'awiyah, Amr bin Aas, Mughairah and Ziyad."[20](#)

Shu'bah says in this regard: "Abu Hurairah always practiced tadlis"[.21](#)

Laith has also been reported to have said: "Whenever we encounter a situation where we see that companions have different views, we adopt that view which is more precautionous."[22](#)

Indeed, it is due, mainly, to these sayings that Imamiyah Shia continues to have such a standpoint. However, most Sunni scholars are of the view that God, the Glorified, and His Prophet (S) purified the companions and made them just ('adil).

Hence, it is necessary to walk in their footsteps and should, thus, interpret their statements which are in contravention with the Quran and tradition in a way such that they do not contradict. In a bid to substantiate their argument, they make references to verses from the Quran and traditions from their own sources. In fact, the most famous tradition which they have narrated in this regard is the alleged prophetic tradition which says:

“My Companions are like the stars; whoever among them you follow, you will be rightly guided.”

As mentioned earlier, this study will examine and criticize the above tradition with reliance on Sunni sources and on the views of their scholars, narrators and memorizers.

- [1.](#) Al-Qamus al-Muhit, 1/237, term "sahb". Ibn Athir and others say: A subject noun is not pluralized in the form of fa'alah except this term. Al-Nehayah, 3/11.
- [2.](#) Al-Misbah al-Munir, 1/333 under the term "sahb".
- [3.](#) Meqyas al-Hidayah, 3/296; Al-Darajat al-Rafi'ah, 10.
- [4.](#) See al-Mukhtasar, 2/67; Meqyas al-Hidayah, 3/300.
- [5.](#) Meqyas al-Hidayah, 3/298.
- [6.](#) Shahid al-Thani, Al-Re'ayah le-haal al-Bedyah, 161; Sayyid Ali Khan Madani, Al-Darajat al-Rafi'ah, 9; Ibn Hajar Asqalani, al-Isabah, 1/ 158. Also, our master, the great scholar Mamqani, may Allah bless him, have ascribed this definition in Meqyas al-Hidayah, 3/300 and Ibn Hajar Asqalani in another example, volume 1, page 159 of Al-Isabah to researchers.
- [7.](#) Meqyas al-Hidayah, 3/297 – 299.
- [8.](#) Al-Lubaba fi Tahdhib al-Ansab, 3/78. This view has also been reported by Sayyid Abdul Hussein in Ajwebat al-Masail, Jarullah, 15.
- [9.](#) We will elaborate on Mazni's statement in future.
- [10.](#) Al-Kifayah fi Ilm al-Riwayah, 46–49. This statement has been reported from him by Ibn Hajar Asqalani in Al-Isabah, 1/162 and 163.
- [11.](#) Al-Isabah, 1/163
- [12.](#) Al-Isti'ab, 1/117, 118 and 129, Usd al-Ghabah, 1/110; Ihya Uloom al-Din, 1/93 and 115
- [13.](#) Al-Isabah, 1/162; Al-Isti'ab, 1/12
- [14.](#) Al-Mukhtasar, 2/67. The same has been stated in Exposition of Al-Mukhtasar.
- [15.](#) Al-Nasaih al-Kafiyah, 166.
- [16.](#) Sharh al-Maqasid, 5/ 310 and 311; al-Isabah, 1/ 163; Al-Nasaih al-Kafiyah, 167 and 168, Irshad al- Fohul, 158; Sheikh al-Muzairah Abu Hurairah, 101; Adhwa Ala al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, 322 and 339.
- [17.](#) Al-Ihkaam fi Usool al-Ahkaam, 6/814.
- [18.](#) Jami' Bayan al-Ilm wa Fazlehi, 2/905
- [19.](#) Sharh Nahju Balaghah by Ibn Abil Hadid, 4/68.
- [20.](#) Al-Mukhtasar fi Akhbar al-Bashar, 1/186.
- [21.](#) Tadlis (concealing) refers to an isnad where a reporter has concealed the identity of his shaikh. Tadlis al- Isnad: A person reports from his shaikh whom he met, what he did not hear from him, or from a contemporary of his whom he did not meet, in such a way as to create the impression that he heard the hadith in person. A mudallis (one who practices tadlis) here usually uses the mode ("on the authority of") or ("he said") to conceal the truth about the isnad.
- [22.](#) Al-Bedayah wa al-Nehayah, 8/117.