

## The Sahābah: How Equitable Were They?

The issue of the *sahābah* and the degree of their justice is one of the most contested issues and the most sensitive. The Sunnis are of the view that ALL the *sahābah* are fair and just and cannot be charged of any wrongdoing whatsoever. They cannot be criticized or doubted with regard to their views about the traditions of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ).

Thus, Sunnis adhere to everything a *sahābi* narrates. According to the Sunnis, as mentioned by al-Nawawi in the Introduction to his *Sharh Sahāh Muslim*, the *sahābi* "... is any Muslim who saw the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) even for a moment. This is accurate, and it is the line of Ibn Hanbal, al-Bukhārī in his *Sahāh*, and of all traditionists." <sup>1</sup>

As for the Shā'ahs, they are of the view that the *sahābah* are not all equal in the degree of their justice and equity, and they are liable to be criticized and critiqued, relying on convincing proofs from the Glorious Book and the Purified Sunnah. As regarding the lie that the Shā'ahs consider all the *sahābah* as unbelievers, in addition to cursing and condemning them, it is an outrageous lie and nothing else. Criticizing a *sahābi* does not mean calling him unbeliever as some idiots propagate.

If such a criticism is based on convincing proofs, why should anyone be angry, and why such a fuss? Among the *sahābah* are believers whom Allāh praised in the Holy Qur'ān saying,

***"Allāh was pleased with the believers when they swore fealty to you [O Muhammad!] under the tree [at Hdaybiya]: He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility upon them, and He rewarded them with a speedy victory" (Qur'ān, 48: 18).***

As *‘allāma* Lutfallāh al-Sāfi has stated with regard to this verse, Allāh Almighty specifically meant those who believed from among the attendants of the fealty ceremony under that tree, and [His Pleasure] was not extended to the hypocrites who also attended it such as Abdullāh ibn Ubayy and Aws ibn Khawli, etc.

There is no clue in the verse that it was in reference to ALL those who swore fealty, and it does not indicate the good outcome of all believers who swore it. The verse does not convey any meaning

beyond the Pleasure of Allāh with them for having sworn this fealty [to His Messenger]. That is to say, He accepted such an oath, and He rewards for it.

The Pleasure of Allāh with those who swore this fealty does not obligate His Pleasure with them for eternity. The evidence for this is what He, the Almighty, said about them:

***“Truly those who pledge their fealty to you [O Muhammad!] do no less than pledge their fealty to Allāh: the hand of Allāh is above their hands” (Qurʿān, 48: 10).***

Had some of those who swore fealty not renege in his oath, and had the Pleasure of Allāh been with them forever, there would have been no use for this verse of the Almighty:

***“... Then anyone who violates his oath does so to the harm of his own soul” (Qurʿān, 48: 10).***

Among the *sahābah* were those predicted by the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) to revert to pre-Islamic beliefs after the Prophet’s demise and would perish on the Day of Judgment. We know this from the following tradition which al-Bukhārī cites in his *Sahāh* with the *isnād* to Sahl ibn Sa’d who said, “I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) say, “I shall precede you at the Pool [of Kawthar]. Whoever reaches it will drink of it, and whoever drinks of it shall never taste of thirst. People whom I know and who know me shall meet me there, but a barrier shall be placed between us.” Sahl goes on to say that the statement of the Prophet (ﷺ) had additional details. The Prophet (ﷺ) would then say, “But they are my companions!”

It will be said to him, “You do not know what alterations [to the creed] they did after you.” The Prophet (ﷺ) shall say, “Crushed, may anyone who makes changes (to the creed) after me be crushed.”<sup>2</sup>

Abdullāh [ibn Abbās] is quoted as having cited the Prophet (ﷺ) saying the following to some *sahābah*: “I shall precede you at the Pool. Some of you, men, shall be raised to me. If I try to hand them [water], they shall not be able to reach me. I shall say, ‘Lord! But these are my companions!’ He shall say, ‘You do not know what they introduced [into the creed] after you.’”<sup>3</sup>

As a testimony to both past traditions which point out to alterations and innovations introduced into the creed, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) compares some of his *sahābah* to Jewish and Christian nations that altered the Word of Allāh from its rightful place. Abū Sa’d al-Khudri says that the Prophet (ﷺ) has said, “You shall follow the ways of those before you the distance of a span, the distance of a yard, [and so on]. Even if they enter the hole of a lizard, you will still follow them there.” We [the *sahābah*] said, “The Jews and the Christians?!” He (ﷺ) said, “Who else?!”<sup>4</sup>

And among the *sahābah* are those about whom the Almighty said the following in His Glorious Book:

***“But when they [some sahābah] see some bargain or amusement, they disperse headlong to it and leave you standing” (Qurʿān, 62: 11).***

This verse was revealed about the *sahābah* who left the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) delivering his Friday sermon when they heard about a trade caravan that had come from Syria, leaving with him only twelve

men from among all the other thousands of *sahābah*.

Jābir ibn Abdullāh [al-Anṣārī] is quoted as having said, “A trade caravan came on a Friday while we were with the Prophet (ﷺ). People left save twelve men; thereupon, Allāh revealed this verse:

***‘But when they see some bargain or amusement, they disperse headlong to it and leave you standing’ (Qur’ān, 62: 11).’’***

In another narrative, he said, “While we were praying with the Prophet (ﷺ), a caravan came carrying foodstuffs. They turned to it, leaving with the Prophet (ﷺ) only twelve men; therefore, this verse was revealed:

***‘But when they see some bargain or amusement, they disperse headlong to it and leave you standing’ (Qur’ān, 62: 11).’’***

The same number of *sahābah* remained with the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) after all the rest had fled away in the Battle of Uhud, prompting the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) to dissociate himself from their action. Al-Barā’ ibn ‘Azib has said, “My uncle, Anas ibn al-Nadar, was absent during the battle of Badr, so he said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! I was absent the first day when you fought the polytheists. If Allāh permits me to be present during the fight against the polytheists, Allāh will see what I shall do.’ When the battle of Uhud approached and the Muslims dispersed, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, ‘Lord! I seek Your excuse for what these have done,’ meaning his *sahābah*.” [5](#)

Add to the above what happened during the battle of Hunayn. The flight of the *sahābah* left a more bitter taste. They numbered in the thousands. The Holy Qur’ān reprimanded them for their abominable action thus: “Assuredly Allāh did help you on many battle-fields and on the Day of Hunayn: Behold! Your great numbers elated you, but they did not avail you at all: The land, for all its vastness, constrained you and you turned back in retreat.

***But Allāh poured His calm upon the Prophet and upon the believers and sent down forces which you did not see: He punished the unbelievers: Thus does He reward those without faith” (Qur’ān, 9:25–26).***

And among the *sahābah* were those about whom the Almighty said,

***“It is not fitting for a Prophet to take prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. You look on the temporal goods of this world, but Allāh looks to the Hereafter, and Allāh is Exalted in might, Wise. Had it not been for a previous ordinance from Allāh, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that you took” (Qur’ān, 8:67–68).***

This verse was revealed in reference to a band of the *sahābah* who were of the view that they should take on the said caravan and what Abū Sufyān’s caravan was carrying, preferring it over fighting when the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) consulted them before the battle of Badr in order to gauge their readiness

and will to fight.

And among the *sahābah* were those who were rebuked by the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) for their tribal attitude and their *jāhiliyya*-type attitudes. It also becomes clear from what is narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullāh [al-Anṣārī] who said once, “We were invaders in a campaign. Sufyān was once in an army when a man from the Muhājirīn assaulted a man from the Anṣār. The Anṣārī man said, ‘Who supports an Anṣārī man?’ and the man from among the immigrants said, ‘Who supports a Muhājirī man?’ The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) heard about it, so he said, ‘What a Jāhili call?!’”<sup>6</sup>

This *jāhili* call almost caused a war between both tribes of al-Aws and al-Khazraj which formed the bulk of the Anṣār. ‘Īshā is quoted as having said, “... so Sa’d ibn Mu’ath stood up and said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! I shall spare you having to deal with him! If he is one of the Aws, we shall strike his neck with the sword. And if he is from among our Khazraj brothers, you shall order us, and we will carry out your order.’”

Sa’d ibn ‘Abdāh, master of al-Khazraj, who was before then a good man but his [tribal] zeal may have overcome him, said, ‘You have lied, by Allāh! We shall kill him, for you are a hypocrite trying to argue on behalf of the hypocrites.’ Arguing intensified between the Aws and the Khazraj, and the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) was at the time on the pulpit. He descended and cooled their anger till they kept silent while he, too, became cool.”<sup>7</sup>

And among the *sahābah* were those who hated Ali (‘a) hatred towards whom is a sign of hypocrisy, as we have already stated. Abū Buraydah has said, “The Prophet (ﷺ) sent Ali to Khālid [ibn al-Walīd] to receive the *khums* tax, and I used to hate Ali who had just had his *ghusul*, so I said to Khālid, ‘Don’t you look at this?!’ When we went to the Prophets (ﷺ), I mentioned the same to him. He said to me, ‘O Buraydah! Do you hate Ali?’ I said, ‘Yes’. He (ﷺ) said, ‘Do not hate him, for his share of the *khums* is a lot more than that.’”<sup>8</sup>

And among the *sahābah* were those who doubted the wisdom of the decisions of the Prophet (ﷺ) as it became obvious when they doubted his wisdom in selecting Usāmah ibn Zayd [as commander of an army]. Some people doubted his leadership. The Prophet (ﷺ), therefore, said, “Do not doubt his authority, for you all used in the past to doubt the authority of his father.”<sup>9</sup>

And among the *sahābah* were those whom the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) kicked out of his meeting place when they objected to his order to write his last will and who, instead, described him as hallucinating. Sa’d ibn Jubayr quotes [Abdullāh] ibn Abbās saying, “Thursday! And what a Thursday it was!” Sa’d went on to say that Ibn Abbās kept weeping till his tears wetted the pebbles. “So I said,” went on Sa’d ibn Jubayr, “O Ibn Abbās! What is it with Thursday?!”

Ibn Abbās said to him, “The pain [of sickness] of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) intensified, so he said, ‘Bring me a shoulder so I may write for you something after which you shall never stray.’ They disputed among themselves, and there must be no dispute in the presence of a Prophet. They said, ‘What is

wrong with him?! Has he hallucinated?! Ask him for an explanation,’ so he (ﷺ) said, ‘Leave me alone, for I am better than what you attribute to me.’”<sup>10</sup>

And among the *sahābah* were those who quarreled over authority following the demise of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), so much so that some of them went as far as asking for the appointment of two rulers, one from the Muhājirīn and one from the Anṣār. This proved they did not relinquish their tribal ways of thinking which had been common during the time of *jāhiliyya* despite their acceptance of Islam as we explained while discussing the events of the Saqāfa.

Among the *sahābah* were Abū Hurayra and Mu’awiyah for whom I dedicated special chapters in other places of this research.

Perhaps the exaggeration of the Sunnis in raising the status of a *sahābi* stems from the honor of his having accompanied the Prophet (ﷺ), but this is not more honoring than marrying his daughter, for Allāh Almighty has said the following about the women of the Prophet (ﷺ):

***“O consorts of the Prophet! If any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the punishment would be doubled to her, and that is easy for Allāh. But any of you who is devout in the service of Allāh and His Prophet, and does righteous deeds, to her We shall grant reward twice [as much] and We have prepared a generous sustenance for her” (Qur’ān, 33:30–31).***

Similarly, He has said the following about the disobedience of the Prophet (ﷺ) of ‘Īshā and Hafsa: “ If both of you turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if you back each other up against him, truly Allāh is his Protector, and [so is] Gabriel and the righteous among those who believe! and the angels too. It may be, if he divorced you (all), that Allāh will give him consorts better than you in exchange! who submit (their wills), who believe, who are devout, who turn to Allāh in repentance, who worship (in humility), who travel (for faith) and fast, previously married or virgins.

O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which stern (and) strong angels are appointed, (angels) who do not flinch (from executing) the commands they receive from Allāh, but do (precisely) what they are commanded. (They will say,) O you unbelievers! Make no excuses this Day! You are only being requited for all that you did!

O you who believe! Turn to Allāh with sincere repentance: In the hope that your Lord will remove your ills and admit you into gardens beneath which rivers flow! the Day that Allāh will not permit the Prophet and the believers with him to be humiliated.

Their light will shine before them and on their right hands, while they say, “Lord! Perfect our light for us, and grant us forgiveness, for You have power over all things. O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell! a (truly) evil refuge.

Allāh sets forth, as an example to the unbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot:

***They were (respectively) under two of Our righteous servants, but they were false to their (husbands), and they benefitted nothing before Allāh on their account but were told, “Enter the Fire along with (others) who enter!” (Qurʾān, 66:4–10).***

What we are trying to say is that keeping a lot of company with the Prophet (ﷺ) does not necessarily mean a higher degree of *imān* for such companions, in addition to the past narratives about the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). What is narrated about the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) is similar if not more perplexing and harsh. For example, Ibn Abbās is quoted as having said, “I kept for a whole year trying to ask ‘Umar about the couple of women who disobeyed the Prophet (ﷺ), but I kept fearing him.

One day, he went to a house, and when he got out of it, I asked him. He said, ‘They were ‘Ā’isha and Hafsa.’ Then he added saying, ‘During the time of *jāhiliyya*, we held women as worthless, but when Islam came and Allāh made references to them, we realized that we have some obligations towards them without our having to force them to do anything. My wife and I had an argument, so I became rough with her and said, ‘You are such and such.’ She said to me, ‘Do you say this to me while your own daughter harms [the feelings of] the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ)?!’ I, therefore, went to Hafsa and said, ‘I warn you against disobeying Allāh and His Messenger!’”<sup>11</sup>

‘Ā’isha has also said, “The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) had a honey drink served to him once by Zainab daughter of Jahsh, and he stayed with her. I and Hafsa conspired that if he (ﷺ) visited either of us, he would be told that he had eaten Maghafir [plant] and that he smelled of Maghafir. When he was told, he said, ‘No, but I had a honey drink at the home of Zainab daughter of Jahsh, and I shall not do so again.’ He (ﷺ) asked her to swear not to tell anyone about it.”<sup>12</sup>

‘Ā’isha also said, “The wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) used to form two parties. One of them included ‘Ā’isha (herself), Hafsa, Safiyya and Sawda, and the other included Umm Salamah and the rest of the Prophet’s wives.”<sup>13</sup>

‘Ā’isha has also said, “I used to feel jealous of the women who offered themselves to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) and say, ‘Does a woman really offer herself?’ When the following verses were revealed:

***‘There is no blame on you if you make an offer of marriage or hold it in your hearts. Allāh knows that you cherish them in your hearts, but do not make a secret contract with them except on honorable terms, nor should you sign the marriage contract till the prescribed term is fulfilled. And be informed that Allāh knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him, and be informed that Allāh is oft-Forgiving, Most Forbearing’ (Qurʾān, 2:235),***

I said (to him), ‘I can see how your Lord is swift in fulfilling your heart’s desires.’”<sup>14</sup>

‘Ā’isha has also said, “Hāla daughter of Khuwaylid, sister of Khadīja, sought permission once to visit the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) who recognized how Khadīja used to seek permission, so he was quite upset about it and said, ‘Lord! I hope it is Hāla!’ I, thereupon, felt jealous and said, ‘Why do you still remember

one of Quraysh's old women with red eyes who has for some time been dead since Allāh has replaced her for you with someone better than her [meaning herself]?"<sup>15</sup>

In yet another narrative, 'Īshā made a reference to Khadīja who distinguished herself from all other wives of the Prophet (ﷺ). She believed in the message of the Prophet (ﷺ) while people then called him a liar. She offered all her wealth to him when people deprived him of theirs. And he was blessed with children by her. All this explains why 'Īshā was so jealous of her especially since the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) used to always mention her virtues even after her death, and this contradicts the claim of 'Īshā that Allāh had granted the Prophet (ﷺ) a woman better than her [than Khadīja].

'Īshā is also quoted as having said, "I never felt jealous of the Prophet's wives as much as I felt jealous of Khadīja. Although I never saw her, the Prophet (ﷺ) used to mention her quite often. He may slaughter a she-camel then cut the meat into pieces then send them to Khadīja's friends. I may say to him that it was as though there was no woman in the world except Khadīja, and he would say that she was such and such, and that Allāh granted him children by her."<sup>16</sup>

Those who believe in the "justice" of all the *sahābah* base their belief on their claim that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "My companions are like the stars: Whomsoever you emulate, you shall be guided." In another such narrative, the wording states: "... If you follow the statements of any of them..., etc."

Although the Sunnis do not openly advocate that all the *sahābah* were infallible, yet anyone who claims the authenticity of this narrative must necessarily believe in the infallibility of all of them. This is so because it is not possible that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) should order the absolute emulation, without any term or condition, as this supposed narrative claims, of someone who may disobey him.

Hence, the past traditions which call for a serious reconsideration and contemplation of the "justice" of many *sahābis* are mostly in reference to those who kept company with the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) for a long period of time; so, what would you say about the "justice" of those who were labeled as "sahābah" for merely seeing the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) even for one moment? And why should there be such an exaggeration anyway?! Can one acquire "justice" and "piety" by merely seeing the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) for one moment, or can it be acquired by obeying the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) and emulating him with good intentions and sincerity?

Such a contradiction, which is rejected by sound reason and by the human nature, may become gloriously obvious in the way how some Sunni "scholars", such as Ibn Taymiyyah, preferred Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān over the ascetic caliph 'Umar ibn Abd al-Azīz for no reason except that Mu'āwiyah was a "sahābi" and 'Umar was a "tābi'i" despite the fact that 'Umar ibn Abd al-Azīz was very famous for his piety and justice, unlike Mu'āwiyah who was famous for creating the greatest dissension among the Muslims in Siffēen and for disobeying the Commander of the Faithful Ali ('a) as we have already stated.

Add to this the fame which 'Umar ibn Abd al-Azīz acquired as the fifth righteous caliph according to the Sunnis themselves, something which by itself proves that Mu'āwiyah was not a righteous caliph at all.

Thus, nobody can be called “righteous” only because he was a companion of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ).

It is useful to ask in this regard: Who occupies a higher degree: those who believed in the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) after having witnessed scores of divine miracles with their own eyes or those who believed in Islam without seeing any of them?! The fact is that I could never see an explanation for such an exaggeration in the degree of “piety” of the *sahābah* and the publicity for the concept that they were all just except to close the door in the face of anyone who criticizes some *sahābis* who worked hard to push caliphate away from its rightful owners. Thus, many Sunnis reject all the irrefutable proofs that Ahlul Bayt (‘a) were more fit to be the Imāms of the Muslims for no reason except they believe in the “justice” of all the *sahābah*. They, therefore, consider anything which these “sahābis” had done as “correct.”

As regarding those who worked hard to disseminate this wrong concept, they did so because they regarded the Imāms from among Ahlul Bayt (‘a) as posing a danger to their thrones due to their knowledge that those Imāms were right in their claim. There was a need, therefore, to apply a sort of smoke-screen and confusion to such traditions and Qur’ānic verses which highlighted the status of these Imāms (‘a) while raising the status of ALL the *sahābah* so that the Imāms from among Ahlul Bayt (‘a) would not have the distinction which qualified them to be the choice of Allāh Almighty as well as that of the majority of the Islamic nation following the demise of the Chosen One (ﷺ).

Hence, the wordings and meanings of the above-cited alleged tradition which says that ALL the *sahābah* are “stars” are modeled after a tradition of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) which says, “The stars offer security for the people of the earth against drowning, while my Ahlul Bayt (‘a) offer them security against dissension [with regard to religious issues]; therefore, if an Arab tribe opposes them, they will differ and become the party of Eblis.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the most significant negative effects which came as the outcome of believing in the “justice” of ALL the *sahābah* is the existence of such a huge quantity of erroneous narratives in the books of *hadīth*. These include what is cited through Jewish and Christian sources and other myths which are all used to cast doubts about the Islamic creed. Such narratives have been accepted and held as being authentic merely because they were narrated by the *sahābah* despite all the latter’s deeds which can be criticized as we explained about many past narratives.

<sup>1</sup> Sahāh Muslim as explained by al-Nawawī, Vol. 1, p. 28 (published by Dār al-Sha`b).

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Sahāh, Vol. 9, p. 144, in the book of dissensions in a chapter titled “Beware of dissension that will specifically afflict those from among you who oppressed”.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 315, in the book of shielding with the Book and the Sunnah in a chapter about following past nations.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 47 in the Book of Jihād in a chapter about the verse saying, “Among the believers are men who proved truthful..., etc.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 397, in the book of Tafsīr in a chapter about this verse: “Whether you ask for their forgiveness or not, (their sin is unforgivable:) If you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allāh will not forgive them because they have rejected Allāh and His Prophet, and Allāh does not guide those who are perversely rebellious” (Qur`ān, 9:80).

- [7.](#) Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 508 in the book of testimonies.
- [8.](#) Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 447 in the book of military campaigns in a chapter about dispatching Ali (‘a) and Khadīja, may Allāh be pleased with both of them, to Yemen.
- [9.](#) Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 57 in the book of the virtues of the saḥābah, in a chapter about Zayd’s virtues.
- [10.](#) Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 260 in the book of khums in a chapter about getting the Jews out of the Arabian Peninsula.
- [11.](#) Ibid., vo. 7 pp. 72–404 in the book about clothes
- [12.](#) Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 404 in the book of Tafsīr in a chapter about the verse saying, “O Prophet! Why do you prohibit [yourself from enjoying what] Allāh has made lawful to you?”
- [13.](#) Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 454 in the book about gifting in a chapter about one giving his friend a gift.
- [14.](#) Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 295 in the book explaining the verse “... make an offer of marriage or hold it in your hearts...” (Qur’ān, 2:235).
- [15.](#) Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 105 in the book of the virtues of al-Ansār in a chapter about the Prophet (ﷺ) marrying Khadīja and her distinctions.
- [16.](#) Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 104 in the book of the virtues of al-Ansār in a chapter about the Prophet (ﷺ) marrying Khadīja and her distinctions.
- [17.](#) Refer to Mustadrak al-Saḥīḥayn.

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