

The Sahaba According to the Followers of Ahlul Bayt

If we research the subject of the *sahaba* without prejudice or sensationalism, we will find the Shi'as viewing them as the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, and reason view them. They neither regard all of them as unbelievers, as some extremists have done, nor do they accept all of them as equitable, as "Ahlul Sunnah wal Jama'ah" have done.

Imam Sharaf ad-Din al-Musawi¹ says the following in this regard:

"Whoever researches our view with regard to the *sahaba* will find it the most moderate of views. We neither go to extremes in this regard as the *ghulat* have done, labelling them all as apostates, nor do we go to extremes in accepting them as trusted authorities as most [Sunni] Muslims have done. Those who attribute their perfection, as well as those who go to the opposite extreme and label them as apostates, are all in the same box.

Sunnis are of the view that anyone who heard or saw the Prophet is absolutely equitable. They support their view from the tradition saying, "... whoever traversed or walked on the earth from them without any exception."¹ But as far as we are concerned, although we regard keeping company with the Prophet as a great honor, it, as is, does not render one infallible. Like all other men, the *sahaba* included equitable persons who are their scholars and greatest men, whereas some of them are hypocrites who committed crimes.

The condition of some of them is unknown; so, we rely on the equitable ones among them and accept them as our masters in the life of this world as well as in the life to come. As for those who oppressed the *wasi* and the Prophet's brother, as well as all those who committed crimes such as Hind's son [Abu Sufyan], the son of the genius, the son of "the blue woman," the son of Uqbah, the son of Arta'a, etc., and their likes, these have nothing to be honored for, nor does their *hadith* hold water. It is of an undecided nature, and we have to carefully scrutinize it.

"Such is our view with regard to the *sahaba* who narrate *hadith*. The Qur'an and the Sunnah are our

argument to pack this view as explained wherever appropriate in our books that deal with the basics of jurisprudence. But the majority of Muslims have gone too far in sanctifying the *hadith* they hear from any *sahabi*, so much so that they swayed from moderation and sought their arguments from those who are good as well as from those who are bad, blindly emulating every Muslim individual who had heard or seen the Prophet. They resented others who differed from them in going to such extremes and went beyond all limits in denouncing them.

“How intense their denunciation of us when they find us rejecting the *hadith* of many *sahaba* whose integrity we publicly challenge or whose condition is not fully ascertained! While doing so, we simply follow the binding legislative obligation in verifying religious facts and looking for authentic Prophetic legacy.

“It is for this reason that they cast doubt about us, piling their accusations on us, charging us with unfounded charges, vying with one another to remain in ignorance about us. Had they recalled their wisdom and consulted the bases of knowledge and scholarship, they would have come to know that equity as a basic ingredient in all the *sahaba* cannot be proven. Had they delved in depth into the meanings of the Qur'an, they would have found it full of references to a number of *sahabi* hypocrites. Suffices you, for example, Surat al-Tawbah and Surat al-Ahzab.”

Dr. Hamid Hafni Dawood, Professor of Arabic Literature and Head of the Department of Arabic at Ayn Shams University in Cairo says, “As for the Shi'as, they view the *sahaba* as they view others: they do not distinguish between them and between the Muslims who came later till the Day of Judgment.”

The reason for that is their application of one set of rules whereby the deeds of the *sahaba*, as well as those of other generations that followed them, are measured. The mere quality of being a *sahabi* does not award anyone a particular merit except when one qualifies himself for such a merit and demonstrates his readiness to carry out the injunctions set by the one who introduced the Shari`a.

Among the *sahaba* are those who are divinely protected against sinning, such as the Imams who were blessed to be in the company of the one who introduced the Shari`a. These include Ali and his sons (peace be upon them). And among them are the men of equity who maintain a beautiful company with Ali following the demise of the Messenger of Allah.

Among the *sahaba* are those who are accurate in their *ijtihad*, while others among them erred in their *ijtihad*. Among them are those who sinned, those who turned atheists and whose views are uglier and more dangerous than those of the latter group. The circle of atheists includes the hypocrites and those who worshipped Allah only marginally. And among them were the disbelievers who never repented, as well as those who reneged after having embraced the Islamic creed.

This means that the Shi'as, who constitute a great portion of the Muslim population, place all Muslims in one balance without differentiating between a *sahabi*, a *tabi'i*, or anyone else. To be a *sahabi* is not to have immunity against wrong beliefs.

It is upon this strong foundation that they allowed themselves, out of their own *ijtihad*, to criticize the *sahaba* and to research the extent of their equity. They also permitted themselves to cast doubt about a number of *sahaba* who violated the conditions of such companionship and who deviated from the path of loving the Progeny of Muhammad.

Why not? The greatest Messenger, after all, has said, “I am leaving among you that which, so long as you adhere to them both, you shall never stray: the Book of Allah and my *`itra*, my Progeny. They shall never part from one another till they rejoin me at the Pool [of Kawthar]; so, see how you succeed me in faring with them.”

Upon this and similar *hadith*, they find many *sahaba* as having violated this *hadith* by oppressing Muhammad's Progeny, and by cursing some members of such Progeny; so, how can the honor of companionship be sound for such violators, and how can they be branded as equitable?

This is the summary of the view held by Shi`as in rejecting the equity of some *sahaba*, and these are the factual scholarly proofs whereupon they built their arguments.

Dr. Hamid Hafni Dawood admits somewhere else that to criticize the *sahaba* and to find fault with them is not a *bid`a* invented by the Shi`as alone. He goes further to say, “Since the beginning, the Mu`tazilites dealt with the same while discussing the issues relevant to the creed. They did not only criticize the *sahaba* in general, they even criticized the caliphs themselves. In doing so, they won supporters and opponents.”

The subject of criticizing the *sahaba* used to be confined, during the first centuries, to those who were deeply immersed in knowledge, especially Mu`tazilite scholars who were preceded in going in such a direction by the heads of the Shi`as and by the leaders who were enthusiastically supporting the Progeny of Muhammad.

I have already pointed out somewhere else that the scholars of Arabic, and Mu`tazilite mentors, were a burden on Shi`a leaders from the first Hijri century. Thereupon, the issue of criticizing the *sahaba* is the child-birth of following Muhammad's Progeny.

It was the result, not the nature, of Shi`ism. Those who followed the Progeny of Muhammad came to recognize the latter as having studied in depth all the branches of knowledge relevant to the creed due to their enjoyment of the sources of knowledge provided by the Imams of Ahlul Bayt who are the pristine source and the over-flowing spring from which Islamic scholarship is derived since the inception of Islam and till our time.²

I personally think that one who seeks the truth has to open the door for criticism and fault-finding; otherwise, he will remain veiled from such faults. This is exactly what “Ahlul Sunnah wal Jama`ah” have done: They have exaggerated in their belief in the equity of all the *sahaba* without researching the latter's conditions; they, therefore, remained to our time distant from the truth.

1. His full name is Sharaf ad-Din Sadr ad-Din al-Musawi. He is author of the celebrated book Al-Muraja`at. The translator of this book has translated it into English under the title: Al-Muraja`at: A Shi`i-Sunni Dialogue. It was published (hard cover edition only) in 1995 by Imam Hussain Foundation, P.O. Box 25/114, Beirut, Lebanon. ___ Tr.

2. This text was published on p. 8 and its following pages of the book titled Al-Sahaba fi Nadar al-Shi`a al-Imamiyya (the Prophet's companions as seen by Imamite Shi`as).

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