

Preface

The question of who the best of the Sahabah, *radhiyallah 'anhum*, was has always been a thorny issue within the Ummah, especially among the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Even the Sahabah disputed with one another over the topic. Specifically, the debate often revolves around Abu Bakr and 'Ali, *'alaihi al-salam*, only. It is very difficult to see anyone – whether Sunni or Shi'i – arguing that 'Umar, 'Uthman, Talhah, Zubayr or some other Sahabi – was the best of the Sahabah. Rather, the exact point of contention is, and always was: was Abu Bakr their best or 'Ali?

Expectedly, most of the Ahl al-Sunnah consider Abu Bakr to have been the best of the Sahabah, then 'Umar, then 'Uthman, and then 'Ali. By contrast, the Shi'ah believe that Amir al-Muminin 'Ali was the best, then al-Hasan, then al-Husayn, and then Sayyidah Faṭimah, *'alaihim al-salam*. There is a minority among Sunnis – including some Sahabah and a lot of Sufis – who share the Shi'i view on the matter.

Ordinarily, the debate over who was the best should have been a mere, healthy academic exercise. However, it is linked with *Imamah* and *khilafah* in the Ummah. So, it is a very big issue, and provokes the deepest emotions of some people. In fact, countless Shi'is and others have been murdered for more than a millenium by Sunni extremists, only for their belief in the superiority of 'Ali. The best of the Ummah at each point in time is the only one qualified for the *khilafah*. This is the Command of Allah and His Messenger, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*. Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) confirms:

ففي هذا الخبر إخبار عمر بين المهاجرين والأنصار أن أبا بكر سيد المسلمين
وخيرهم وأحبهم إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ذلك علة مبايعته فقال بل
نبايعك أنت فأنت سيدنا وخيرنا وأحبنا إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم
ليبين بذلك أن الأمور به تولية الأفضل وأنت أفضلنا فنبايعك

In this report is the declaration of 'Umar among the Muhajirun and the Ansar that Abu Bakr was the

sayyid of the Muslims and the best of them, and the most beloved of them to the Messenger of Allah. This is the reason for following him. So, he (‘Umar) said, “Rather, we will follow you because you are our *sayyid*, and the best of us, and the most beloved of us to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him”. He wanted to make clear through it that: **WHAT IS ORDAINED IS TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO THE BEST**, and you are the best of us. So, we will follow you. 1

The bottomline here is that *khilafah* by anyone who is not the best of his time is contrary to the Order of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and is therefore both illegal and a *bid’ah*. That makes the *khalifah* himself and all his supporters ringleaders of a *bid’ah*, as long as they are aware of his deficiency and still uphold his *khilafah*. In that way, they would be guilty of creating a new provision in the religion to supplant that of Allah. The grave danger of all this is captured perfectly in these words of the Messenger of Allah, documented by Imam al-Nasai (d. 303 H):

شر الأمور محدثاتها وكل محدثة بدعة وكل بدعة ضلالة وكل ضلالة في النار

The worst of the (religious) affairs are their innovations, and every innovation is a *bid’ah*, **and every bid’ah is misguidance, and every misguidance ends to the Fire.**2

‘Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) comments:

صحيح

Sahih3

The Command of Allah and His Messenger is that the best of the Ummah should *always* be their *khalifah*, as testified by ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Meanwhile, the innovation in this matter is to make or allow *any* inferior individual as the *khalifah*. This innovation is a *bid’ah*, and will land whosoever leads, practices or recognizes it in Hellfire. It is understandable then why some of our Sunni brothers are so hell-bent upon emphasizing the superiority over Abu Bakr over the whole Ummah, followed by ‘Umar and ‘Uthman, by all means – even to the extent of committing massacres. The survival of their *madhhab* depends very heavily on it. Should Abu Bakr, ‘Umar or ‘Uthman fall, Sunnism itself ceases to exist as a valid entity!

So, certain drastic steps were taken to address the challenge. First, a very wide re-definition was issued for Shi’ism. This, apparently, was to scare Sunnis away from researching into the issue. Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (d. 852 H) takes the podium:

والتشيع محبة على وتقديمه على الصحابة فمن قدمه على أبي بكر وعمر فهو
غال في تشيعه ويطلق عليه رافضي وإلا فشيوعي فإن انضاف إلى ذلك السب أو
التصريح بالبغض فغال في الرفض وإن اعتقد الرجعة إلى الدنيا فأشد في الغلو

Shi'ism is love of 'Ali and the placing of him over the Sahabah (except Abu Bakr and 'Umar only). Whoever places him above Abu Bakr and 'Umar, such is an extremist in his Shi'ism, and he is called a Rafidi.

If he does not (place 'Ali over the two), then he is only a Shi'i. If he added to that (i.e. preference of 'Ali over Abu Bakr and 'Umar) abuse, cursing or open hatred (of Abu Bakr and 'Umar), he is then an extremist in *Rafdhi*. If he believes in *Raj'ah* into this world, then he is severe in (Rafidhi) extremism.⁴

Therefore, a Sunni is only someone who considers 'Ali as inferior to Abu Bakr, 'Umar AND 'Uthman. Whosoever places him above 'Uthman is a Shi'i, and whosoever views him as superior to Abu Bakr or 'Umar is a Rafidhi. In the Sunni creed, being a Shi'i is a *bid'ah*. Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) says:

أن البدعة على ضربين: فبدعة صغرى كغلو التشيع، أو كالتشيع بلا غلو ولا تحرف، فهذا كثير في التابعين وتابعيهم مع الدين والورع والصدق. فلو رد حديث هؤلاء لذهب جملة من الآثار النبوية، وهذه مفسدة بينة. ثم بدعة كبرى، كالرفض الكامل والغلو فيه

Bid'ah has two types:

The minor *bid'ah*: like extreme Shi'ism, or like moderate Shi'ism, for this was widespread among the Tabi'in and their followers, despite their devotion, piety and truthfulness. If the *ahadith* of these people were rejected, part of teachings of the Prophet would be lost, and that would be a clear evil.

Then **the major *bid'ah*:** like complete *rafdh* and extremism in it.⁵

By classifying the placing of 'Ali above 'Uthman as a *bid'ah* – which leads to Hellfire – the classical Sunni *'ulama* hoped to put a firm lid on all threats to their *madhhab*. However, their action has produced some horrible unintended consequences. Many of the Sahabah were *Rawafidh* by Sunni definition, and therefore heretics who will burn forever in the Fire! Imam Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 H) identifies some of these Rafidhi Sahabah:

وروى عن سلمان وأبي زر والمقداد وخباب وجابر وأبي سعيد الخدري وزيد

بن الأرقم أن علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه أول من أسلم وفضله هؤلاء علي غيره

Salman, Abu Dharr, al-Miqdad, Khabab, Jabir, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri and Zayd b. Arqam narrated that 'Ali b. Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, was the first to accept Islam, **and they considered him the most superior (among the Sahabah).**⁶

These senior Sahabah considered 'Ali as superior to Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman! By Sunni standards, their *bid'ah*, therefore, was of the *major* type! They were complete Rafidhis. Another well-known Sahabi like them was Abu al-Tufayl, *radhiyallah 'anhu*. Imam al-Dhahabi states about him:

واسم أبي الطفيل، عامر بن وائلة بن عبد الله بن عمرو الليثي الكناني الحجازي الشيعي. كان من شيعة الإمام علي

The name of Abu al-Tufayl was 'Amir b. Wathilah b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Amr al-Laythi al-Kanani al-Hijazi, **the Shi'i. He was from the Shi'ah of Imam 'Ali.**⁷

Imam Ibn 'Abd al-Barr adds:

وكان متشيعا في علي ويفضله ويثني على الشيخين أبي بكر وعمر ويترحم على عثمان

He was a Shi'i of 'Ali and considered him the most superior. He used to extol the two Shaykhs, Abu Bakr and 'Umar, and would ask for Allah's mercy upon 'Uthman.⁸

Al-Hafiz explains the words of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr above:

قال أبو عمر كان يعترف بفضل أبي بكر وعمر لكنه يقدم عليا

Abu 'Umar said: He accepted the merit of Abu Bakr and 'Umar **but he considered 'Ali to be the most superior.**⁹

This creates an impossible dilemma for Sunni Islam. If Sunnis stick with their view that Shi'ism – as defined by them – is a *bid'ah*, then they must agree that all these fine Sahabah were heretics with no hope of salvation in the Hereafter. By contrast, if they free the Shi'i Sahabah, then they must equally free all other Shi'ah and Rawafidh! What is good for the goose is equally good for the gander. Besides, the Sahabah, who met the Prophet, are in an even more accountable position on any Islamic matter than all the generations after them. It gets scary when one considers the possibility that the Messenger of Allah could have been of the same opinion as the Shi'i Sahabah! If he did, then it would have been Sunnah to place 'Ali over Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. In that case, the majority view of the Ahl al-Sunnah on the matter would have been a *bid'ah* – in fact, a compounded *bid'ah*.

The other step taken by the Sunni *'ulama* was to confuse their followers on the status and meanings of explicit *ahadith* indicating the overall superiority of Amir al-Muminin 'Ali b. Abi Talib over all Sahabah.

The most guilty individual in this regard was none other than “Shaykh al-Islam” Ibn Taymiyyah. Others, such as Imam al-Mubarakfuri (d. 1282 H), ‘Allamah al-Albani, Shaykh al-Arnau⁹ and others, have also followed his steps, albeit at a much lower level. In this book, we will be examining some of such *ahadith*, proving their authenticity absolutely, and analyzing their texts in the light of the Qur’an and *mutawatir* Sunnah. Our *manhaj* in this regard is open, transparent, mathematical and precise. For instance, we have relied very heavily upon the verdicts concerning the individual narrators by al-Hafiz al-‘Asqalani in his legendary reference work, *al-Taqrīb*. The reasons for this approach are two. First, al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, often fondly referred to simply as al-Hafiz, is one of the greatest Sunni scholars of *rijal* and *hadith*. ‘Allamah al-Albani says about him:

لكن من كان في ريب مما أحكم أنا على بعض الأحاديث فليعد إلى فتح الباري فسيجد هناك أشياء كثيرة وكثيرة جداً ينتقدها الحافظ أحمد بن حجر العسقلاني الذي يسمى بحق أمير المؤمنين في الحديث والذي أعتقد أنا وأظن أن كل من كان مشاركاً في هذا العلم يوافقني على أنه لم تلد النساء بعده مثله.

But, whoever is in doubt concerning the verdicts I have given concerning some *ahadith* (in *Sahih al-Bukhari*), let him refer to *Fath al-Bari*, and he will find there lots and lots of things (in *Sahih al-Bukhari*) which have been criticized by **al-Hafiz Ahmad b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, who is rightly named the Amir al-Muminin in Hadith, and whom I believe – and I suppose that anyone who has this knowledge (i.e. science of hadith) would agree with me – that no woman has ever given birth to anyone like him after him.**¹⁰

The phrase “amir al-muminin” is of course a reference to the supreme master.

Secondly, al-Hafiz himself states in the Introduction to *al-Taqrīb*:

أنني أحكم على كل شخص منهم بحكم يشمل أصح ما قيل فيه، وأعدل ما وصف به

I have graded every individual among them with a verdict that contains the most correct of what is said about him, and the most just of the descriptions given for him.¹¹

In other words, a lot of things have been said about each of the narrators. But, not everything said about them is authentically transmitted, correct or accurate. So, al-Hafiz, who is a king in the Sunni science of *hadith*, has compiled only “the most correct” and “the most just” of the statements made about them. No wonder, top Sunni *hadith* scientists like ‘Allamah al-Albani and others have relied *very* heavily upon this *al-Taqrīb* in all their works. We will be doing the same throughout this book and others. There are two clear advantages in doing this. One, it would ensure the accuracy of our conclusions on the various narrators. Two, it would keep our book concise and neat. As such, we will firstly quote the criticisms of a Sunni scholar, mostly Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah, against a particular *hadith* – which establishes ‘Ali’s

superiority over all the Sahabah – and then examines the trustworthiness of all its narrators, primarily through *al-Taqrīb*. Where the name of the narrator is not present in *al-Taqrīb*, then we go for the books of Imam al-Dhahabi, who is equally a superweight in Sunni *hadith* sciences, as well as others like ‘Allamah al-Albani and Shaykh al-Arnau¹.

This humble author has adopted a very strict *takhrij* style throughout the book. This is why he has excluded *ahadith* which he believes to be true, but which do not meet the strict standards of authenticity in the Sunni *hadith* sciences. In particular, we focus on the reliability of the narrators and the full connectivity of the chains. We also seek if there are corroborative supports for either the chains or the texts of the *ahadith*. Most importantly, we also investigate any possible hidden defects in the chains, such as *tadlis*, poor memory and *irsal* of the narrators and present detailed researches to make clarifications wherever necessary. Sometimes, in order to save space, we do simply rely upon explicit authentications of chains and *ahadith* by the topmost Sunni *hadith* scientists. Through this methodology, we hope to give the full opportunity to whoever is researching the topic in order to determine the real truth.

Meanwhile, we do not neglect Sunni arguments and reports in favour of the superiority of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar either. We query their authenticity too, in line with strict standards of Sunni *rijaal* and further test their compatibility with the Qur’an and undisputed history. The full details of our investigations are provided in our book, so that our esteemed reader can verify, reason and make his independent conclusions too.

Throughout our book, we have relied upon Sunni books only, and specifically those of the highest standing in their respected categories. This way, we aim ensure full accuracy in everything. We implore Allah to forgive us all our mistakes, and to accept this as a worthy act of *‘ibadah*.

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1. Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Halim b. Taymiyyah al-Harrani, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah* (Muassasat Qurtubah; 1st edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad Rashad Salim], vol. 8, p. 565
 2. Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Ahmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasai, *al-Mujtaba min al-Sunan* (Halab: Maktab Matbu‘at al-Islamiyyah; 2nd edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 3, p. 188, # 1578
 3. Ibid
 4. Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani al-Shafi‘i, *Hadi al-Sari Muqaddimah Fath al-Bari* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-‘Arabi; 1st edition, 1408 H), p. 460
 5. Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthman al-Dhahabi, *Mizan al-I’tidal fi Naqd al-Rijal* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah; 1st edition, 1382 H) [annotator: ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi], vol. 1, pp. 5–6, # 2
 6. Abu ‘Umar Yusuf b. ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr b. ‘U‘sim al-Nimri al-Qurtubi, *al-Isti‘ab fi Ma‘rifat al-Ashab* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil; 1st edition, 1412 H) [annotator: ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi], vol. 3, pp. 1090, # 1855
 7. Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthman al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 9th edition, 1413 H) [annotators: Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut, Muhammad Na‘im al-‘Arqisusi and Mamun ‘Aghirji], vol. 3, p. 468, # 97
 8. Abu ‘Umar Yusuf b. ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr b. ‘U‘sim al-Nimri al-Qurtubi, *al-Isti‘ab fi Ma‘rifat al-Ashab* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil; 1st edition, 1412 H) [annotator: ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi], vol. 4, p. 1697, # 3054
 9. Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-‘Ahabah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1415

- H) [annotators: Shaykh ‘Adil Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Mawjud and Shaykh ‘Ali Muhammad Ma’udh], vol. 7, p. 193, # 10166
10. Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. ‘Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Fatawa (Cairo: Maktabah al-Turath al-Islami; 1st edition, 1414 H), p. 525
11. Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, Taqrib al-Tahdhib (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 1, p. 24
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