

The Love of the Companions for Prophet Muhammad (part 1 of 2): Who were the Companions?



The most widely accepted definition of a companion of Prophet Muhammad is someone who met the Prophet, believed in him and died as a Muslim. The Arabic translation of the word companion is *sahabi*, thus companions (plural) becomes *sahaba*. As with all Arabic words there are many shades and levels of meaning. The root of the word is *sa-hi-ba* and means physical nearness or to sit with, thus a *sahabi* is generally considered someone to have been close to Prophet Muhammad; someone who spent considerable time in his company or presence. The companions, men, women and children loved Prophet Muhammad dearly and anyone of them would have given their lives in his defence or in defence of the fledgling religion.

Both God and Prophet Muhammad reciprocated the companions love and devotion.

"... God is well-pleased with them as they are well-pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise), to dwell therein forever." (Quran 9:100)

Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him, said, "*The best of my nation is my generation then those who follow them and then those who follow them.*"[\[1\]](#)

The companions are considered the best generation of the Islamic nation, both then and now. We learn about their etiquettes and manners, we read their stories and marvel at their exploits; we admire their religious zeal and their utter devotion to God and His Messenger. However, we often lack a holistic understanding of their lives. Who were these men, women and children? What were their lives like before the advent of Islam? What sort of people were they before they chose to love and follow Prophet Muhammad? And in addition to this what was it about Prophet Muhammad that produced such complete devotion?

The people who lived in the society from which the Prophet came from were from different walks of life, exactly as you would find in a small town today. Some were rich while others were poor, some were kind while others were cruel. Some were honest while others were not. The Companions of the Prophet, may Allah praise him, were indeed the best of all people. Ibn Masood, one of the Companions, said: "Indeed Allah, the Exalted, chose Muhammad as His Prophet, for he was the most pious of His slaves, and Allah sent him with the Message. Allah then chose the Companions of the Prophet to be with the Prophet as they were the best of all people after him."

In pre-Islamic Arabia there was no system of government thus there was no law and order. If crimes were committed the injured party took justice into his own hands. A person felt secure only amongst his own tribe and it seems that the peninsula was in a constant state of warfare. Disputes were settled in battles and old and gallant codes and honour systems were recognised and used. Caravan trade was an important fixture in Arabia and fortunes were won and lost via the trading of things as diverse as camels, raisins and silver bars.

Islam was able to take the very best of Arabian society and use it. Their innate traits of valor, strength and fierceness were harnessed and tamed by Islam. A connection to God changed the lives of the companions of Prophet Muhammad. Islam took an undisciplined people and used them to establish a system of rule unlike any other known to humankind. Love for Prophet Muhammad changed lives then, just as it does now. Let us take a look at some of the changes to the lives of the companions and we will see that this, the first generation of Muslims was very similar to the people converting to Islam now, in the 21st century.

Hamzah Ibn Abdul Muttalib, the Prophet's paternal uncle was of a similar age to Muhammad, they played together as children. However as they grew older they parted ways. Hamzah preferred a life of leisure trying to secure a place amongst the leaders of Makkah while Muhammad chose a life of contemplation. Hamzah enjoyed his life; he was strong and well respected. He seemed to be on a path of leadership but soon all his acquaintances were talking about Muhammad and how he was destroying the lifestyle they had come to enjoy. Hamzah found himself having to make a decision when one day he learned that Muhammad had been insulted by the men Hamzah had been friends with in his quest for the good life. He chose Muhammad and converted to Islam and in doing so turned his back on a life of luxury and indolence. Hamzah knew Muhammad well, loved him like a brother and found that his decision was not a hard one to make.

Omar Ibn Al Khattab's path to Islam began with a vehement hatred of Muhammad but that hatred soon turned into a fierce love. When Muhammad's teachings became a problem for the men of Makkah, Omar pronounced his hatred for Islam openly and took part in the abuse and torture of many of the weaker converts to Islam. His hatred of Islam and the way it was able to change lives was so strong that he volunteered to kill Prophet Muhammad. On

taking the decision and without a second's hesitation, he strode down the streets of Makkah intent on drawing his sword and ending the life of the Prophet of God. Omar was a man of strength, he was feared and admired for his boldness but he too was overcome by the sublime beauty of the Quran and his recognition of the innate goodness and justice of the man Muhammad.

The Makkan leader known as 'Abu Jahal' (i.e. father of ignorance) was actually named Amr ibn Hisham and he was commonly known as 'Abu Hakam' (Father of Wisdom). His relentless hostility and belligerence towards Islam however, earned him the name Abu Jahal among the Muslims. He was a staunch polytheist and hated Prophet Muhammad. He took every opportunity to curse and humiliate him. If he discovered a convert he would reprimand and humiliate him. If he discovered a trader had converted to Islam he would give orders that no one trade with him thereby ruining his livelihood and causing him to become impoverished. Abu Jahal perished in the first battle fought against the Makkans, the Battle of Badr. His son Ikrimah however, became one of the important military and civil leaders of the Islamic nation. After years of hatred towards Islam he embraced the new faith when he observed Prophet Muhammad's justice towards the people of Makkah. When Makkah was conquered Prophet Muhammad could easily have put his most hated enemies to death however his sense of righteousness caused him to bestow a general pardon and amnesty.

These three men were very strong in both character and physicality. They were not easily dominated in fact they were usually the ones with the upper hand. They made quick and firm decisions to embrace Islam and follow Prophet Muhammad. In the next article we will look at the qualities and character traits of Prophet Muhammad and ask what was it that made people endure torture and trials in order to support their new religion and follow their Prophet.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

(part 1 of 2): Devotion Beyond Compare

Arabia was a violent male dominated society. The strong succeeded while the weak perished. Women were less than chattels and baby daughters were buried alive with less care than we bury our pets today. These were the conditions under which the men, women and children who became the companions of Prophet Muhammad lived. It was into this lawless society that God intervened and gave the world the man known as, "a mercy to humankind". This was a man who valued life, honesty and generosity. The

people admired him for his trustworthiness even before the revelation of Islam. He was charismatic and accessible to all; men, women and children alike.

"And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds." (Quran 21:107)

Muhammad was a selfless man who devoted the last 23 years of his life to teaching his companions and followers how to worship God and how to respect humanity. He delivered a message imbued with the concepts of mercy, forgiveness and justice for all. It was a very appealing message to the poor and down trodden, of which there were many but it was also appealing to the wealthy.

Prophet Muhammad lived in a world where the strong dominated and the weak perished, however even before Islam he was a gentle hearted hospitable man whose admirable traits and qualities made people want to draw close to him. He was a chaste and contemplative young man yet the wild and undisciplined youth liked to share his company. He was what we would call today an all-round good guy; one who can be trusted and relied upon. As he grew into adulthood Prophet Muhammad was known as a good friend and honest businessman. Among the people of Makkah he was known as Al-Ameen – the trustworthy one. They turned to him for judgement and consultation, and because of his honesty he was often asked to mediate disputes or hold items in trust.

The people who knew Prophet Muhammad best had little difficulty accepting his Prophethood or the astounding message that he sought to inspire people with. They were aware of his character, particularly his lack of arrogance and his compassion for those less fortunate than himself. Among Prophet Muhammad's early followers were many poor, destitute and lonely people. They flocked to his side and were eager to take comfort in his words and deeds. Many felt that they finally had someone who understood their physical needs and cared about the state of their souls. Sadly however these were the same people who were at first ridiculed, and then tortured and abused for their new beliefs. They were without tribal support and many suffered terribly because of their attachment to Prophet Muhammad and their acceptance of his message of Islam.

According to biographer Ibn Ishaq, a slave named Bilal suffered terribly for his immediate acceptance of Prophet Muhammad's message. He was beaten mercilessly, dragged around the streets and hills of Makkah by his neck, and subjected to long periods without food or water. His owner Umayya ibn Khalaf reportedly, "would bring him out at the hottest part of the day and throw him on his back in the open valley and have a great rock put on his chest; then he would say to him, 'You will stay here till you die or deny Muhammad and worship al-Lat and al-'Uzza".^[1] Bilal would not renounce Islam, and amidst his suffering he uttered only one word – Ahad (meaning One God).

After several years of economic boycott, abuse and torture, the new Muslims had no choice but to migrate to the city of Yathrib (Madina). There the people were ready to welcome Prophet Muhammad as their secular and spiritual leader but leaving Makkah, especially en masse, proved problematic. The Makkan leaders were already incensed that Prophet Muhammad had dared to question and alter their way of life. Now, to walk away unpunished and unrepentant seemed to them to be the highest of insults. This time also proved to be one where the companions of Prophet Muhammad demonstrated their devotion and love for him. The Muslims began to migrate, and the polytheists spared no effort in hindering them.

A young man named Hubaib was hung from the gallows and asked to save his own life by saying he wished Prophet Muhammad was in his place. He answered their request with great courage by saying, "Never! Not only would I not want him to take my place, I would not even want a thorn to prick his foot." One of the leaders of Makkah was heard to say, "I have never seen anyone in the world loved by his friends as much as Muhammad is loved by his companions."^[2]

While many Muslims left under the cover of darkness, a man named Suhaib openly expressed his wish to migrate. The Makkan leaders began to insult and dissuade him, even out rightly demanding that he stay in Makkah. Suhaib, a wealthy man, offered them his entire fortune in exchange for the right to leave unhindered and this was eventually accepted. These companions thought nothing of giving up everything that they owned in order to be with the man they loved and admired. When Prophet Muhammad heard of Suhaib's dilemma and what he did in order to migrate he said, "Suhaib has conducted a successful trade!"^[3]

Soon the Makkan leaders laid siege to their own city trying to prevent the migration to Madina. They kept a close eye on Prophet Muhammad's house, knowing that while he remained in Makkah all was not lost. On the night Prophet Muhammad decided to leave for Madina with his friend and confidante Abu Bakr, his young cousin Ali chose to stay in the house disguised as the Prophet. Ali slept in Muhammad's bed covered by Muhammad's mantle. Ali felt that he was protected by God because he was trying to protect God's Messenger. The men guarding the house had no idea that Prophet Muhammad had escaped their net. However in the cold light of day Ali was interrogated to no avail about the whereabouts of the two fugitives.

This anecdote also serves to remind us that the women companions were no less devoted to Prophet Muhammad, may God praise him. When no information was obtained from Ali as to the Prophet's whereabouts they began to intimidate and physically abuse Asma, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad's travelling companion Abu Bakr. Apparently this young woman was severely slapped around the face and head. But Asma was not deterred for she went on to smuggle food to the Prophet and her father while they were hiding in the caves outside Makkah.

All of Prophet Muhammad's companions thought of him with love and affection; they were more devoted to him than they were to their own welfare and comfort. The companions were concerned for his every need and committed their lives to him and the message of Islam. If their commitment was mentioned they would reply by saying, "O Prophet of God you are dearer to us than our own mothers and fathers".

Footnotes:

[1] Idols worshipped by the people of Mecca.

[2] Ibn Sai'd

[3] Ibn Hisham.