

QURANIC CLASSIFICATION OF PEOPLE AROUND PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAWA)

Lecture 3 in the series: UNVEILING THE LESSER KNOWN COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET (SAWA)

By: Mowlana Syed Aftab Haider on 23 September 2017 (Muharram 1439) at the Ahlul Bait (a.s) Islamic Centre, Ottery, Cape Town

We continue to remember the sacrifice of Imam Hussain (a.s) and the other martyrs of Karbala through learning and understanding the message of Islam and Karbala. For the past 2 lectures we discussed the issue of companionship of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) and the various opinions on this matter.

In Lecture 2 we unpacked this apparent issue of Apostasy of the companions of Rasulullah (SAWA) after he passed away.

SUMMARY OF LECTURE 2 ON SUPPOSED APOSTASY OF SAHABA

1. We Shia, followers of Ahlul Bait (a.s), do not believe that Sahaba became apostates after the passing away of Rasulullah (SAWA). However, we believe that they were great people with great sacrifices and contributions, together with great services and efforts which they made for the progress of Islam.
2. At the same time, they were human beings and therefore among them you find those with outstanding commitment and sacrifice, and also those who were not on that level and committed significant errors. Therefore, we do not believe that Sahaba were beyond reproach, because they were human beings.
3. History itself is testimony to the fact that they differed with each other and they unfortunately became embroiled in deadly conflict with each other. Hence, we cannot say that they were ALL on the right path, or stars to be followed.
4. This is the point of difference with our Sunni brethren. Indeed, while we differ, it is important to emphasize that cursing and insulting the companions is not acceptable, and totally contrary to the Akhlaq expected from us by the Imams of Ahlul Bait (a.s).
5. Imam Ali (a.s) reprimanded his own followers against the use of abusive language when they were complaining about the characters of some Sahaba. Instead, his guidance was that they should speak about what is right and wrong, and people will find their way from there. This is the moral and ethical standard which Ahlul Bait (a.s) established towards Sahaba.
6. As we mentioned, there were deep political undertones at play to silence people from being critical of the oppressive rulers who deviated from the Islamic system. The consequences of this

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deviation are still felt today, as the Ummah is suffering!

7. We also discussed that this ill-informed accusation against us Shia on our position towards Sahaba is exploited to promote hate and ugly sectarian agendas.

DOES OUR CRITICAL APPROACH ON SAHABA CAST DOUBT ON THE ISLAMIC BELIEF SYSTEM?

The question that is raised is that if we Shia are critical about the Sahaba then it means we doubt the Sharia itself, because Islam reached us through them! So if they are not reliable, then whatever we believe in today by the name of Islam is on very shaky grounds!

In response to this doubt, we are repeatedly saying that we do NOT REJECT SAHABA! We are not renouncing this very important generation of Islam and nullifying them in totality. We are not creating doubt about their sincerity or questioning their commitment and contribution to Islam.

Not at all, as they are praised in the Holy Quran, and so does Rasulullah (SAWA) and Imam Ali (a.s) and the other Imams of Ahlul Bait (a.s).

We are not denying Sahaba in totality. It does not impact on the authenticity of Islam if there were some weaknesses and diversions amongst them, because we are required to authenticate the reliability of the medium through which Islam reaches us.

Even our Sunni brethren who believe in the justice of ALL the Sahaba tend to divide Hadith into different levels of authenticity based on their due diligence on the lengthy chain of narrators connecting us to the original message. They also emphasize on verifying authenticity through checks and balances of those involved in the narration, but may stop when there is a Sahabi involved, because Sahaba are beyond reproach according to them.

However, in our case as followers of Ahlul Bait (a.s), verification continues until it reaches to Rasulullah (SAWA) himself. This is not because we are critical of Sahaba and their role in conveying Islam to the generations afterwards. According to us, they are all entitled to verification, given the sensitivity associated with relaying utterances from the blessed lips of Rasulullah (SAWA).

The key point to note is that this does not bring Sharia in doubt nor the medium of Islam being relayed through Sahaba.

DID RASULULLAH (SAWA) FAIL IN HIS MISSION IF ONLY FEW SAHABA REMAINED ON THE RIGHT PATH?

Another question is sometimes raised, that we Shia are saying that very few of the Sahaba persevered on the right path, while the rest went astray. By implication this means that we are saying that Rasulullah (SAWA) failed in his propagation and training? Are we saying that only a few people successfully graduated from his class, as the rest went astray after his passing? This is then a direct attack on Rasulullah (SAWA) himself?!

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Our response to this is that it is completely untrue. Those who were products of his school were plenty in number, not a few.

Firstly, numbers are not important. Quality is important! If you look at those early Sahaba you will realize the great spirit of sacrifice, devotion, and highest levels of moral character they established and presented to the masses.

What about all those who gave their lives in the battles, like the martyrs of the Battles of Badr, Uhud, Khyber, Khandaq and other battles where Rasulullah (SAWA) participated and also where he did not participate?! This is a long list...

PLAYING THE NUMBERS GAME...

Look at the previous history of Ambiya. For how many years and centuries did Nabi Nuh (a.s) propagate the Divinity of Almighty Allah (SWT) and how many people accepted his message? There are plenty of examples, even amongst Nabi Ibrahim (a.s), Nabi Musa (a.s), Nabi Esa (a.s), Nabi Dawood (a.s).

The Holy Quran has dedicated an analysis about these people, saying that the majority of the people do not understand or know, or do not have the capacity to accept Imaan, or that spirit of Istiqama and perseverance. This is what the Holy Quran has revealed about the history of Ambiya.

So the success or failure of the mission of Rasulullah (SAWA) is not decided by referring to the majority and minority. Can we say that Nabi Nuh (a.s) failed in his mission, and similarly other Ambiya who had a very low number of supporters? Clearly NO!

Success and failure of Ambiya's mission does not depend on numbers or the material victory. It depends on the level of sincerity that they displayed to the job at hand and their level of commitment, irrespective of their numbers. Truth was always in the minority! One of the objections by the Ambiya was that they have nobody with them except a few people.

In our discussions last year Muharram regarding Imam Hussain (a.s) as the heir of the Prophets we discussed this issue about how Imam Hussain was completely outnumbered, with his 72 companions confronting 30,000 in the opposition camp. Are we going to say that the opposition was on the right path because of their numbers and Imam Hussain (a.s) was unsuccessful with his 72?

Majority and minority in numbers are never the criteria in the path of Truth and therefore you cannot measure the success of Rasulullah (SAWA) through numbers.

The Holy Quran has spoken extensively about people around our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA). I will cautiously avoid referring to them as Sahaba. The Holy Quran basically divides these people into 2 major groups:

1. Those who sincerely accepted the message of Rasulullah (SAWA) and devoted themselves

to him and his message.

2. Those who accepted Islam but the level of their acceptance was very weak.

1. THE SINCERE DEVOTEES TO THE MESSAGE OF RASULULLAH (SAWA)

The Holy Quran praises these people for the manner in which they took the message and mission of Rasulullah (SAWA) and absorbed it with full dedication. Again, there are different groups in this category which the Holy Quran elaborates, as follows:

a. The early vanguards and pioneers (Sabiqoon). Again, I refer to verse 100 of Surah Tawba (chapter 9) of the Holy Quran, which has been the central point of the past 2 discussions, where the felicitations of this group have been explicitly mentioned.

“And (as for) the foremost, the first of the Muhajirs and the Ansars, and those who followed them in goodness, Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them for ever; that is the mighty achievement.”

b. Those who paid allegiance under the tree. The Holy Quran says in verse 18 of Surah Fath (chapter 48):

“Certainly Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity on them and rewarded them with a near victory”.

c. The Holy Quran refers to the third group, namely migrants (Muhajiroon), in verse 8 of Surah Hashr (chapter 59):

“It is for the poor who fled their homes and their possessions, seeking grace of Allah and (His) pleasure, and assisting Allah and His Messenger: these it is that are the truthful.”

d. Then in the same group of committed people, the Holy Quran speaks about these people in verse 29 of Surah Fath (chapter 48):

“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration”

These verses emphasize the position of Quran towards Sahaba. They are not all equal. The Holy Quran establishes that those who sacrificed before the conquest of Mecca are much better than those who sacrificed after the conquest of Mecca.

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There is a difference between those who stood with Rasulullah (SAWA) when he was weak and being attacked from all corners and those who joined him when he had the whole Arabian Peninsula under his governance.

Here we have discussed the different categories which the Holy Quran describes from among the good companions of Rasulullah (SAWA). Quran distinguishes the Sabiqoon from the Muhajiroon, and those who paid allegiance under the tree and also those who are very firm in the face of the enemy but very compassionate with the people of Islam.

2. THOSE WITH WEAK ACCEPTANCE OF ISLAM

Now let us look at the group who are not so good, as described in the Holy Quran, but still hang around Rasulullah (SAWA). These people are overwhelmingly referred to in the Holy Quran as Munafiqoon (the hypocrites). In fact, chapter 63 of the Quran is named after them.

There were also different groups amongst the Munafiqoon.

a. Those who were well-known and CLEARLY RECOGNISED are referred to in the first verse of Surah Munafiqoon (chapter 63):

“When the hypocrites come to you, they say: We bear witness that you are most surely Allah's Messenger; and Allah knows that you are most surely His Messenger, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars.”

b. Verse 101 of Surah Tawba (chapter 9) speaks about the Munafiqoon (hypocrites) who are not known as they HIDE THEIR HYPROCRISY, after speaking about the vanguards and pioneers of Islam in the verse prior to that (verse 100).

“And from among those who are round about you of the dwellers of the desert there are hypocrites, and from among the people of Medina (also); they are stubborn in hypocrisy; you do not know them; We know them”.

c. Another group of hypocrites that the Holy Quran speaks about in verse 12 of Surah Ahzab (chapter 33) are those with sick hearts:

“And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was a disease began to say: Allah and His Messenger did not promise us (victory) but only to deceive.”

d. Another group is referred to in verse 102 of Surah Tawba (chapter 9):

“And others have confessed their faults, they have mingled a good deed and an evil one; may be Allah will turn to them (mercifully); surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

They are not necessarily sick in their hearts, neither are they hypocrites. These are sinners with weak faith who admit to their mistakes and mix good deed with bad.

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This list goes on and on, but these verses of the Holy Quran illustrate the point that whoever was with Rasulullah (SAWA) and whoever met him and said the Shahada is not guaranteed felicitations in the Hereafter. The Holy Quran clarifies that there is NO TOTAL, INCLUSIVE AMNESTY.

There are variations in good and bad, and this reality of the history existed in the time of Rasulullah (SAWA). This is what we are saying, nothing more, nothing less.

THE PROBLEM OF ABUSE OF SAHABA TODAY

We do not deny that there are those among Shia who use abusive language towards Sahaba. This is completely unacceptable and as we have repeatedly clarified, this is not the Akhlaq of the Imams of Ahlul Bait (a.s).

Similarly, you find these radical, deviant extremists in every belief system. Let us take ISIS as an example. Can we say that it is a representation of Sunni Islam? Not at all!

This problem of extremism exists on both sides. None of the leading Maraji' endorse any form of disrespect towards Sahaba.

We will conclude the prelude to our theme on this point. Since lecture 1 until now, we have discussed the philosophy and our understanding about Sahaba. We will now start discussing some of the lesser known companions of Rasulullah (SAWA), as this is the theme for the 10 nights Majalis.

THE EXEMPLARY EARLY SAHABA

Indeed, among these companions are those who lived in the time of Rasulullah (SAWA) and passed away or were martyred in his lifetime. In this part, there seems to be no difference in the Muslim Ummah.

For those who were martyred in the battlefields during the lifetime of Rasulullah (SAWA), all Muslims display the greatest of reverence and respect towards them and regard them as the greatest of examples to follow. Shaheed Ayatollah Sayed Muhammad Baqir Sadr (RA) refers to these Sahaba as the cream of the generations of Islam!

For those who survived after the demise of Rasulullah (SAWA), we see in the history of Islam that differences and disputes ensued. That is where differences of opinion exist.

We will now embark on our journey to understand some of the great personalities who were martyred or passed away during the life of Rasulullah (SAWA).

ZAYD IBN HARITHA - THE FIRST SAHABI TO ACCEPT ISLAM

The first personality I would like to introduce you to is from the earliest Muslims. I am not referring to Lady Khadija al-Qubra (s.a) because we do not regard her as Sahabi. Furthermore,

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we do not regard Imam Ali (a.s) as Sahabi. According to history, the third person who accepted Islam was Zayd ibn Haritha, who was a great hero of Islam.

It is recorded by historians that he was 10 years younger than Rasulullah (SAWA). Before the introduction of Islam, he came with his mother to visit a tribe near Mecca. This tribe was attacked by its enemies, and they took Zayd as a prisoner. He was sold as a prisoner to Lady Khadija (s.a), and he joined her in the house of Rasulullah (SAWA) when she married him. In fact, Zayd became the gift of Lady Khadija (s.a) to Rasulullah (SAWA).

Zayd was very young when this all happened. He grew up in the house of Rasulullah (SAWA) as a slave, under the shadow of Rasulullah (SAWA) and Lady Khadija. At that time, he was so close to Rasulullah (SAWA) that people started calling him Zayd, the son of Muhammad!

It is amazing that when Rasulullah (SAWA) announced his Prophethood and conveyed the message of Islam, Zayd was the first person to accept Islam after Lady Khadija (s.a) and Imam Ali (a.s). Therefore they say that the first slave to have embraced Islam was Zayd ibn Haritha. Rasulullah (SAWA) loved him dearly and took good care of him.

ZAYD NEEDS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HIS PARENTS AND RASULULLAH (SAWAS)

Later on, after years had passed, Zayd's parents came looking for him. They requested that Rasulullah (SAWA) accept their cash offer in order to get their Zayd back. Rasulullah (SAWA) gave Zayd the choice of going back to his parents or staying with Rasulullah (SAWA).

Zayd replied with that beautiful historical answer, whereby he said that he will indeed remain with Rasulullah (SAWA) as his slave and will never leave him. Zayd's parents were totally surprised by this, asking him if he preferred slavery over freedom? Zayd responded to his parents and the elders around him by saying that they do not understand how precious slavery in the house Rasulullah (SAWA) is, way more than any form of liberation!

ZAYD IS THE ONLY SAHABI MENTIONED IN THE HOLY QURAN

Zayd is the only companion whose name is mentioned in the Holy Quran. This is a unique feature about Zayd! Rasulullah (SAWA) raised him over the years and then had him married to a lady by the name of Zainab bint Jahsh. Zayd was not very happy with his marriage to her and used to complain to Rasulullah (SAWA) that Zainab thought that Rasulullah (SAWA) wanted to marry her, when in fact he suggested Zayd.

This stayed as a sticky point in the heart of Zainab, even though she accepted Zayd on Rasulullah's (SAWA) recommendation. They were never happily married though.

Then, a verse of the Holy Quran was revealed where the name of Zayd is mentioned. It is verse 37 of Surah Ahzaab (chapter 33 of the Holy Quran):

“And when you said to him to whom Allah had shown favor and to whom you had shown a favor: Keep your wife to yourself and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; and you concealed in your soul what Allah would bring to light, and you feared men, and Allah had a greater right that you should fear Him. But when Zaid had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished their want of them; and Allah's command shall be performed.”

CRUCIAL PRINCIPLES ESTABLISHED IN THIS VERSE

The crucial principle established in this verse is that adopted children are not biological children. You can provide them with the best of tender love and care, but from a legal standpoint, they remain children of their biological parents.

Therefore, legal matters apply as they would from the position of the biological parents and not adopted parents. Example, a boy would not become Mahram for the adopted mother and vice versa for a girl.

Rasulullah (SAWA) did marry Zainab bint Jahsh and that created a huge controversy and source of fitna for the enemies of Islam who exploited this as a character assassination attempt on the dignity of Rasulullah (SAWA).

Imam Reza (a.s), the 8th Imam of Ahlul Bait (a.s) categorically denounced these accusations against Rasulullah (SAWA), saying that he married Zainab to set a precedent against the prevailing incorrect practice in Arab custom when it comes to adopted children being treated as though they were biological.

ZAYD AND HIS COMMITMENT TO RASULULLAH (SAWA)

He was extremely committed, to the point where one of his names was “Zayd of love”. He participated in every battle with Rasulullah (SAWA). Finally, he was sent to the Battle of Mu'tah, which took place around Jordan, where he was martyred along with Jafar ibn abi Talib and Abdullah ibn Rawahah. This was a grand trio of heroic Sahaba.

The place of their martyrdom has a shrine erected where they are buried and for many many years was a meeting place at this time of the year to commemorate and mourn the tragedy of Karbala. However, with the rise of anti-Shia rhetoric, this shrine has now been banned for these mourning ceremonies.

WHO WAS UMME AYMAN?

She is from Africa, specifically Ethiopia, and took personal care of Rasulullah (SAWA) whom he respected like a mother. She was dedicated to Lady Fatima (s.a) and was the one who escorted Lady Fatima (s.a) to the house of Imam Ali (a.s) on the evening when they got married.

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Umme Ayman also narrated the story of Karbala.

Zayd had special loyalty to Imam Ali (a.s). He got married to this special lady in history, from Africa. Zayd married this esteemed lady, and they gave birth to another very important historical personality named Usama!

Usama was given the leadership position of the army by Rasulallah (SAWA) while he was sick in the last days of his life. Rasulallah (SAWA) commanded people to follow the leadership of Usama for Jihad, but people were not ready to commit to him because he is young. Rasulallah (SAWA) said that Usama was representing his father Zayd who was so devoted to Islam and achieved martyrdom.

This incident is again, another bitter pill in the history of Islam.

CONCLUDING POINT TO REFLECT ON WITH ZAYD IBN HARITHA

Zayd has a choice to go back with his parents. This occurred long before the conquest of Mecca when life was very difficult. There was fierce opposition to Rasulallah (SAWA) and he was being isolated. There were countless enemies, but Zayd chose difficulty in remaining steadfast in his commitment to Rasulallah (SAWA) over the easy way out, which would have been the case if he returned with his parents.