# On the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Like Mawlana Jami, I say, *“0 Messenger of God! If only like the dog of the Companions of the Cave, I could be in Paradise among your Companions. Is it right that their dog is in Paradise while I am in Hell? He was the dog of those Companions; I am the dog of yours!”*

*In His Name, be He glorified! And there is nothing but it glorifies Him with praise.*

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.*

*Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are strong against the unbelievers, [but] compassionate amongst each other. (48:29)*

*You Ask:* There are some narrations which say: “*At a time when inno­vations are rife, some of the righteous from among the believers and those who fear God will be on a level with the Companions, or of even greater vir­tue.”* Are these narrations sound? And if so, what is their true meaning?

*The Answer:* The consensus of the Sunnis that after the prophets the most virtuous of mankind are the Companions, is a certain proof that those that are sound out of those narrations refer to minor virtues. For in minor vir­tues and particular perfections a quality may be deemed preferable to that which is superior and in fact preferable. But from the point of view of gen­eral virtue the Companions cannot be reached, who are the subject of Divine praise at the end of Sura al-Fath, and are praised and applauded in the Torah, Gospels, and Qur'an. For now, we shall explain three points of wisdom con­cerning this truth, which comprise three reasons, out of very many reasons and instances of wisdom.

# First Instance of Wisdom:

The conversation of the Prophet was such an elixir that someone who experienced it for one minute received lights of reality equivalent to years of spiritual journeying. For in conversation there is reflection and a being colored. It is well-known that through reflection and following and imitating, and through the sublime light of prophethood, a truly exalted level may be reached; —like through allegiance to his sovereign and following him, a sultan's servant may rise to a position so high a king cannot rise to it. It is due to this mystery that the greatest saints cannot reach the level of the Companions. Even saints like Jalaluddin Suyuti, who conversed many times with God's Noble Messenger (PBUH) while awake, even if they do this and are honored in this world with his company, they still cannot reach the Companions. For through the light of Muhammad's (PBUH) prophethood, the Companions' conversation was with him as Prophet. While the saints saw him (PBUH) after his death and conversed with him (PBUH) through the light of his sainthood. That is to say, the personification and appearance of God's Noble Messenger (PBUH) is in respect of his sainthood, not in regard to his prophethood. Since that is so, however much higher the level of prophethood is to that of sainthood, one should differentiate between the two conversations to that degree.

Just how luminous an elixir was the Prophet's company may be understood through the following: a primitive man so hard-hearted and savage he buried his daughter alive would come and be honored with the conversation of the Prophet for an hour, and would acquire such kindness and compassion that he would not step on an ant. And an ignorant savage would converse with the Prophet for a day, then go to lands like China and India and instruct civilized peoples in the realities and guide them in perfections.

# Second Reason:

As is explained and proved in the discussion of interpretation of the law in the Twenty-Seventh Word, the vast majority of the Companions were at the highest level of human perfections. For at that time in the mighty revolution of Islam, good and truth appeared in all their beauty, and evil and falsehood, in all their ugliness, and they were felt physically. Such a difference was apparent between good and evil and such a distance opened up between truth and falsehood that they drew as distant from one another as belief is from unbelief, and even Hell is from Paradise. The Companions, who by nature possessed elevated emotions, were captivated by the highest morality, and inclined towards dignity and virtue, would not voluntarily stretch out their hands to evil and falsehood, and so fall to the level of Musaylima the Liar and his ridiculous utterances. For he was the herald of falsehood, evil, and lies, and their embodiment. Their characters demanded that they looked to the rank of the perfections, those of God's Beloved (PBUH) at the highest of the high, who was the herald and embodiment of truthfulness, good, and right, and that they hastened in that way with all their strength and endeavor.

For example, it sometimes happens that in the market of human civilization and shop of social life, everyone flees in disgust from the fearsome results and ugly consequences of certain things, like from a deadly poison, let alone buying them, while the beautiful results and valuable consequences of certain other things and of immaterial goods attract the general view and demand to themselves like a universal panacea and a sparkling brilliant; everyone tries their utmost to buy them. In just the same way, in the Era of Bliss in the market of human social life, since goods like lying, evil, and unbelief gave rise to results like everlasting misery and base buffoons like Musaylima the Liar, it is certain and clear that the Companions, who were captivated by elevated characteristics and love of exalted things, would flee from them with loathing as from fatal poison. And of a necessity, the Companions, with their pure natures and praiseworthy characteristics, would, with all their strength, emotions, and faculties, be desirous of and customers for truth, truthfulness and belief, which yielded results like eternal happiness and luminous fruits like God's Noble Messenger (PBUH), as though for the most effective panacea and precious diamond. However, after that time, the distance between truthfulness and lying has gradually and by degrees diminished, until they have become shoulder to shoulder. Having begun to be sold together in the same shop, social morality has become corrupted. The propaganda of politics has caused greater demand for lying. At a time when the awesome ugliness of lying has begun to be concealed and the shining beauty of truthfulness has begun not to be apparent, who can attain to the strength, constancy, and*taqwa* of the Companions in the matters of justice, truthfulness, exaltedness, and right, or surpass their level? I shall explain something which occurred to me which will illuminate this to a degree. It was like this:

One time, it occurred to me, why could wondrous individuals like Muh-yiddin al-'Arabi not attain to the levels of the Companions? Then, while saying, “*Glory be to my Sustainer, the Most High”* during the prayers, the meaning of the phrase was unfolded to me. Not in its complete meaning, but its reality in part became apparent to me. I said in my heart: *“If only I could perform one of the five daily prayers in the same way as this phrase, it would be better than a year's worship.”* After the prayers I understood that that thought and state was guidance indicating that the Companions' degree in worship could not be reached. In that mighty social revolution brought about by the lights of the Qur'an, while opposites were separated from one another, and evils together with all their darkness, details and all who followed them, and good and perfections together with all their lights and results came face to face — at such an exciting time, all glorifications of God and recitations of His Names expressed all the levels of their meanings freshly and newly and in a young and unfaded fashion. So too, under the crashing of that mighty revolution all the senses and subtle inner faculties of people were awakened, even senses like those of fancy and imagination, in an awakened and aware state, received the numerous meanings of those recitations and glorifications in accordance with their own perceptions, and absorbed them.

Thus, due to this wisdom, when the Companions, whose senses were awakened and subtle faculties, alert, uttered those blessed words comprising the lights of belief and glorification, they did so in all their meaning and they partook of them with all their senses. However, after that revolution and upheaval, the subtle faculties have gradually sunk into sleep and the senses fallen from that point of realities into heedlessness; like fruits, under the veil of familiarity, those blessed words have gradually lost their delicacy and freshness. Simply, as though drying up through the air of superficiality, only a little freshness remains, and this may be restored to its former state only through drastic surgery of a reflective and reasoning kind. Thus, it is because of this that another can reach the virtue and level the Companions attained to in forty minutes, only in forty years.

# Third Reason:

As is proved in the Twelfth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Fifth Words, the comparison of prophethood and sainthood is that of the sun itself and the sun's image as it appears in mirrors. Thus, however much higher the sphere of prophethood is than that of sainthood, the servants of the sphere of prophethood and the Companions, the stars of that Sun, have to be superior to the righteous in the sphere of sainthood to the same degree. The legacy of prophethood and veracity, which is the supreme sainthood, is the sainthood of the Companions; even if a saint attains to this, he still cannot reach the level of the Companions, the first rank. We shall explain three out of the numerous aspects of this Third Reason.

**First Aspect:**The Companions cannot be reached in interpretation of the law, that is, in deducing its ordinances, that is, in understanding what pleases Almighty God from His Word. Because that mighty Divine revolution revolved on understanding the dominical wishes and Divine ordinances. All minds were turned towards deducing the Divine ordinances. All hearts were eager to know *“What does our Sustainer want from us?”* All that happened at that time did so in a way that made this known and understood. The discussions of the time concerned them. Thus, since everything and all situations and discussions and conversations and stories occurred in such a way as to give some sort of instruction in these meanings, and since this perfected the Companions' capacities and illuminated their minds, and since their ability to interpret the law and deduce its ordinances was ready to be lit up like a match, someone at this time with the intelligence and capacity of the Companions could not reach in ten years or perhaps in a hundred, the level of deduction and interpretation they reached in a day or a month. Because now, worldly happiness is the focus of attention in place of eternal happiness. Mankind's attention and view is directed towards different goals. Since the struggle for livelihood together with lack of reliance on God has bewildered man's spirit, and Naturalist and Materialist philosophies have blinded his intellect, just as the social environment does not strengthen a person's mind and capacity in the matter of interpreting the Divine law, so it confuses and scatters them. We proved in the discussion on interpretation of the law in the Twenty-Seventh Word in the comparison between Sufyan ibn Uyayna and someone of his intelligence today that the other person could not acquire in a hundred years what Sufyan acquired in ten.

**Second Aspect:** The level of the Companions in closeness to God cannot be attained with the feet of sainthood. For Almighty God is infinitely close to us; closer to us than everything, but we are infinitely distant from Him. **Divine proximity** may be gained in two ways:

* **The First** is through the unfolding of Divine immediacy, to which the Divine proximity in prophethood looks, and which the Companions manifested through the legacy of prophethood and conversation of the Prophet.
* **The Second Way** is to traverse the degrees of our distance from God and be honored with Divine proximity to an extent. Most of the spiritual voyaging of sainthood is according to this, and illumination through the self and through the outside world proceeds in this way.

Thus, the first way is purely given, it is not acquired; it is attraction, the drawing of the Most Merciful One, and it is being loved by Him. The path is short, but very severe, very elevated, very pure, and without shadow. The other is acquired, long, and in shadow. Even if its strange wonders are many, it cannot reach the first in regard to quality and Divine proximity. For example, there are two ways of reaching yesterday. The first is not to be subject to the course of time. Through a sacred power, it is to rise above time, and see yesterday as present like today. The second is to traverse the distance of a year, to travel and turn, and come to yesterday. But still yesterday cannot be held; it leaves the person and departs. In just the same way, there are two ways of passing from the apparent to reality. The first is to be carried away directly on the attraction of reality, and, without entering the intermediate realm of the sufi way, to find reality within the apparent itself. The second is to pass through many levels through spiritual journeying. For sure, the saints are successful in annihilating the soul and kill the evil-commanding soul, but they still cannot reach the Companions. Because, since the Companions' souls had been purified and cleansed, through the many faculties within the soul, they manifested to a greater degree the varieties of worship, and thanks, and praise. After the soul has been annihilated, the worship of the saints acquires a simpleness and plainness.

**Third Aspect:** The Companions cannot be reached in regard to virtuous actions and good deeds pertaining to the hereafter. Because, just as in certain conditions in a frightening and important post, a soldier may gain in one hour's watch the virtue of a year's worship, and by being hit by a bullet may rise in one minute to a station similar to a degree of sainthood which can only by gained in at least forty years; so too, the Companions' service in the establishment of Islam and propagating the decrees of the Qur'an and their declaring war on the whole world for Islam was so elevated that others cannot reach one minute of it in a year. It may even be said that in that sacred service all their minutes were like that one minute of the martyred soldier. All their hours were like the one hour's watch of a faithful soldier in some terrifying post in which the acts are few, but the recompense great and value high.

Indeed, since the Companions formed the first rank in the establishment of Islam and spreading of the lights of the Qur'an, in accordance with the rule 'the cause is like the doer,' a share of all the good works of all the Islamic community passes to them. The Islamic community saying *“O God! Grant blessings to our master Muhammad and to his Family and Companions”* shows that the Companions receive a share of the good works of their whole community.

Furthermore, just as an insignificant characteristic in the root of a tree takes on a large form in the tree's branches, and is larger than the largest branch; and just as a small protuberance at the beginning gradually forms a mass; and just as an excess the size of a needle point at a central point may become more than a meter at the circumference of the circle, just like these four examples, since the Companions were from the roots and foundations of the luminous tree of Islam, and were at the beginning of luminous lines of the structure of Islam, and were from among the leaders of the Islamic community and were the first of their number, and since they were close to the center of the Sun of Prophethood and Lamp of Reality, a few of their actions were many and their small acts of service, great. To reach their level necessitates being a true Companion.

*O God! Grant blessings to our master Muhammad, who said: “My Companions are like the stars, whichever of them you follow, you will be rightly guided,”[[2]](#footnote-2) and, “The best of centuries is my century,”[[3]](#footnote-3) and to his Family and Companions, and grant them peace.*

*Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed, You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

# Question:

It is said, the Companions saw God's Noble Messenger (Peace and blessings be upon him), then they believed. However we have believed without seeing him, in which case our belief is stronger. Also, there are narrations mentioning the strength of our belief, are there not?

**The Answer**: At that time, when all ideas were opposed and hostile to the truths of Islam, the Companions believed so strongly —sometimes on only seeing the person of God's Messenger (PBUH) and without miracles— that all the generally held ideas in the world did not shake them. Let alone doubts, they did not even cause some of them the slightest anxiety or scruple. You are comparing your belief with that of the Companions, but how can there be any comparison? For despite your seeing with the mind's eye, not the Messenger's (PBUH) humanity and bodily form, which was the seed of the Tuba-tree of his prophethood, but through all the lights of Islam and truths of the Qur'an, his luminous, magnificent collective personality, encompassed by a thousand miracles, you waver and fall into doubt at the word of a European philosopher. Yet due to their belief, the Companions did not waver in the face of the attacks of the entire world of unbelief and of the Christians, Jews, and philosophers? And how can you compare the intense fear of God of the Companions and their complete righteousness, which demonstrated the strength of their belief and proceeded from it, and your dull belief, which due to your extreme weakness does not impel you to perform even the obligatory practices completely, O you who make such a claim!? However, the Hadith the meaning of which is: *“Those at the end of time who do not see me and believe, are more acceptable,”* refers to particular virtues. It concerns certain special individuals. Our discussion, however, is in regard to general virtue and the majority.

# Second Question:

They say that the saints and possessors of perfection abandoned the world. It even says in a Hadith: *“Love of this world is the source of all error.”* Whereas the Companions were very involved in the world. It was not abandoning the world, some of them were ahead of the civilized of that time, even. How is it that you say that even the least of such Companions was of greater worth than the greatest saint?

**The Answer**: It has been proved decisively in the Second and Third Stopping-Places of the Thirty-Second Word that to love the face of the world which looks to the hereafter and that which looks to the Divine Names is not the cause of loss, but the means to perfection and attainment, and however far one goes in those two faces, the further one goes in worship and knowledge of God. The world of the Companions was in those two faces. They saw this world as the arable field of the hereafter, and sowed and reaped it.

They saw beings as the mirrors of the Divine Names, and gazed on them yearningly. As for the transience of the world, that is its transitory face, which looks to man's base desires.

# Third Question:

The sufi paths are the ways of reality. Some of the heroes and leaders of the Naqshbandi Order, which is claimed to be the most famous, the most elevated, and the highway among the sufi ways, defined its basis as follows. They said:*On the Naqshbandi way four 'abandoning' are necessary: abandoning the world, abandoning the hereafter, abandoning existence, and abandoning “abandoning”.* That is to say, on the Naqshi way one has to give up four things: both give up this world; and, on account of the soul, not make even the hereafter one's true aim; forget one's existence; and in order not to become vain and proud, not think about these acts of renunciation. That means true knowledge of God and human perfections are attained through giving up what is other than God?

**The Answer**: If man consisted of only a heart, it would be necessary to give up everything other than God, and to leave behind even the Divine Names and attributes and bind one's heart to the Divine Essence alone. But man possesses many senses and subtle faculties charged with duties, like the mind, spirit, soul, and others. The perfect man is he who, driving all those subtle senses towards reality on the different ways of worship particular to them, marches heroically like the Companions in a broad arena and rich fashion towards the goal, with the heart as commander and the subtle faculties as soldiers. For the heart to abandon its soldiers in order to save only itself and to proceed on its own is the cause not of pride, but of distress.

# Fourth Question:

Where does the claim of the Companions' superiority spring from? And who put it forward? Why should this matter be made the subject of discussion at this time? Also, why is there this claim of equality with the great interpreters of the law?

**The Answer**: There are two groups who say these things. Some are the sincere religious scholars and men of religion who, seeing certain Hadiths, open up such discussions in order to encourage and hearten the pious and the upright at this time. We do not have anything to say to them. They are anyway few and are quickly made aware. The other group, however, consists of most fearsome, conceited people who want to spread their denial of the schools of law by claiming equality with the great interpreters of the law, and to further their irreligion by claiming equality with the Companions. Because firstly, those people of misguidance have become depraved, and have become addicted to depravity, and cannot carry out the obligations of the Shari'a, since they form an obstacle to their depravity. In order to find a pretext for themselves, they say: *“These questions may be interpreted. The schools of law are opposed to each other in these matters. And the interpreters of the law were human beings like us, and may have made mistakes. In which case, like them we shall interpret the Divine law and perform our worship as we wish. Why should we be compelled to follow them?”* Thus, due to these Satanic wiles, these wretches put themselves outside the fold of the schools of law. It is demonstrated clearly in the Twenty-Seventh Word just how baseless and rotten these claims are, so we refer you to that.

Secondly; that group of the people of misguidance saw that the matter does not end with the interpreters of the law, for what lay on their shoulders were only the theoretical matters of religion. Whereas this group wants to give up and change the essential teachings of religion. If they say: *“We are better than them,”* the matter does not finish there. For interpreters of the law may interfere in theoretical matters and in secondary matters which are not categorical, but these people of misguidance who follow no school of law want to mix their ideas in the essentials of religion as well, and to change matters which are not capable of being changed, and to oppose the incontrovertible pillars of Islam. And so they are bound to attack the Companions, who are the bearers and supports of the essentials of religion. Alas! It has been proved decisively in the Twenty-Seventh Word that not animals in human form like them, but true human beings and the greatest of the saints even, who are the most perfect of true human beings, cannot win the case claiming equality with the least of the Companions.

*O God! Grant blessings and peace to Your Messenger, who said: “Do not insult my Companions! By the One in Whose hand is myself, if one of you were to spend gold equivalent to Mt. Uhud, he could not attain to the equivalent of two handfuls that one of them spent, or even half that.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

 *“Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith and put not in our hearts [any] resentment toward those who have believed. Our Lord, indeed You are Kind and Merciful.” (59:10)*

# The Companions[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Companions constitute the first pure and blessed channel through which the Qur'an and the Sunna were transmitted to later generations. God is the All-Trustworthy and Inspirer of Trust. The Qur'an describes Archangel Gabriel as trustworthy and as one, obeyed and having power (81:20-21). Prophet Muhammad was renowned for his trustworthiness. The Qur'an was entrusted to the Companions, who memorized and recorded it so that it could be transmitted. This blessed community, which was praised in the Torah and Gospel, was the living embodiment of almost all laudable virtues and sought nothing but the good pleasure of God. In addition to the Qur'an, they absorbed the Sunna, lived disciplined lives in strict accordance with the Prophet's example, and exerted all their efforts to both represent and transmit it with complete accuracy.

According to Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, scholars define a Companion as *“a believer who saw and heard the Messenger at least once and died as a believer.”*[[7]](#footnote-7) Even though some scholars have stipulated that a “potential” Companion should have lived in the Messenger's company for one or even two years, most scholars say it is enough to have been present in his radiant atmosphere long enough to derive some benefit from it.

Of course, the Companions are not equal to each other in rank or greatness. Some believed in the Messenger at the very outset of his mission, and conversions continued until his death. The Qur'an grades them according to precedence in belief and to conversion before and after the conquest of Makkah (9:100’ 57:10). The same gradation also was made by the Messenger. For example, he reproached Khalid for offending 'Ammar, saying: *“Don't bother my Companions!”*[[8]](#footnote-8) He also frowned at 'Umar when he annoyed Abu Bakr, and asked: *“Why don't you leave my Companions to me? Abu Bakr believed in me when all of you denied me.”* Abu Bakr knelt down and explained: *“O Messenger of God, it was my fault!”*[[9]](#footnote-9)

Hakim al-Nisaburi divided them into twelve ranks, and most scholars accept his ranking:

* The four Rightly Guided Caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali), and the rest of the ten who were promised Paradise while still alive (Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam, Abu 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf, Talha ibn 'Ubaydullah, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, and Sa'id ibn Zayd).
* Those who believed prior to 'Umar's conversion and met secretly in Arqam's house to listen to the Messenger.
* Those who migrated to Abyssinia.
* The Helpers (Ansar) who swore their allegiance to the Messenger at al-'Aqaba.
* The Helpers who swore their allegiance at al-'Aqaba the following year.
* The Emigrants who joined the Messenger during the hijra before his arrival in Madina from Quba, where he stayed for a short while.
* The Companions who fought at Badr.
* Those who emigrated to Madina between the Battle of Badr and the Treaty of Hudaybiya.
* The Companions who swore allegiance under a tree during the expedition of Hudaybiya.
* Those who converted and immigrated to Medina after the Treaty of Hudaybiya.
* Those who became Muslims after the conquest of Makkah.
* Children who saw the Messenger any time or any place after the conquest of Makkah.

Muslim scholars of the highest rank, whose minds are enlightened by scientific knowledge and whose souls are illumined by religious knowledge and practice, agree that Prophets are the greatest members of humanity. Immediately after them come the Companions of the Last Prophet, who is the greatest Prophet.

Although some Companions may have the same rank as previous Prophets in a particular virtue, no one can equal a Prophet in general terms. Likewise, some of the greatest saints or scholars can compete with the Companions or even excel some of them in particular virtues, but even a Companion of the lowest rank, such as Wahshi (the slayer of Hamza), is still greater, in general terms, than all who come after the Companions. All Muslim scholars, whether Traditionists, theologians, or saints, agree upon this.

1. From the Addendum to the Twenty-Seventh Word, BSN [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. al-'Ajlunl, Kashf al-Khafa , i, 132, No: 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bukhari. Shahada, 9; Fada'il Ashab al-Nabl, 1; Ayman, 10. 27; Tirmidhi, Fitan, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Qur'an, 2:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bukhári, Fada'il Ashab al-Nabl, 5; Muslim, Fada'il al-Sahaba, 221, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Excerpted from http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/faith/prophet-muhammad/24996-the-companions [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibn Hajar, al-Isaba, 1:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibn Athir, Usd al-Ghaba, 4:132. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bukhari, "Tafsir," 7/3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)