Relation to Messengership. Prophethood is greater than sainthood, and Messengership is greater than Prophethood. Every Prophet is a saint, but no saint is a Prophet. Although every Messenger is a Prophet, not every Prophet is simultaneously a Messenger. Prophet Muhammad is the last and greatest Prophet and Messenger. The Companions are related directly to his Messengership and connected with him on account of his Messengership. All who come after the Prophet, however great they may be, are connected with him on account of sainthood only. Therefore, a Companion is greater than a saint to the degree that Messengership is greater than sainthood (the distance between them cannot be measured).

The benefits of company. Nothing can compare with the enlightenment and spiritual exhilaration gained from a Prophet's actual presence or company. No amount of reading what an intellectual, especially a spiritual, master has written can benefit you as much as learning directly from a Prophet. Thus the Companions, particularly those who were with him most often and from the very beginning, benefited so much that they were elevated from crude, ignorant, and savage desert people to the rank of being humanity's religious, intellectual, spiritual, and moral guides until the Last Day.

To be a Companion, one would have to go back to the Makka or Madina of the seventh century ce, listen to the Messenger attentively and observe him speaking, walking, eating, fighting, praying, prostrating, and so on. Since this is impossible, no one can attain the rank of the Companions, who were endowed with Divine coloring in the Messenger's presence.

Truthfulness. Islam is based on truthfulness and the absence of lies. The Companions embraced Islam in its original, pristine purity. For them, being a Muslim meant abandoning all previous vices, being purified in the radiant atmosphere of Divine Revelation, and embodying Islam. They would rather die than tell a lie. The Messenger once declared that if apostasy were as repugnant to a person as entering fire, then that person must have tasted the pleasure of belief. The Companions tasted this pleasure and, being sincere Muslims, could not lie, as this was almost as serious as apostasy. We have trouble understanding this point fully, for people in our own time regard lying and deceit as skills, and almost all virtues have been replaced by vices.

The atmosphere created by Revelation. The Companions were honored with being the first to receive the Divine Messages through the Prophet. Every day they were given original messages and invited to a new "Divine table" full of the ever-fresh "fruits" of Paradise. Every day they experienced radical changes in their lives, were elevated closer to God's Presence, and increased in belief and conviction. They found themselves in the verses of the Qur'an, and could learn directly whether or not God approved of their actions.

For example, whenever and wherever: Those who are with him are hard against the unbelievers, merciful one to another. You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking blessing from God and good pleasure. Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration (48:29) was revealed, eyes turned primarily to Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali. After all, they were famous for being with the Messenger from the very beginning, their hardness toward unbelievers, their mercy to fellow Muslims, and for frequent and long bowing and prostration before God while seeking His good pleasure.

When: Among the believers are men who were true to their covenant with God; some of them have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting, and they have not changed in the least (33:23) was recited, everyone remembered the martyrs of Uhud, especially Hamza, Anas ibn Nadr, and 'Abd Allah ibn Jahsh, as well as others who had promised God to give their lives willingly in His Way.

While God explicitly mentioned Zayd ibn Haritha in: So when Zayd had accomplished what he would of her ... (33:37), [1] He declared in 48:18 that He was well pleased with the believers when they swore fealty to the Messenger under a tree during the expedition of Hudaybiya.

In such a blessed, pure, and radiant atmosphere, the Companions practiced Islam in its original fullness and pristine purity, based on deep perception, profound insight, and knowledge of God. So, even an ordinary believer who is aware of the meaning of belief and connection with God, and who is trying to practice Islam sincerely, can grasp some glimpse of the purity of the first channel through which the Sunna was transmitted to the next generation.

The difficulty of the circumstances. The reward of a deed changes according to the circumstances in which it is done and the purity of the doer's intention. Striving in the way of God in such severe circumstances as fear, threats, and shortage of necessary equipment, and purely for His sake, is far more rewarding than the same action performed in a free and promising atmosphere.

The Companions accepted and defended Islam in the severest circumstances imaginable. The opposition was extremely inflexible and unpitying. In Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi'a Musamarat al-Abrar, Abu Bakr is reported to have told 'Ali after the Prophet's death that the early Companions did not go out except at the risk of their lives-they always feared that a dagger would be thrust at them. Only God knows how many times they were insulted, beaten, and tortured. Those who were weak and enslaved, such as Bilal, 'Ammar, and Suhayb, were tortured almost to death. Young people like Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, were beaten, boycotted, and imprisoned by their families.

Yet none of them ever thought of recanting or opposing the Messenger. For the sake of God, they forsook everything they had-their homes, native lands, and belongings-and emigrated. The believers of Madina welcomed them enthusiastically, protected them, and shared with them everything they had. They fulfilled their covenant with God willingly, sold their goods and souls to God in exchange for belief and Paradise, and never broke their word. This gained them so high a rank in the view of God that no one can attain it until the Last Day.

The severity of circumstances, along with other factors, made the Companions' belief strong and firm beyond compare. For example, the Messenger once entered the mosque and saw Harith ibn Malik sleeping there. He woke him up. Harith said: "May my father and mother be sacrificed for your sake, O Messenger of God! I am ready to carry out your orders!" The Messenger asked him how he had spent the night. Harith answered: "As a true believer." The Messenger said: "Everything that is true must have a truth (proving it). What is the truth of your belief?" Harith replied: "I fasted during the day and prayed to my Master in utmost sincerity all night long. Now I am in a state as if I were seeing the Throne of my God and the recreation of the people of Paradise in Paradise." The Messenger concluded: "You have become an embodiment of belief." [2]

The Companions became so near to God that "God was their eyes with which they saw, their ears with which they heard, their tongues with which they spoke, and their hands with which they held."

The Companions in the Qur'an. Ibn Hazm voices the opinion of many leading scholars: "All of the Companions will enter Paradise." It is possible to find proofs in the Qur'an testifying to this assertion. The Qur'an describes the Companions as follows:

Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Those who are with him are hard toward the unbelievers, merciful one to another. [They kept so long vigils that] you see them bowing, prostrating, seeking blessing, bounty (of forgiveness and Paradise) and good pleasure (of God). Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration. This is their likeness in the Torah and in the Gospel: as a seed that puts forth its shoot, and strengthens it, and it grows strong and rises straight upon its stalk, pleasing the sowers, that through them it may enrage the unbelievers. God has promised those of them who believe and do deeds of righteousness forgiveness and a mighty wage [He will reward them in Paradise with the things that neither eyes will ever have seen nor ears heard]. (48:29)

And as: The Outstrippers, the first Emigrants and Helpers, and those who followed them in good-doing-God is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Him; He has prepared for them gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to dwell forever; that is the mighty triumph. (9:100)

Abu Hurayra never missed a discourse of the Messenger. He was always with him, and stayed in the antechamber of the Prophet's Mosque. He suffered hunger almost all the time. Once he went to the Messenger and told him that he had eaten nothing for days. Abu Talha took him as a guest, but unfortunately there was little in his house to eat. So, he asked his wife Umm Sulaym to " put the children to bed early, and put on the table whatever we have to eat. When we sit at the table, put out the candle pretending to make its light brighter. No one sees in the dark whether one is really eating or not. I will act as if I am eating, and thus our guest can satisfy his hunger." After the dawn prayer, the Messenger turned to them, smiled, and said: "What did you do last night? This verse was revealed concerning you:

Those who made their dwelling in the abode [Madina], and in belief, before them [the Emigrants] love whoever has emigrated to them, not finding in their breasts any need for what they have been given, and preferring others above themselves, even though poverty be their portion. Whoever is guarded against the avarice of his own soul, those - they are the prosperous. (59:9)

We also read of the Companions: God was well-pleased with the believers when they were swearing fealty to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down peace, calm and tranquility upon them, and rewarded them with a nigh victory (48:18).

The Companions swore many oaths of allegiance to the Messenger, promising to protect him and carry, by God's Will, Islam to ultimate victory as best they could. They kept their promise at the cost of all their belongings and lives. Most were martyred either during the Prophet's lifetime or while conveying Islam throughout the newly conquered lands. It is still possible to find, in almost every part of the Muslim world, tombs where several Companions are buried. Also, they raised numerous scholars in jurisprudence, Traditions, Qur'anic interpretation, as well as in history and the biography of the Prophet. The Qur'an states: Among believers are those who were true to their covenant with God; some have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting, and they have not changed in the least (33:23).

The Companions in Hadith. The Prophet also praised the Companions and warned Muslims not to attack or insult them. For example, Bukhari, Muslim, and other Traditionists relate from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri that the Messenger warned: "Don't curse my Companions, don't curse my Companions! I swear by Him in Whose hand is my life that even if you had as much gold as Mount Uhud and spent it in the way of God, this would not be equal in reward to a few handfuls of them or even to half of that."

The Companions have such a high value because they accepted, preached, and protected Islam in the severest circumstances. Besides, according to the rule that "the cause is like the doer," the reward gained by all Muslims from that time until the Last Day is being added to the Companions' record, without taking away any of the doers' rewards. Had it not been for their efforts to spread Islam wherever they went, no one would know of it or be able to become Muslim. So, all Muslims after the Companions should feel indebted to them and, rather than thinking of criticizing them, should pray for them: As for those who came after them, they say: "Our Master, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in belief, and put not into our hearts any rancor toward those who believe. Our Master, surely You are the All-Gentle, the All-Compassionate" (59:10).

Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibban quote 'Abd Allah ibn Mughaffal's warning that he heard from the Messenger: Oh God, Oh God! Refrain from using bad language about my Companions! Oh God, Oh God! Refrain from using bad language about my Companions! Don't make them the target of your attacks after me! Whoever loves them loves them on account of his love of me; whoever hates them hates them on account of his hatred of me. Whoever hurts them hurts me; whoever hurts me "hurts" God.

Imam Muslim relates in his Sahih that the Messenger declared: Stars are means of security for the heaven. When they are scattered, what was promised for Heaven befalls it. I am the means of security for my Companions. When I leave the world, what was promised for my Companions will befall them. My Companions are means of security for my nation. When they leave the world, what was promised for my nation will befall it.

As recorded in Bukhari, Muslim, and other authentic books of Tradition, the Messenger declared: "The best people are those living in my time. Then come those who follow them, and then come those who follow them. Those will be followed by a generation whose witness is sometimes true, sometimes false." [4] The time of the Companions and the two succeeding generations was the time of truthfulness. People of great righteousness and exacting scholars appeared during these first three generations. Later generations contained many who lied and perjured themselves to reinforce false beliefs or attain worldly aims. It was natural for liars and members of heterodox sects (as it is for biased Orientalists and their Muslim followers) to lie about the Companions and the pure Imams of the two generations succeeding them, as they were strongholds of Islam and strengthened its pillars.

In his Hilyat al-Awliya', Abu Nu'aym quotes 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar: Whoever desires to follow a straight path should follow the path of those who passed away: The Companions of Muhammad. They are the best of his Umma, the purest in heart, the deepest in knowledge, and the furthest from any false display of piety. They are a community whom God chose for His Prophet's company and His religion's conveyance. Try to be like them in conduct and follow their way. They are the Companions of Muhammad. I swear by God, the Master of the Ka'ba, that they were on true guidance. [5]

As recorded by Tabarani and Ibn al-Athir, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, one of the first people to embrace Islam in Makka and sent to Kufa as a teacher by 'Umar, said: "God looked at the hearts of His true servants and chose Muhammad to send to His creatures as a Messenger. Then He looked at the hearts of people and chose his Companions as the helpers of His religion and the viziers of His Prophet." He also said: "You may excel the Companions in fasting, praying, and in striving to worship God better. But they are better than you, for they paid no attention to the world and were most desirous of the Hereafter."

The companions who excelled narrating Traditions. God Almighty created people with different dispositions and potentials so that human social life would be maintained through mutual help and the division of labor. Therefore, some Companions were good farmers, successful tradesmen or businessmen, students, military commanders, and administrators. Some, especially the Ashab al-Suffa (those who stayed in the antechamber of the Prophet's Mosque) never missed a teaching of the Messenger and tried to memorize his every word. These Companions later narrated to people whatever they heard from or saw about the Messenger. Fortunately, they outlived the others by God's Will and, together with 'A'isha, constituted the first, golden channel through which the Sunna was transmitted. The following is a brief description of their characters and lives:

Abu Hurayra was from Yemeni tribe of Daws. He became a Muslim in the early days of 7th year ah at the hands of Tufayl ibn 'Amr, the chief of his tribe. When he emigrated to Madina, the Messenger was busy with the Khaybar campaign. He joined him in Khaybar. The Messenger changed his name, 'Abd al-Shams, to 'Abd al-Rahman, saying: "A man is not the slave of either the sun or moon."

Abu Hurayra was very poor and modest. One day the Messenger saw him cradling a cat and nicknamed him Abu Hirr (the father or owner of a cat). People soon began to call him Abu Hurayra. However, he liked to be called Abu Hirr, since this title was given to him by the Messenger.

He lived with his non-Muslim mother. Always praying her conversion, one day he asked the Messenger to pray for this. He did so, and before he lowered his arms, Abu Hurayra ran to his house, so sure was he that the Messenger's prayer would be accepted. When he arrived, his mother stopped him at the door so that she could finish ghusl (total ritual ablution). She then opened the door and declared her conversion. After this, Abu Hurayra requested the Messenger to pray that believers should love him and his mother. The Messenger did so. Therefore, love of Abu Hurayra is a mark of belief.

This Companion had an extraordinarily keen memory. He slept the first third of night, prayed and did his daily supererogatory recitations in the second third, and went over the Traditions he had memorized in order never to forget them in the last third. He memorized more than 5,000 Traditions. He never missed a discourse of the Messenger, sought to learn his Traditions, and was a lover of knowledge.

One day he prayed: "O God, grant me knowledge I will never forget." The Messenger heard him and said: "O God, amen." On another day, he told the Messenger: "O Messenger of God, I don't want to forget something that I hear from you." The Messenger asked him to take off his cloak and spread it on the ground, which Abu Hurayra did. The Messenger then prayed and emptied his hands onto the cloak as if he had filled them with something from the Unseen. He ordered Abu Hurayra to fold up the cloak and hold it to his breast, which he did. After narrating this incident, Abu Hurayra used to say: "I folded it up and held it to my breast. I swear by God that [since then] I have not forgotten anything I heard from the Messenger."

Abu Hurayra paid no heed to the world. He usually fasted 3 or 4 days successively because of poverty. Sometimes he writhed with hunger on the ground and said to those passing by: Istaqra'tuka, which has a double meaning: "Will you not recite to me some Qur'an?" and "Will you not feed me?" Ja'far Tayyar understood him better than anybody else and took him as a guest.

Abu Hurayra patiently endured such hardship for the sake of Hadith. To those who sometimes warned him that he was narrating too many Traditions, he replied sincerely: "While my Emigrant brothers were busy in the bazaar and my Helper brothers with farming, I tried to keep my soul and body together to keep company with the Messenger." Sometimes he said: "Were it not for the verse: Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after We have shown them clearly in the Book, they shall be cursed by God and the curses (2:159), I would narrate nothing."

Some claim that other Companions were opposed to Abu Hurayra's narrating. This claim is groundless. Many Companions, among them Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari, Anas ibn Malik, and Wasila ibn Aslam, narrated Traditions from him. Some asked Abu Ayyub why he narrated from Abu Hurayra despite his earlier conversion, to which he would reply: "He heard from the Messenger many things we did not hear."

Many leading Tabi'un also received numerous Traditions from him, including Hasan al-Basri, Zayd ibn Aslam, Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib (who married Abu Hurayra's daughter so that he could benefit from him more), Sa'id ibn Yasar, Sa'id al-Makburi, Sulayman ibn Yasar, Sha'bi (who received Traditions from 500 Companions), Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, and Qasim ibn Muhammad (who is accepted as a link in the chain of Nakshbandi spiritual guides). Hammam ibn Munabbih and Muhammad ibn Munkadir are the most famous of the 800 people who received Traditions from him.

'Umar appointed Abu Hurayra as governor to Bahrayn. However, when he made a small amount of wealth by trade during his period of office, 'Umar had him investigated. Although he was found innocent and requested to return to office, Abu Hurayra declined, saying: "That is enough for me as a governor."

Abu Hurayra, despite claims to the contrary by such Orientalists as Goldziher and their Muslim followers like Ahmad Amin, Abu Rayya, and 'Ali 'Abd al-Razzaq, was never anti-'Ali and pro-Umayyad. He should have supported 'Ali in the internal conflicts so that sedition would be crushed, but chose to remain neutral, for: "Seditions will appear, during which the one who sits [silent] is better than the one who stands [to participate]; the one who stands is better than him who walks [to participate], and the one who walks is better than him who runs [in them]." This hadith might not have been related to the internal conflicts during 'Ali's caliphate, but Abu Hurayra thought that it was and so remained neutral.

Abu Hurayra opposed the Umayyad government. He once stood in front of Marwan ibn Hakam and narrated the hadith: "The destruction of my community will be in the hands of a few callow (young) men from the Quraysh." Marwan responded: "May God's curse be upon them," pretending not to understand who was meant. Abu Hurayra added: "If you like, I can inform you of their names and characteristics."

He was frequently heard to pray: "O God, don't make me live until the sixtieth year." This supplication was so famous that whoever saw Abu Hurayra recalled it. He had heard from the Messenger that some inexperienced, sinful young men would begin to rule the Muslims in 60 ah. He died in 59 ah, and Yazid succeeded his father Mu'awiya one year later.

There is no proof that 'A'isha was opposed to Abu Hurayra's narrating. Both 'A'isha and Abu Hurayra lived long lives and, except for the following incident, she never criticized his narrations. Once when he was narrating Traditions near her room while she was praying, she finished her prayer and came out, only to find that he had left. She remarked: "The Messenger's Traditions should not be narrated in this way, one after another," meaning that they should be narrated slowly and distinctly so that the listeners could understand and memorize them.

Some claim that Imam Abu Hanifa said: "I don't take the opinions of three Companions as evidence in jurisprudence. Abu Hurayra is one of them." This is simply a lie. Allama Ibn Humam, one of the greatest Hanafi jurists, regarded Abu Hurayra as a significant jurist. Besides, there is nothing to prove that Abu Hanifa said that.

Abu Hurayra narrated more than 5,000 Traditions. When gathered together, they make perhaps a volume 1.5 times as long as the Qur'an. Many people have memorized the Qur'an in 6 months or even quicker. Abu Hurayra had a very keen memory and spent 4 years with the Messenger, who prayed for the strength of Abu Hurayra's memory. It would be tantamount to accusing Abu Hurayra of deficient intelligence to claim that he could not have memorized so many Traditions. In addition, all of the Traditions he narrated were not directly from the Messenger. As leading Companions like Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'A'isha, and Abu Ayyub al-Ansari narrated from him, he also received Traditions from them.

While Abu Hurayra was narrating Traditions in the presence of Marwan ibn Hakam at different times, the latter had his secretary record them written secretly. Some time later, he asked Abu Hurayra to repeat the Traditions he had narrated to him earlier. Abu Hurayra began: "In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate," and narrated the same Traditions with exactly the same wording. So, there is no reason to criticize him for narrating so many Prophetic Traditions.

'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbas was born 4 or 5 years before the Hijra. He had a keen intelligence and memory, and was an inspired man. The Messenger prayed for him: "O God, make him perceptive and well-versed in the religion, and teach him the hidden truths of the Qur'an." [6] During his lifetime, he came to be known as "The Great Scholar of the Umma," "the Sea" (One Very Profound in Knowledge), or "The Translator (Clarifier) of the Qur'an."

He was a very handsome, tall man endowed with great eloquence. His memory was such that he memorized an 80-couplet poem by 'Amr ibn Rabi'a at one reading. Besides his profound knowledge of Qur'anic interpretation, Tradition, and jurisprudence, he also was well-versed in literature, particularly in pre-Islamic poetry. In his Tafsir, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari relates either a couplet or verse from him in connection with the interpretation of almost each Qur'anic verse.

He was greatly loved by the Companions. Despite his youth, 'Umar appointed him to his Advisory Council, which consisted of elder Companions. When asked why he had done this, 'Umar tested their level of understanding of the Qur'an. He asked them to explain: When comes the help of God, and victory, and you see men entering God's religion in throngs, then proclaim the praise of Your Master, and seek His forgiveness; for He is Oft-Returning [in grace and mercy] (110:1-3). The elders answered: "It orders the Prophet to praise God and seek His forgiveness when he sees people entering Islam in throngs after the help of God and victory came." 'Umar was not satisfied, and so asked Ibn 'Abbas the same question. He replied: "This sura implies that the death of the Messenger is near, for when people enter Islam in throngs, it means that the mission of Messengership has ended." 'Umar turned to the council and explained: "That's why I include him among you." [7]

Ibn 'Abbas was famous for his deep insight, profound learning, keen memory, high intelligence, perceptiveness, and modesty. When he entered a gathering place, people would stand in respect for him. This made him so uncomfortable that he told them: "Please, for the sake of the help and shelter (you gave the Prophet and the Emigrants), don't stand for me!" Although one of the most knowledgeable Muslims, he showed great respect to scholars. For example, he helped Zayd ibn Thabit mount his horse by holding the stirrup steady and explained: "We have been told to behave like this toward our scholars." In return, Zayd kissed his hand without his approval and remarked: "We have been told to behave like this toward the Messenger's relatives." [8]

As noted above, Ibn 'Abbas did not like people to stand for him to show respect. However, when he was buried, something occurred that was as if the dead had stood in respect for him and the spirit beings welcomed him. A voice was heard from beneath the grave: O soul at peace! Return unto your Master, well-pleased, well-pleasing! Enter among My servants! Enter my Paradise! (89:27-30). [9]

Ibn 'Abbas brought up many scholars in every branch of religious knowledge. The Makkan school of jurisprudence was founded by him. Such leading Tabi'un scholars as Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Mujahid ibn Jabr, and Ikrima acknowledged: "Ibn 'Abbas taught us whatever we know." He narrated about 1,600 Traditions.

'Abd Allah Ibn 'Umar was the only one of 'Umar's nine sons to be called Ibn 'Umar (the son of 'Umar). This shows that he had greater worth to be called 'Umar's son or to be mentioned with the name of 'Umar. Although 'Umar is the second greatest Companion, 'Abd Allah may be regarded superior in knowledge, piety, worship, and devotion to the Sunna. His care in following the Prophet's example was such that Nafi', Imam Malik's tutor, narrates: "While we were descending 'Arafat, Ibn 'Umar entered a hole. When he came out, I asked him what he had done there. The Imam answered: 'While descending 'Arafat, I was behind the Messenger. He went down into that hole and relieved himself. I felt no need to do that now, but I don't like to oppose him.'" [10] Also, no one ever saw him take more or less than three swallows of water, for he saw the Messenger drink water in three swallows.

Ibn 'Umar was born in the early years of Islam. He saw his father beaten severely by the Makkan polytheists many times. [11] When the Muslims emigrated to Madina, he was about 10 years old. The Messenger did not let him fight at Badr because he was too young. When he was also prevented from fighting at Uhud, he returned home so grief-stricken that he spent the whole night asking himself: "What sin have I committed that they did not include me in the army fighting in the way of the Messenger?" [12]

Ibn Khalliqan relates in Wafayat al-A'yan (The Death of the Notables) from Sha'bi:

Once in their youth, 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, his brother Mus'ab ibn Zubayr, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar were sitting near the Ka'ba. They thought that each should ask God for something special in the hope that the prayer would be accepted. Ibn Zubayr prayed: "O God, for the sake of Your Grandeur, Honor, and Majesty, make me a ruler in Hijaz." Mus'ab stretched out his arms and prayed: "O God, for the sake of Your Honor, Majesty, and Grandeur, of Your Throne and Seat, make me a ruler in Iraq." 'Abd al-Malik raised his hands and prayed: "O God, I ask You to make me a ruler over all the Muslims and secure, through me, Muslim unity even at the cost of some lives." When 'Abd Allah prayed, he asked: "O God, don't take my soul before You guarantee Paradise for me." [13]

The prayers of the first three were accepted: 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr ruled for a while in Hijaz and was eventually martyred by Hajjaj the Tyrant, the notorious Umayyad governor. Mus'ab ruled in Iraq for a short time. 'Abd al-Malik succeeded his father, Marwan, as caliph and secured Muslim unity of Muslims, though at the cost of many lives and much bloodshed.

As for Ibn 'Umar, Imam Sha'bi remarks: "Whether the Imam's prayer was accepted or not will be clear in the Hereafter." Sha'bi knew something: "Ibn 'Umar never opposed the Prophet's descendants or supported the Umayyads. Hajjaj was afraid of him. Once, Hajjaj gave a sermon before the noon prayer that was so long that the noon prayer's time was almost over. Ibn 'Umar warned him: 'O Governor, time is passing without waiting for you to finish your sermon.' Hajjaj was full of rancor and enmity for Ibn 'Umar. Finally, during a pilgrimage he found someone to prick Ibn 'Umar's heel with a poisonous spear while he was in pilgrim attire. The poison eventually killed him." [14]

'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, one of the first five or six people to embrace Islam, also narrated a considerable number of Traditions. As a youth, he tended the flocks of such Qurayshi leaders as Abu Jahl and 'Uqba ibn Abi Mu'ayt. After his conversion, he would no longer be separated from the Messenger. He entered the Prophet's house without asking to do so and so frequently that people thought he was a family member. During military or non-military expeditions, he carried the Prophet's water bag, wooden sandals, and mat upon which he slept or sat. Eventually, he became known as "the caretaker of the pattens (sandals-like shoes), couch, and water bag." [15]

Ibn Mas'ud worked some wonders. For example, while he was once being tortured in Makka, he became invisible to his torturers. The Messenger called him "the son of the mother of a slave," and advised his Companions: "Whoever wants to recite the Qur'an as if it were being revealed for the first time, let him recite it according to the recitation of the son of the mother of a slave." [16] One day the Messenger asked him to recite some of the Qur'an to him. Ibn Mas'ud excused himself: "O Messenger of God, shall I recite it to you while the Qur'an is being revealed to you?" However, the Messenger insisted: "I would prefer to hear it from others." Ibn Mas'ud began to recite Surat al-Nisa'. When he reached verse 41: How then will it be, when We bring forward from every nation a witness, and bring you as a witness against those?, the Messenger, whose eyes were full of tears, stopped him, saying: "Stop, please. This is enough." [17]

Ibn Mas'ud, who was short and weak, once climbed a tree because the Messenger asked him to do so. Those present laughed at his legs. The Messenger warned them, saying: "Those legs will weigh more than Mount Uhud according to the measure of the Hereafter in the other world." [18]

Caliph 'Umar sent him to Kufa as a teacher and with a letter, in which he said: "O people of Kufa! If I did not prefer you over myself, I would not have sent Ibn Mas'ud to you." [19] Ibn Mas'ud lived in Kufa during the caliphate of 'Umar and trained many scholars. Such great Tabi'un scholars as Alqama ibn Qays, Aswad ibn Yazid al-Naha'i, and Ibrahim ibn Yazid al-Naha'i grew up in the ethos established by Ibn Mas'ud. One of the people attending Alqama's courses asked him who had been his teacher. When Alqama answered that he had learned from 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, and Ibn Mas'ud, the man responded: "Good! Good!"

Ibn Mas'ud continued to stay in Kufa during 'Uthman's caliphate. However, after 'Uthman summoned him to Madina to investigate a groundless complaint about him, Ibn Mas'ud did not want to go back to Kufa, as he was already very old. One day a man ran to him and said: "Last night I dreamed that the Messenger was telling you : 'They have afflicted you much after me, so come to me.' You answered: 'Alright, O Messenger of God. I will not leave Madina any more.' A few days later Ibn Mas'ud became ill. 'Uthman visited him, and the following conversation took place between them:

Do you have any complaints?  
I have many complaints.

Of what?  
Of my sins while going to God.

Is there something you desire?  
God's mercy.

Would you like me to send for a doctor?  
The "doctor" has made me ill. So, there is nothing the doctor you will send for can do for me. [20]

Ibn Mas'ud spent about 20 years in the company of the Messenger. He narrated approximately 800 Traditions.

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Besides those four great Companions, 'A'isha, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah, and Anas ibn Malik are the other Companions who narrated many Traditions.

'A'isha lived with the Messenger for 9 years. She had great talents, a keen intelligence and memory, and a deep insight and perceptiveness. She had a great curiosity to learn new things, and asked the Messenger to explain those matters that she found it hard to understand.

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri lived in the mosque's antechamber and was always with the Messenger. He lived a long life, and a time came when he was regarded as the most knowledgeable person of Madina.

Jabir Ibn 'Abd Allah is the son of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr ibn Haram al-Ansari, who was martyred at Uhud. After the Messenger's death, he lived in Madina (where he lectured in the Prophet's Mosque), Egypt, and Damascus. Such leading Tabi'un scholars as 'Amr ibn Dinar, Mujahid, and Ata' ibn Abi Rabah attended his lectures. [21] People gathered around him in Damascus and Egypt to learn of the Messenger and his Traditions.

Anas Ibn Malik served the Messenger for 10 years in Madina. After the Messenger's death, he lived a very long life, during which he must have taught the Prophetic Traditions to those around him.

All the Traditions recorded in Kanz al-'Ummal, including authentic and defectively transmitted ones, number 46,624. It is possible someone to memorize them within a short time. Among the Traditionists of early Islamic ages, many people memorized more than 100,000 Traditions, including fabricated ones. Given this fact, it cannot be claimed by the Sunna's detractors and doubters that the number of Traditions narrated from certain Companions is too great for them to have memorized and narrated.

[1] The Messenger declares: "My Companions are like stars; whomever of them you follow, you will be guided to the True Path." This hadith is explicitly corroborated by the verse: Remember you said to him whom God favored (33:37) By "him whom God favored", the verse refers to Zayd ibn Haritha, the emancipated slave of the Messenger, who is not included in the greatest of the Companions. God orders all Muslims to follow the way of those whom He favors: "Guide us to the Straight Path, the path of those whom You favored" (1:5). This means that the Companions, especially the greatest among them, are guides by whom one can find the True or Straight Path. (Tr.)  
[2] Haythami, Majma' al-Zawa'id, 1:57; Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal, 13:353.  
[3] Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Ashab," 5; Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 221.  
[4] Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 212; Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Ashab," 1.  
[5] Abu Nu'aym, Hilya, 1:305.  
[6] Bukhari, "Wudu'," 10; Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 138.  
[7] Bukhari, "Tafsir," 110/3.  
[8] Ibn Hajar, 2:332.  
[9] Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, sura al-Fajr, verses 27-30. Haythami, Majma', 9:285  
[10] Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 2:131.  
[11] Ibn Hisham, Sira, 1:374.  
[12] Bukhari, "Maghazi," 6; I Sa'd, 4:143.  
[13] Ibn Khalliqan, Wafayat al-A'yan, 2:30  
[14] Ibn Sa'd, 4:185-7.[15] Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Ashab," 27; Ibn Sa'd, 3:153.  
[16] Ibn Ma'ja, "Muqaddima," 11; Hakim, Mustadrak, 2:318; Ibn Hajar, al-Isaba, 2:369.  
[17] Tirmidhi, "Tafsir al-Qur'an," 5.  
[18] Ibn Sa'd, 3:155.  
[19] Ibid., 157.  
[20] Ibn Kathir, 7:183.  
[21] Ibn Hajar, 1:213.