

'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

- 1 The best of my community are my generation,
- 2 then those who follow them,
- 3 then those who follow.
- 4 'Imrān said: I am unsure whether God's Messenger said twice or three times after his generation.
- 5 Then there will come after them people who bear witness without being asked;
- 6 are untrue to a trust,
- 7 pledge but do not fulfil,
- 8 and obesity will spread among them. <sup>(1)</sup>

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3650; Muslim, 2535.

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿As for the first to lead the way, of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār, as well as those who follow them in [the way of] righteousness, God is well-pleased with them, and well-pleased are they with Him. He has prepared for them gardens through which running waters flow, where they shall abide forever. That is the supreme triumph.﴾ (9: 100)
- ﴿Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, nor knowingly betray the trust that has been reposed in you.﴾ (8: 27)
- ﴿[And the true servants of God are] those who never bear witness to what is false, and whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity.﴾ (25: 72)
- ﴿They are the ones who fulfil their vows and stand in awe of a day of woes that fly far and wide.﴾ (76: 7)

#### The Narrator

'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn ibn 'Ubayd emanated from the Khuzā'ah tribe. His appellation was Abu Nujayd. He embraced Islam together with Abu Hurayrah in Year 7 AH, 629 CE, which witnessed the Battle of Khaybar. He was in the Prophet's army on several military expeditions. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sent him to Basrah to teach Islam to its population. Ibn Sīrīn said: 'We have not seen anyone among the Prophet's companions who excelled 'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn'. He was known to have his supplication answered. He did not participate in the troubling events that led to the assassination of the third and fourth caliphs, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. He died in Year 53 AH 671 CE.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that the best of people are his companions who were his contemporaries. Next were the *tābi'īn*, i.e. the generation that followed the Prophet's companions, and then the generation that followed. He then said that corruption would spread after those noble generations. Then there would be people who would be unscrupulous in their testimony, untrue to their trust, and who would not honour their commitments. They would prefer to enjoy the pleasures of this life, and this would leave its mark on them.



# Message and Meaning



The Prophet (peace be upon him) states that the best of all people are the believers who were his contemporaries. They are his companions who met him, believed in him as God's Messenger and remained Muslims to the end of their lives. They are the ones who shouldered the responsibility of delivering the message of Islam far and wide. They strove for God's cause, sacrificing their all for it, and were always ready to give all their support to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

God praises them in several places in the Qur'an, as in the verses that says: 'As for the first to lead the way, of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār, as well as those who follow them in [the way of] righteousness, God is well-pleased with them, and well-pleased are they with Him. He has prepared for them gardens through which running waters flow, where they shall abide forever. That is the supreme triumph'. (9: 100) In other verses of the Qur'an, God makes clear that He has accepted their repentance of whatever error they might have committed. Consider the verse that says: 'Say: All praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen'. (27: 59) Ibn 'Abbās says that the verse refers to the Prophet's companions, whom 'God has chosen to support His Messenger'.<sup>(1)</sup>



Next to the Prophet's companions in superior merit are the *tābi'īn* who met the Prophet's companions and learnt from them. They transmitted God's Book and the Prophet's Sunnah from the Prophet's companions, and reported their views in respect of explaining the Qur'an, Fiqh and theology.



Next in rank is the generation that followed that of the *tābi'īn*. They transmitted the knowledge of the Islamic faith and took good care to preserve the Sunnah and to record the hadiths of the Prophet. They were the ones who ensured the spread of Islam into all corners of the world.

God, Mighty and Exalted, praises all three generations. Concerning the Prophet's companions, He says: '[Such war gains are for] the poor migrants who have been driven out of their homes and possessions, seeking God's favour and His goodly acceptance, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the ones who are true. (8) And to those who were already firmly established in the Home and in faith, those who love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given. They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want. Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful'. (59: 8-9) And of the *tābi'īn* and their followers, He says: 'Those who come after them pray: 'Our Lord! Forgive us and forgive our brethren who preceded us in faith. Leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe. Lord, You are compassionate, ever-merciful'. (59: 10)

1 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'an*, Vol. 19, p. 482.



'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn, the narrator, doubted whether the Prophet (peace be upon him) added another generation after these two of the *tābi'īn* and the next generation. Most versions do not include such doubt. They confirm the two generations without adding a third.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then speaks about the corruption and wrong practices that would be witnessed among his community after those generations. There would be people who would come forward as witnesses, without being asked for a testimony. This would not be due to any strong desire to state the truth and ensure that right was done; it would rather occur due to their complacency and readiness to give false evidence. This is confirmed by another version of the hadith, narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd, which includes: 'Then there will come after them a generation when a person's testimony precedes his oath, and his oath precedes his testimony'.<sup>(1)</sup> This means that they would be careless about their testimony and not bothered if they were considered reliable or unreliable. As for those who would come forward to testify in order to ensure justice and support the oppressed, these would be the best of witnesses, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'Shall I tell who the best of witnesses is? He is the one who gives his testimony before being asked'.<sup>(2)</sup>



Another characteristic of such people is that they are untrue to their trust. Therefore, people will not entrust them with anything regarding themselves or their property.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) adds another description of them, stating that they do not honour what they commit themselves to do, whether it is for God's sake or for others. If any of them pledges himself to do some act of worship or gives a promise to another person, they do not honour such a commitment.

These characteristics are stated by the Prophet as belonging to hypocrites. He said: 'Among the marks of a hypocrite are three [characteristics]: when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he reneges; and when he is placed in a position of trust, he betrays'.<sup>(3)</sup>



The last characteristic of such people mentioned in this hadith is that they care only for the pleasures of this world and this is marked on their bodies. Obesity is common among them, and this is evidence of carelessness and seeking worldly pleasures. This does not mean that every fat person is a transgressor or that every hypocrite is obese. It is a description that applies to many of them, showing them as preoccupied with worldly cares.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2652; Muslim, 2533.

2 Related by Muslim, 1719.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 33; Muslim, 59.

# Implementation

1

Every educator, advocate of Islam and every person in a position of authority should promote love and respect of the Prophet's companions in people's hearts.

2

Every Muslim should learn the history of the Prophet's companions and try to emulate them in the strength of their faith and in their values. Ibn 'Abbās rightly describes them saying: 'They raised the banner of Islam, and endeavoured to choose the best for the Muslim community. Thus, they showed the ways and standards of *ijtihad* and determining the proper way for Muslims. As they did that, God's blessings became clearly apparent, and His faith was well established and clearly identified. Through the Prophet's companions, God reduced disbelief to absolute disgrace, removing its stalwart advocates and pillars. God's word became supreme, while the word of disbelievers was brought utterly low. God's peace, grace and blessings be to those pure and sublime souls. In life, they were God's devoted servants, and after death, their heritage remained alive. They gave sincere counsel to all mankind. They aimed for the life to come before reaching it, and they departed this world when they were still alive'.<sup>(1)</sup>

3

Every Muslim must make sure never to be disrespectful of the Prophet's companions and never revile them. They were the Prophet's dear companions and, next to the prophets, were the best of mankind.

4

For every Muslim, the safe attitude is to overlook the conflict that took place between them. Everyone of them tried to do what they felt to be right.

5

Loving the Prophet's companions is the mark of a true believer, while hating them is a mark of hypocrisy. Everyone should consider his position by this standard.

6

Everyone is recommended to read the history of the main figures of the *tābi'īn*, so as to learn how they became the best of people after the prophets and the Prophet's companions.

7

The proper conduct for a Muslim is to pray to God to grant His acceptance to the Prophet's companions and bestow mercy on the *tābi'īn* and those who follow them with clear conscience. We all should pray that God will bring us alongside them in company with the Prophet in Paradise.

8

True scholarship requires that a person should acknowledge his doubt or error on a particular point, rather than try to arbitrarily press his point, going into error and misleading others.

9

Testimony is a very serious matter which should never be underestimated. It is important that one should be absolutely clear and certain of what he says before standing as a witness.

1 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, Vol. 1, p. 371.

10

This hadith does not contradict the strong recommendation to come forward to testify about something a person knows for certain. Such a person need not wait to be called as a witness in order to bring about what is right and fair. This is particularly applicable when someone is the only person who has such information and can give such true testimony.

11

It is most important to be true to one's trust. God has forbidden all betrayal of trust. He says: 'Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, nor knowingly betray the trust that has been reposed in you'. (8: 27)

12

Betrayal of trust includes that a person does not do his work to the best of his ability, cheating in examinations, sales and commercial transactions. It also includes giving misleading information to patients so as to pay for unnecessary tests.

13

Being true to one's promise is a characteristic of believers. God says in reference to good believers: 'They are the ones who are true to their bond with God and never break their covenant'. (13: 20) Every Muslim should stick to the characteristics of believers and discard those of hypocrites.

14

Making a pledge, i.e. *nadhr*, to do some good deed, such as voluntary fasting or giving a charitable donation, is discouraged because it commits a person to do what is not obligatory for him. This commitment may become a burden. However, when one makes such a pledge, one must fulfil it. God says: 'Let them fulfil their pledges'. (22: 29)

15

A Muslim should not pursue all types of worldly pleasures. He should take only what is legitimate and sufficient. To give most of one's attention to worldly matters will divert a person from what Islam recommends.



