

Abu Bakr, the Truthful

أبو بكر الصديق رضى الله عنه

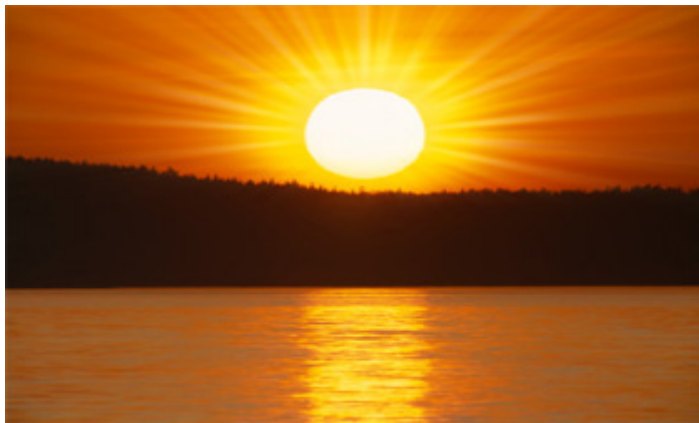
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‘If I had taken anyone as my closest friend I would have taken Abu Bakr, but he is my brother and companion.’¹ These are the words of Prophet Muhammad, may God shower him with praises, and Abu Bakr was his closest earthly companion. Abu Bakr was known as *As Siddeeq* (the truthful). The Arabic word *Siddeeq* implies more than lack of deceit; it indicates a person in a constant state of truthfulness. One who recognises the truth and adheres to it. The word *Siddeeq* implies truthfulness to one’s self, those around us and most importantly to God. Abu Bakr was such a man.

Prophet Muhammad showed his great love and respect for Abu Bakr by associating him with the concept of the “closest friend”. In Arabic, the word used is *khaleel* and it denotes more than friendship, rather a heartfelt closeness with an unbreakable connection. Prophet Abraham was known as the *khaleel* of God, and Prophet Muhammad himself reserved this word for his relationship with God, but his connection with Abu Bakr involved a special rapport.

¹ Saheeh Al-Bukhari

Background

The sayings of Prophet Muhammad and the history of Islam tell us that Abu Bakr was born a little over two years after Prophet Muhammad, and that both were born into the tribe of Quraish, although into different clans. Abu Bakr was born into a reasonably well off family and established himself as a successful trader and merchant. He was a likeable, approachable man who had a large social network.

Abu Bakr loved to talk and communicate with all those around him and was an expert in Arab genealogy. He knew the names and locations of all the Arab tribes and understood their good and bad qualities. It was this knowledge that allowed him to mix easily with many diverse people and command a great deal of influence in Meccan society.

When Prophet Muhammad married his first wife Khadijah, he and Abu Bakr became neighbours and found that they shared many of the same characteristics. Both men were traders, and both conducted their affairs with honesty and integrity.

Both Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr avoided the vice and corruption that abounded in pre-Islamic Arabia and both avoided idolatry. They recognised each other as kindred spirits and struck up a lifelong friendship.

The First

Abu Bakr As Siddeeq was the first person to heed Prophet Muhammad's message and enter into Islam. When he heard Prophet Mohammad say that there was nothing worthy of worship but God and that he (Muhammad) was the messenger of God, Abu Bakr accepted Islam without any reservations. For everybody else who comes to Islam or rekindles lost faith, there is an obstacle, a moment of hesitation, but not for Abu Bakr. The sweetness of faith entered his heart and the one known as the truthful, recognised the truth.

In the early days when the message was first revealed, Prophet Muhammad called the people around him to Islam in secret. Prophet Muhammad knew that his message would shock and dismay the Meccans who were deeply entrenched in ignorance. He wanted to build a band of followers who would slowly deliver the message, spreading out in ever-increasing circles. When there were 38 Muslims, Abu Bakr went to his beloved friend Prophet Muhammad and said he wanted to proclaim the message in public.

Prophet Muhammad refused, thinking the numbers too small to risk exposure. Abu Bakr insisted and kept mentioning this to his companion. When Prophet Muhammad was ordered by God to make his message public, he and Abu Bakr made their way to the Kaaba (the house of God in the centre of Mecca). Abu Bakr stood up and proclaimed in a loud voice, "There is none worthy of worship but God, and Muhammad is his slave and messenger". Abu Bakr was the first public speaker for Islam.

When Prophet Muhammad died the Muslims were devastated, some even refused to accept the truth. Their hearts were broken. Although overwhelmed by grief, Abu Bakr addressed the people, he praised and glorified God and said, "Whoever worshipped Muhammad, then Muhammad is dead, but whoever worshipped God, then God is Ever-living and shall never die." ² He then recited verses from Quran.

"(O Muhammad) Verily you will die, and they also will die."
(Quran 39:30)

"Muhammad is no more than a Messenger, and indeed (many) Messengers have passed away before him. If he dies or is killed, will you then turn back on your heels (as disbelievers)? And he who turns back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God, and God will give reward to those who are grateful. (Quran 3:144)

2 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

During this great crisis, the devastated Muslims chose Abu Bakr as their leader. He was the first Caliph (leader of the Muslims).

Prophet Muhammad's nephew, Ali ibn Abu Talib, praised Abu Bakr as the first person to enter Islam and the first to perform any good deeds.³ In Islam, competing with one another to do good deeds is not only acceptable but also encouraged. Prophet Muhammad exhorted his followers to behave easily in the affairs of this world, but to race with one another towards everlasting life in Paradise. Muslim historian, At Tabarani, quotes righteous companion Ibn Abbas as saying, "Abu Bakr.....excelled all the companions of Prophet Muhammad in piety and righteousness, renunciation of worldly goods and reliance upon God." From the sayings of Prophet Muhammad we learn that Abu Bakr will be the first person to enter Paradise after the Prophets of God.⁴ Abu Bakr – the first!

Prophet Muhammad, may God shower him with praises, and his close companion Abu Bakr were less than three years apart in age. Both were born into the same Arab tribe, Quraish, but were from different clans. Most of Prophet Muhammad's early life was spent in relative poverty while Abu Bakr came from a reasonably well off family. Both men lived and behaved in a quiet and dignified manner and both men had shunned idolatry all of their lives. When Prophet Muhammad received his mission to spread the message of Islam the first man he turned to was his friend Abu Bakr. Without a moments hesitation Abu Bakr accepted Islam and began a journey of dedication and love that was to last the rest of his life.

Abu Bakr loved his friend dearly and was ready and able to accept the truth of Islam easily. When he heard the message that

3 Ali ibn Abu Talib at Abu Bakr's funeral.

4 Abu Dawood.

God was One, he was ready to accept what he already new to be true. His daughter Aisha narrated that in all of his life, Abu Bakr never prostrated to an idol. Abu Bakr himself relates that when he was a child, his father took him to the place of idols and left him there amongst the statues. The young boy looked at the inanimate objects surrounding him and asked them of what benefit they could be to him. When the idols were unable to respond Abu Bakr decided that he would not worship something that could not hear or see. He innately understood that statues and idols were not worthy of worship.

Abu Bakr's love for the One True God and his support for his friend Muhammad meant that in the early days of Islam, he was often persecuted and mercilessly beaten. The majority of Meccans hated to hear Muhammad's message of reform and reckoning. They were the guardians of idolatry and a great deal of revenue was made from the pilgrims visiting one or more of the idols worshipped in and around Mecca. If Muhammad succeeded in uniting the people in the worship of One God and if their ways of corruption were eradicated, their lives would be irreversibly changed.

The Migration

The shocking treatment, torture and brutality directed against the Muslims meant that Prophet Muhammad sent many of them away for their own protection. The second of two migrations was to the nearby city of Yathrib, later to be named Madina. Although often called a flight, it was in reality a carefully planned migration. Two tribes from Yathrib had negotiated a treaty with Prophet Muhammad and offered him their allegiance and protection but at this stage, Prophet Muhammad had not been given permission by God to leave Mecca. He did however send his followers to Yathrib in groups small enough not to attract the attention of the Meccans.

One day in the heat of the noonday sun, Prophet Muhammad visited the home of his friend Abu Bakr. The streets of Mecca were deserted and Abu Bakr knew this visit of great importance, this time of day was reserved for rest. Prophet Muhammad asked Abu Bakr to “empty your house”, meaning that he had something important and private to discuss. Abu Bakr replied, “This is your family.” Prophet Muhammad went inside and revealed to his friend that God had given him permission to leave Mecca. Aisha narrates that her father wept when he heard that he was to be Prophet Muhammad’s companion on the journey.

Abu Bakr wept not from fear, although the journey would be fraught with danger, but from sheer joy. This was an opportunity for him to spend more than ten days travelling alone with his dearest companion. It was an opportunity to spend many days and nights drinking from the fountain of Prophethood. Abu Bakr announced that he had camels prepared and ready to go, for he too had been waiting for his companion Muhammad to be given the permission to leave. That night the two friends left through the back door and walked into the black desert landscape.

The Search

When the Meccans realised that Prophet Muhammad had escaped Mecca, thereby eluding their plans to kill him, they were furious. Search parties immediately began to scour the surrounding areas. Although they suspected that prophet Muhammad was heading for Yathrib, they sent scouts in every direction. Abu Bakr and Prophet Muhammad spent three days hiding in a cave south of Mecca.

At one stage, a search party came so close to the entrance of their cave Abu Bakr could see their shoes above him. He was filled with fear and trepidation, not for himself, for he was a courageous man, but for his beloved friend. Abu Bakr whispered, “Messenger of God, if they look down towards their feet they will see us!” Prophet Muhammad replied, “Abu Bakr, what do you

think of two people with whom God is the third?" God revealed the following verse of Quran in response to this poignant moment.

"If you help him (Muhammad) not (it does not matter), for God did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two, when they were in the cave, and he (Prophet Muhammad) said to his companion (Abu Bakr), "Be not sad (or afraid), surely God is with us." Then God sent down His Sakinah (calmness, tranquillity, peace, etc.) upon him, and strengthened him with forces that you saw not, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowermost, while it was the Word of God that became the uppermost, and God is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (Quran 9:40)

The angry and frantic Meccans stood outside the cave but did not enter. A spider had spun a delicate web across the entrance to the cave making it appear that no one had entered the cave in a very long time. Abu Bakr understood from his beloved friend's words that the power of God is often found manifest in the least expected places. A tiny, fragile spider spinning a web of concealment was mightier than an army. Abu Bakr, the first man to enter Islam became one of two. Two friends united on a mission, bound by their love for each other and for the fledgling Muslim nation, strengthened by their love of the One True God.



Abu Bakr was a man of shrewd judgment. He was able to discern the truth when others were muddled by the complexities of a situation. Thus, he found it very easy to see the truth in Islam but realised that the words of Muhammad would cause a rift in Meccan society. The leaders of Mecca would not tolerate anything that put their economic situation or lifestyles in jeopardy. Abu Bakr knew that difficult times lay ahead and felt it was his duty to protect his companion, Prophet Muhammad. The two friends saw each other everyday and their friendship grew stronger as their understanding of Islam grew and took root in their hearts. For three years Islam blossomed in secret. The new Muslims spread the message of Islam through a network of trusted friends and families, but the time came when God commanded Prophet Muhammad to spread the message in public.

Abu Bakr understood that life would become difficult as the leaders of Mecca realised how many people were accepting Islam. He knew that Prophet Muhammad would require his protection, but over the months, Abu Bakr also took on the role of protector for many new Muslims. As more and more people converted to Islam the non-Muslim leaders of Mecca began a campaign of

persecution and abuse designed to destroy the new faith. Most of the men, women and children from the tribes of Mecca had the protection of their families, but the slaves and the poor were particularly vulnerable.

It was the slaves and the destitute that were particularly attracted to the teachings of Islam. They heard the words of equality, freedom, and the mercy of the One True God and saw it as a way to escape the brutality of their existence and find comfort in the forgiveness and love of God. They learned that all men were slaves of God and that He offered guidance and protection to all, not just the elite classes. Abu Bakr was a rich merchant and was able to ease the suffering of many slaves by buying them from their masters and setting them free.

Among the slaves set free by Abu Bakr was Bilal⁵, the man destined to become the first man to call the faithful to prayer. Bilal's master would make him lie on burning sand and have large slabs of rock placed on his chest, but he refused to give up his new faith. When Abu Bakr heard of Bilal's condition, he raced to free him. In all, Abu Bakr freed eight slaves, four men and four women. Although the buying and freeing slaves was not unknown in Meccan society, it was usually done for far less altruistic reasons. Once a slave was freed, he was honour bound to offer his protection to the one who freed him, and for this reasons the rich Meccans would free slaves that were physically fit and strong. Abu Bakr freed slaves for the sake of God, not for himself.

“Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification; And have in their minds no favour from any one For which a reward is expected in return, But only the desire to seek the Countenance, Of their Lord, Most High; And soon they shall attain complete satisfaction.” (Quran 92:18-21)

5 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

Protecting his Companion

One day, when Prophet Muhammad was in the Kaaba (House of God) the Meccans surrounded him and started taunting and verbally abusing him, and very quickly it escalated to physical abuse. Someone informed Abu Bakr that his companion was in need of his assistance, so he rushed to the Kaaba and pushed into the middle of the fight, placing himself between Prophet Muhammad and his attackers. He cried out, **“Would you kill a man for saying that Allah is his Lord”**.⁶ The Meccans were momentarily stunned, but within seconds they fell upon Abu Bakr and beat him mercilessly. The beating was so severe that the blood flowed from his head and clotted his hair.

On another occasion, when the Prophet was praying, one of the Meccan elites threw a piece of cloth around his neck and began to strangle him. Although people could see what was happening nobody was courageous enough to come to Prophet Muhammad’s rescue. When Abu Bakr entered the Kaaba and saw his friend’s predicament, he rushed over and fought off the attacker.

A story that comes from Ali ibn Abu Talib epitomises Abu Bakr’s reputation as a quiet achiever who never put his own needs first and was devoted to Islam and its messenger, Prophet Muhammad. When Ali was the leader of the Muslims, many years after the deaths of both Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr, he made a speech in which he enquired of his audience, “Who is the most courageous man in Islam?” The audience responded, “You! Ameer Al Mumineen (leader of the faithful)” Ali had a fierce reputation as a warrior and brave fighter. He looked at the men seated before him and said, “It is true I have never faced an opponent and lost, but I am not the most courageous. That honour belongs to Abu Bakr”.

6 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

Ali went on to relate that in the Battle of Badr, the first battle the fledgling Muslim nation faced, the Muslims refused to let Prophet Muhammad be in the front lines and instead built a shelter for him at the back. The men were asked who would volunteer to guard the Prophet, but none would step forward except Abu Bakr. Prophet Muhammad stayed in the shelter for sometime, praying for the success of his small nation, and Abu Bakr could be seen walking back and forth, his sword unsheathed, ready to repel any threat to his beloved companion.

Later in the battle, Prophet Muhammad led the centre battalion and Abu Bakr the right flank. They were friends united in all circumstances, in times of ease or hardship. Abu Bakr is an example of a courageous man prepared to use his wealth, abilities and strength in the service of Islam and ready to give up his life for the sake of God or to protect God's messenger.

Words of Praise

Ali ibn Abu Talib also gave Abu Bakr's funeral oration. The following passages are just a small sample of his words of praise for Prophet Muhammad's closest companion.

“You supported him when others had deserted him, and you remained firm in helping him in misfortunes when others had withdrawn their support.

“You had the lowest voice but the highest distinction. Your conversation was most exemplary and your reasoning most just; your silence was longest in duration, and your speech was most eloquent. Bravest among men, and well-informed about matters, your action was dignified.” Thus was Abu Bakr, the protector.