

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful

As'hab us-Suffah

The great lovers of the Holy Prophet (saw)

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1. Introduction; *The Beloved of Allah*

((إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا))

Allah sends down His blessings on the Prophet and His angels pray for him. O ye who believe, you too should invoke His blessings on him and salute him with the salutation of peace. [33:57]

There is not a corner on earth where one cannot find a lover of the greatest of creation Hadhrat Habibullah (saw). The hearts of the righteous are so completely annihilated in the love of the Holy Prophet (saw) that not a second goes by without a believer praising his blessed name. In the United Kingdom, a non-Muslim state, the love of the Holy Prophet (saw) is so vast that the name Mohammad is the second most registered name with newly born babies¹.

The pen of the greatest lover of the Holy Prophet (saw), Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as), has imprinted upon history the following verses in praise of the Holy Prophet (saw),

يَسْعَى إِلَيْكَ الْخَلْقُ كَاطْمَانٍ	يَا عَيْنَ فَيْضِ اللَّهِ وَالْعِرْفَانِ
تَهْوَى إِلَيْكَ الزُّمُرُ بِالْكَيزَانِ	يَا بَحْرَ فَضْلِ الْمُنْعَمِ الْمَتَانِ
نَوَّرْتَ وَجْهَ الْبَرِّ وَالْعُمَرَانِ	يَا شَمْسَ مُلْكِ الْحُسْنِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ
مِنْ ذَالِكَ الْبَدْرِ الَّذِي أَصْبَانِي	قَوْمَ رَأُوكَ وَأُمَّةٌ قَدْ أُخْبِرَتْ

O (you who are) the Fountain of Allah's munificence, and perfect understanding of Allah, People rush towards you, thirstily.

*O (you who are) the Ocean of God's grace --- Who is the Bestower of Favours, exceedingly Beneficent,
Hordes of (thirsty) people hurry towards you holding their bowls (in hand).*

*O (you who are) the Sun of the (spiritual) Kingdom of Beauty and Grace!
You have (spiritually) illuminated (the inhabitants of) the deserts as well as the cities.*

*A (group of) people (was fortunate that they) saw you, while others simply heard about you:
The (enchantingly beautiful) Full Moon which has cast a spell over me.*

In another poem the great poet, Allama Sharf-ud-Din Mohammad ibn Hasan al-Busairi, has written in his masterpiece the Qaseedah Burda,

¹ *Mohammad is No2 in Boys Names.* Times Online. Accessed 13/01/2008. [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1890354.ece] 'Muhammad is now second only to Jack as the most popular name for baby boys in Britain and is likely to rise to No 1 by next year, a study by The Times has found. The name, if all 14 different spellings are included, was shared by 5,991 newborn boys last year, beating Thomas into third place, followed by Joshua and Oliver.'

لَا طِيبَ يَعْدِلُ قُرْبًا ضَمَّ أَعْظَمَهُ طُوبَى لِمَنْتَشَفٍ مِنْهُومُلْتَمِسِمْ

*No perfume equals the dust (earth) which is touching his (the Holy Prophet's (saw)) body.
Glad tidings be to the person who smell it (the dust) and kisses it.*

Indeed, the love contained in the hearts of the righteous for the Holy Prophet (saw) is only overshadowed by the immense love which the Holy Prophet (saw) himself had for mankind. It was the outstanding character and endless love of the Holy Prophet (saw) which transformed the once primitive people of Arabia into blazing stars. The Promised Messiah (as) describes this magnificent revolution as follows,

جَاءُوكَ مِنْهُوْبَيْنَ كَالْعُرْيَانِ فَسَتَّرْتَهُمْ بِمَلَاْحِفِ الْإِيْمَانِ
صَادَفْتَهُمْ قَوْمًا كَرُوْثٍ ذِلَّةٍ فَجَعَلْتَهُمْ كَسَيْبِكَةِ الْعُقْيَانِ

*They came to you looted and naked,
And you cloaked them with the cloak of faith.
You found them dirty like a heap of dung,
And you made them clean like a piece of gold.*

The Promised Messiah (as) has outlined in his masterpiece work, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, that with the coming of the Holy Prophet (saw) so began the spiritual revolution of Arabia which later spread to the corners of the earth. He writes that there are, 'three springs from which human states flow, namely, the self that incites to evil, the self that reproves and the soul at rest'. In turn there are three distinct avenues of reform to which a person can turn²,

1. *The first is that senseless savages should be taught the elementary social values pertaining to eating, drinking, marriage etc. They should not go about naked nor eat carrion, like dogs, nor practise any other type of wildness. This is an elementary stage of the reform of natural conditions of the type that would have to be adopted, for instance, if it is desired to teach a savage from Port Blair, the elementary ways of human behaviour.*
2. *The second method of reform is that when a person has adopted elementary human ways, he may be taught the higher moral qualities and should be instructed to employ his faculties in their proper places and on their proper occasions.*
3. *The third method of reform is that those who have acquired high moral qualities should be given a taste of the draught of the love of and union with God.*

The Promised Messiah (as) proceeds to describe the low spiritual and physical status of the inhabitants of Arabia before the advent of the Holy Prophet (saw)³ and how

² *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. Pg.12.

³ The Promised Messiah (as) writes, 'Our lord and master, the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was raised at a time when the world had been thoroughly corrupted. As God

the Holy Prophet (saw) was the catalyst which ignited Arabia from darkness into a glowing spiritual state in which they overcame each of the above three stages.

I would like to draw your attention to two deeply intense narrations which very beautifully offer mankind an insight into the unparalleled love and care which the Holy Prophet (saw) kept in his heart for each and every one of Allah's (swt) blessed creation. On one occasion the Holy Prophet (saw) was sat with Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud (ra) and asked him to recite the Holy Qur'an. Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud (ra) was shy to recite in front of the Holy Prophet (saw) and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, should I recite it to you when it has been revealed to you?', to which the Holy Prophet (saw) replied, 'I love to hear it from another person'. Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud (ra) then began to recite the Holy Qur'an and specifically from Surah Nisaa, eventually reciting the verse,

((فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جِئْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ عَلَىٰ هَؤُلَاءِ شَهِيدًا))

"And how will it fare with them when We shall bring a witness from every people, and shall bring thee (O Mohammad) as a witness against these!" [4:42]

Almighty has said: 'Corruption has spread over land and sea' (30:42). This means that the people of the book, as well as those who had no experience of revelation, had all been corrupted.

The purpose of the Holy Quran was to revive the dead, as is said: 'Know that Allah is about to revive the earth after its death' (57:18). At that time the people of Arabia were steeped in barbarism. No social pattern prevailed and they took pride in every type of sin and misconduct. A man married an unlimited number of wives, and they were all addicted to the use of everything unlawful. They considered it lawful to marry their mothers, and that is why God Almighty had to prescribe: 'Your mothers are made unlawful for you' (4:24).

They ate carrion and some of them were even cannibals. There is not a sin of which they were not guilty. Most of them did not believe in the after life. Many of them denied the existence of God. They killed their female infants with their own hands. They killed orphans and devoured their substance. They had the appearance of human beings but were bereft of reason. They possessed no modesty, no shame, and no self respect. They drank liquor like water. The one among them who indulged indiscriminately in fornication was acknowledged as the chief of his tribe. They were so utterly ignorant that their neighbouring people called them the unlettered ones. At such time and for the reform of such people, our lord and master, the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, appeared in Mecca. This was the time that called for the three types of reform that we have just mentioned.' [The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam. Pp.13-14.]

In his poem Al-Qaseedah the Promised Messiah (as) has beautifully described this spiritual shift,

قَدْ دَعَوْا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَنُفُوسَهُمْ وَتَبَرَّعُوا مِنْ كُلِّ نَسَبٍ فَانِ
ظَهَرَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ بَيِّنَاتُ رَسُولِهِمْ فَتَمَرَّقَ الْأَهْوَاءُ كَالْأَوْثَانِ

They said good-bye to their low desires, to their low passions,
They abandoned all earthly property.

The truth of their prophet dawned on them,
Their low desires vanished like things of no consequence.

Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud (ra) relates that upon reciting this particular verse he could see tears flowing from the blessed eyes of the Beloved of Allah (saw). This is indeed the true example of unreserved love⁴.

On another occasion it is reported by Hadhrat Abdullah ibn Omar (ra) that one day when a solar eclipse occurred the Holy Prophet (saw) entered the Masjid and began to pray. His prayer was so intense that he stood in each part of the prostration (qiyaam, ruku', sajdah) for so long that it was as if he would not continue to the next. The Holy Prophet (saw) began taking heavy breaths and crying uncontrollably whilst he could be heard pleading with Allah (swt) saying, '*O Allah you had promised me⁵ that in my presence you will not punish the Ummah. O Allah it is only You that have promised that when these people make istighfar there will be no punishment*⁶. Such was the love of the Holy Prophet (saw); he deeply loved mankind and it is for that very reason that he remains a living example and leader in millions of homes across the planet.

The essay before you is concerned with a specific set people who are to be counted amongst the greatest of the companions and richest in their love for Allah (swt), His blessed Prophet (saw) and the noble quest for knowledge. These people were the As'hab us-Suffah and it is fundamentally important that we each come to know about, appreciate, and love the contribution of these great individuals to both Islam and the evolution of the human spirit. As will be later established, the Holy Prophet (saw) undoubtedly loved and cared for these men of humility and this fact alone is reason enough for us to love them with every shred of our very being.

2. The Suffah

In the early days of Islam the Qiblah was not Baitul Haraam but instead Muslims prayed towards Jerusalem (Bait-ul-Quds). The Holy Prophet (saw) prayed towards Jerusalem out of obedience to the Will of Allah (swt) however his heart was always inclined towards the Ka'aba. For this reason, when in Mecca, he would always position himself in the prayer so that he was facing both the Ka'aba and Jerusalem⁷. After the migration of the Muslims to Medina (hijra) the Holy Prophet (saw) was not able to continue this and he (saw), with the companions, would pray only towards Jerusalem. The positioning of Jerusalem dictated that they would stand in the South-Western part of the Prophet's Mosque⁸. This lasted until Allah (swt) revealed the verse,

⁴ Shamaa'il Tirmidhi. 306/2 (Pg.329)

⁵ This promise is said to be a reference to the revelation, [8:34]

((وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَأَنْتَ فِيهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ)) - 'But Allah would not punish them while thou wast among them, and Allah would not punish them while they sought forgiveness.'

⁶ Shamaa-il Tirmidhi. 307/3 (Pg.330)

⁷ For more information see Tafsir-ul-Kabir. Khalifatul Masih II. Ft.151.

⁸ Chapters from the History of Madina. Pg.35.

((قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ
بِعَاقِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ))

Verily, We see thee turning thy face often to heaven; surely, then, will we make thee turn to the Qiblah which thou likest. So turn thy face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your faces towards it. And they to whom the Book has been given know that this is the truth from their Lord; and Allah is not unmindful of what they do. [2:144]

After this the Southern door of the Prophet's Mosque was closed and a new one was opened in the Northern part of the Mosque facing the new Qiblah, Baitul Haraam⁹. Under the instructions of the Holy Prophet (saw) a shade was then erected which was fixed to the wall where the old Qiblah used to be situated (this was now the back wall of the Mosque). The type of shade, or raised bench, which was erected, is known in Arabic as a Suffah (صفة) and this is why that quarter of the Mosque became known as Al-Suffah¹⁰.

The Suffah was not an enclosed space but was open on three sides and became a place which many of the poorer companions would occupy. The great scholar of hadith Hadhrat Ibn Hajr al-Asqalani (ra) relates to us in his work Fath-ul-Bari that¹¹, 'As-Suffahh is the place in the back portion of the Prophet's Masjid. It had a covering and was prepared so that estranged people could stay there, people who had neither homes nor families'.

3. As'hab us-Suffah

Many historical records tell us that the people who lived in the place of Suffah (sometimes referred to as 'The People of the Bench or Veranda') were those individuals who either had no family or were too poor to afford their own accommodation. Whilst this is true in part it does an injustice to those companions who chose to live in the place of Suffah because of their burning desire to shun all worldly objects and completely annihilate themselves in the service of Allah (swt) and love of His Messenger (saw). These people were not few in number and sacrificed all of the temptations of this world in search of a far greater reward in the Hereafter¹².

⁹ IBID. Pg.35

¹⁰ Hadhrat Chaudhry Muhammad Zafrullah Khan (ra) describes the area as follows, 'In one corner of the mosque a covered platform was prepared which was known as Suffah. This served as the resting place of indigent Emigrants, who had nowhere else to go to. This was their home and they became known as the Dwellers of Suffah'. Muhammad; Seal of the Prophets. Pg.84.

¹¹ "وَأَنَّ الصِّفَّةَ مَكَانَ مُؤَخَّرِ الْمَسْجِدِ النَّبَوِيِّ مِثْلَ مَنْزِلِ الْغُرَبَاءِ فِيهِ مَنْ لَا مَأْوَى لَهُمْ وَلَا أَهْلٌ" Fath-ul-Bari.Hadith 3581 For the English translation see: As-Sallaabee. The Noble Life of the Prophet. Vol.2. Pg.735.

¹² Of the companions who chose a life of asceticism were Abu Hurairah, Ka'ab ibn Malik al-Ansari, Hanzala ibn Amir al-Ansari, Harithah ibn al-Nu'man al-Ansari (most of these companions had houses in Medina but chose to live in the Suffah). For more information see Medinan Society at the Time of the Prophet. Pg.87; The following verses beautifully express the sacrifice of those companions,

وَقَدْ افْتَنَّاكَ أُولُو النَّهْيِ وَبَصِيقِهِمْ وَدَعُوا تَذَكَّرَ مَعَهُدِ الْوُطَّانِ

The great Islamic thinker Hadhrat Chaudhry Muhammad Zafrullah Khan (ra) has commented on the As'hab us-Suffah writing¹³,

'They enjoyed the company of the Holy Prophet most of the time, and occupied themselves with worship and the recitation of the Holy Quran. They had no permanent means of subsistence. The Holy Prophet looked after them, and shared with them whatever became available to himself and to members of his family. On occasion, the latter went without, and whatever was available was sent to the Dwellers of Suffah. Ansar also offered them hospitality, so far as they could afford it. Nevertheless, these people often faced starvation. This continued for several years till some of them began to find gainful occupation, and the national treasury could also afford to provide them with some relief.'

The precise number of the As'hab us-Suffah is not known but it is estimated that the Suffah could hold up to three hundred people at any one time and that roughly seventy people made up its' permanent residents¹⁴. The initial inhabitants of the Suffah were members of the Muhajirun who were without any accommodation but as time passed the Suffah would house people from many different areas who could find no other place to live. The famous scholar Abu Nu'aym is one of the few people who has named members of the As'hab us-Suffah, he lists a total of fifty-one companions who are agreed upon and are as listed below¹⁵,

1. Abu Huraira¹⁶
2. Abu Darr al-Ghifari
3. Wathilah Ibn Asqa
4. Qays ibn Tahfah al-Ghifari
5. Ka'ab ibn Malik al-Ansari
6. Sa'eed ibn Malik ibn Hadhim al-Jumahi
7. Salman al-Farsi¹⁷

قَدْ آتَرُوكَ وَقُورًا أَحْبَابِعُمْ وَتَبَاعَدُوا مِنْ حَلْقِهِ اللَّخْوَانِ

The wise chose you, and true in their faith,
They forgot their hearts and homes.

They chose you, and withdrew from their friends,
And removed themselves from their kith and kin.

(Hadhrt Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Al-Qaseedah)

¹³ Muhammad; Seal of the Prophets. pp.84-85.

¹⁴ Medinan Society at the Time of the Prophet. Pg.86.

¹⁵ IBID. Pg.88. Also. Abu Nu'aym, al-Hilyah. 1/339. 341.

¹⁶ Abu Huraira (literally father of the kitten) was a great companion and related the most ahadith of all the companions (a mammoth 5374 ahadith). After the death of the Holy Prophet (saw) he was appointed by Hadhrt Omar (ra) as the governor of Bahrain.

¹⁷ A great companion of the Holy Prophet (saw) who was sold into slavery more than ten times before becoming a Muslim. He received the greatest of praises in the following hadith, 'While we were sitting with the Prophet Surat Al-Jumu'a was revealed to him, and when the Verse, "And He (Allah) has sent him (Muhammad) also to other (Muslims)....' (62.3) was recited by the Prophet, I said, "Who are they, O Allah's Apostle?" The Prophet did not reply till I repeated my question thrice. At that time, Salman Al-Farisi was with us. So Allah's Apostle put his hand on Salman, saying, "If Faith were at (the place of) Ath-Thuraiya (pleiades, the highest star), even then (some men or man from these people (i.e. Salman's folk) would attain it."

8. Asma ibn Harithah ibn Sa'eed al-Aslami
9. Hanzala ibn Abu Amir al-Ansari
10. Hazim ibn Harmala
11. Harithah ibn Nu'man al-Ansari al-Najjari
12. Hudhayfah ibn Usayd Abu Surayhah al-Ansari
13. Hudhayfah ibn Yaman¹⁸
14. Jariyah ibn Jamil ibn Shabah ibn Qirt
15. Ju'ayl ibn Suraqah ibn al-Dumari
16. Jurhad ibn Khuwaylid al-Aslami
17. Rafa'ah Abu Lubabah al-Ansari
18. Abd Allah Dhu al-Bijadayn
19. Dukayn ibn Sa'eed al-Mazani
20. Khubayb ibn Yasaf ibn Anabah
21. Kharim ibn Aws al-Ta'i
22. Kharim ibn Fatik al-Asadi
23. Khunays ibn Hadhafah al-Sahami
24. Khabbab ibn al-Art¹⁹
25. Al-Hakam ibn Umayr al-Thamali
26. Harmalah ibn Ayas
27. Zayd ibn al-Khattab²⁰
28. Abd Allah ibn Masud²¹
29. Al-Tafawi al-Dawsi
30. Talhah ibn Amr al-Nadri
31. Safwa ibn Bayda al-Fahri
32. Suhayb ibn Sanan al-Rumi²²
33. Shaddad ibn Usaym
34. Shaqran²³
35. Al-Sa'eeb ibn Khalad
36. Salim ibn Umayr
37. Salim ibn Ubayd al-Ashja'i
38. Safinah²⁴
39. Salim²⁵
40. Abu Fazin

¹⁸ He was a very pious and spiritual person who was known for his excellent manners and tremendous fear of Allah (swt). He was appointed by Hadhrat Omar (ra) as the Governor of Mada'in.

¹⁹ He was a sword maker who entered Islam and was badly tortured by the members of the polytheists of the Qureysh. Asha'abi is reported to have said, '*Khabbab withstood all the horrors that the polytheists exposed him to. They went so far as to place burning stones onto his naked back until his flesh came off*'. (Khaalid Muhammad Khaalid. Men Around the Messenger. Pg185.)

²⁰ The older brother of Hadhrat Omar (ra) who was a heroic warrior and met with martyrdom on the day of Yammama after he famously killed the deceiver Al-Rajjal.

²¹ It is doubted by some that Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud lived in the Suffah but he was nevertheless a great companion and held as one of the most knowledgeable in the Islamic sciences.

²² He was the son of a powerful Arab but was taken and sold into slavery at a young age. Despite being an Arab he had a foreign accent as he grew up in Roman lands. Through a miraculous set of events he came to be in Mecca and accepted Islam at the hand of the Holy Prophet (saw). He was greatly loved by the Holy Prophet (saw) and when Hadhrat Omar (ra) suffered from the fatal blow which ended his life he instructed that Hadhrat Rumi lead the prayers.

²³ Mawla of the Holy Prophet (saw).

²⁴ Mawla of the Holy Prophet (saw).

²⁵ Mawla of Abi Hudhaifah. The Holy Prophet (saw) famously said, '*Take the Qur'an from four people: Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, Saalim, Ubai ibn Ka'ab and Mu'adh ibn Jabal*'.

41. Al-Agharr al-Mazani
42. Bilal ibn Rabah²⁶
43. Al-Barra ibn Malik al-Ansari
44. Thawban²⁷
45. Thabit ibn Wadi'ah al-Ansari
46. Thaqif ibn Amr ibn Shamit al-Asadi
47. Sa'ad ibn Malik Abu Sa'id al-Khudari
48. Al-Arbad ibn Sariyah
49. Ghurfah al-Azadi
50. Abd al-Rahman ibn Qirt
51. Abbad ibn Khalid al-Ghifari

4. Characteristics of As'hab us-Suffah

As has been mentioned the As'hab us-Suffah were a group of people who were predominantly poor and had no family. This was a state which developed and changed over many years with people leaving the Suffah after marriage or when they were blessed with additional provisions. Their general condition improved in the later Madinan days as the poverty and financial depression which had struck Medina improved.

However, the hardship which they were made to undergo should not be taken as a light matter, they were made to endure such devastating tribulations that their very dignity and lives were almost extinguished on many occasions. The Suffah was a structure which was not enclosed or sealed. As it was open to the forces of nature the As'hab us-Suffah sometimes had an untidy outward appearance as their cloths and skin would often be covered in dust. The cloths which they wore were made of a thin and weak material which was hardly adequate enough in size to cover their bodies. This caused many of them great personal discomfort as they became embarrassed to enter the Mosque to pray²⁸. The situation became so distraught that many of the As'hab us-Suffah were made to wear a thin loin cloth²⁹. As the Suffah was an open structure and the As'hab us-Suffah were without sufficient clothing they had no defense against the cold winter nights of Medina.

The companions would sometimes go without food for long periods of time and endure great hunger. Some of the As'hab us-Suffah, Abu Hurairah being the most famous example, would physically fall unconscious when praying in Masjid An-Nabawi. One should pause here for a moment and reflect upon the magnitude of the pure desire and firm obedience of these individuals that despite suffering from hunger and the cold they would rather risk falling unconscious than miss a prayer. When food was available they would often be limited to eating dates which would be distributed amongst them all evenly. It is narrated that they were so just in the distribution of the little food they had that if one of them would eat two dates

²⁶ Hadhrat Bilal (ra) was a close companion of the Holy Prophet (saw), the Muezzin of the Holy Prophet, guaranteed the blessing of entering Jannah, and the freed slave of Hadhrat Abu Bakr (ra).

²⁷ Mawla of the Holy Prophet (saw). Hadhrat Thawban (ra) was deeply in love with the Holy Prophet (saw) and could always be found in close proximity to the Holy Prophet (saw).

²⁸ Medinan Society at the Time of the Prophet. Pg.91.

²⁹ IBID. Also see Sahih Al-Bukhari 1/114; Ibn Sa'ad. Al-Tabaqat. 1/255.

together he would tell the other companions that he had taken two and that they should take one extra³⁰.

The hunger which they suffered from was something they could simply not avoid due to the dictates of their circumstance and so in order to overcome this great trial they would engulf themselves in the remembrance of Allah (swt). Surely Allah (swt) has promised,

((وَلَنبَلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاغِبُونَ أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ))

And We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and fruits; but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.

Who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say, 'Surely, to Allah we belong and to Him shall we return.'

It is these on whom descend blessings from their Lord and also mercy, and it is these who are rightly guided. [2:156-8]

The desperation of the trial they were made to undergo is better understood through the words of Hadhrat Abu Hurairah (ra) who said, 'By Allah except Whom none has the right to- be worshipped, (sometimes) I used to lay (sleep) on the ground on my liver (abdomen) because of hunger, and (sometimes) I used to bind a stone over my belly because of hunger'.

Such trials are only entered upon and embraced by those individuals who have embarked upon the journey towards the highest stations of spirituality. The Promised Messiah (as) described the severe hunger he himself endured as follows,

I have often thought that if a corpulent person, who is also a wrestler, had to starve along with me, he would die before I could feel any acute need for food. This experience taught me that one can progress stage by stage in starving oneself and that until one's body becomes accustomed to such privations a comfort loving person is not fit to accomplish stages of spiritual progress. But I would not advise everyone to embark upon such a discipline, nor did I do so of my own accord. I have known many ignorant dervishes who adopted a course of hard physical discipline and in the end lost their sanity and spent the rest of their lives in madness or became afflicted with various diseases such as tuberculosis, etc.

Not all humans possess similar mental faculties. Those whose faculties are naturally weak cannot bear any physical discipline. Very soon, they are afflicted with some

³⁰ Even this was an act of complete obedience to the instruction of the Holy Prophet (saw), 'Narrated Ibn 'Umar: The Prophet decreed that one should not eat two dates together at a time unless he gets the permission from his companions (sharing the meal with him).' Sahih Al- Bukhari. Vol.3, Bk.44, No.669.

dangerous disease. It is better that one should not subject oneself to a rigorous physical discipline on one's own. Rather one should adopt the faith of simple people. Of course, if one receives a revelation from God and it is not opposed to the magnificent Shariah of Islam, it must be carried out.

However, the foolish fakirs of today teach disciplines which do not result in any good. One should stay away from them.

Keep in mind that it was on the basis of a clear vision from God Almighty that I carried out rigorous physical discipline for eight or nine months and tasted hunger and thirst. Then I stopped its continuous practice, but did revert to it occasionally'

The link here is made by the Promised Messiah (as) between the way with which physical hunger can act, in certain circumstances, as a source which feeds one's spiritual hunger. The great servant of Allah (swt) Bashir Orchard (ra) has expounded upon this subject and beautifully drawn readers towards the relationship between the physical and spiritual hunger of mankind in his book 'Guide Posts' where he writes³¹,

Once there was a lady suffering from general ill-health. She was advised to move to a warmer climate from where she wrote letters to her friends extolling the lovely weather, beautiful scenery and luscious fruits. She wrote in glowing words about the variety of tempting fruits. However she always referred to her lack of appetite. Later news was received that she had died despite the abundance of health building fruits. She did not die from the absence of nourishing food but from the want of appetite. So it is with many of us. We live in the midst of abundant spiritual guidance but we have no appetite for it. God has provided us with heavenly nourishment but most of us do not hunger for it. Only those with spiritual appetite assuage their hunger with God's heavenly fruits which sustain them not only for the moment but during the days that lie ahead [...] He who earnestly seeks to appease his spiritual hunger constantly seeks and absorbs spiritual food. He feeds his mind with holy thoughts and incessantly strives to improve his character which he regards as his first duty. This is the central aim of life. His innermost desire is to climb higher and higher in holy living and he perpetually strives to better himself towards this end being aware that it requires of him attention, effort, sacrifice and prayer:

*Beauty and truth and all that these contain,
Drop not like ripened fruit about our feet;
We climb to them through years of sweat and pain.*

The As'hab us-Suffah were the great lovers of Allah (swt) and their example was inspired with the blessed quest for the very spiritual food which is alluded to in the above quotation. They spent their days in deep reflection and would always aspire to find new ways to expand their knowledge and serve the Holy Prophet (saw). From amongst them we discover some of the most prominent companions in the field of knowledge. Hadhrat Abu Huraira(ra), who was generally accepted as the most prominent of the As'hab us-Suffah, was renowned for having an exquisite memory. Anyone familiar with ahadith will understand just how important he was in this field having put to heart the highest number of ahadith reaching a staggering total of

³¹ Bashir Ahmad Orchard. Guide Posts. Pp.78-79.

5374³². On this issue we find an enlightening narration of Hadhrat Abu Hurairah (ra) who said³³,

'You people say that Abu Huraira tells many narrations from Allah's Apostle and you also wonder why the emigrants and Ansar do not narrate from Allah's Apostle as Abu Huraira does. My emigrant brothers were busy in the market while I used to stick to Allah's Apostle content with what fills my stomach; so I used to be present when they were absent and I used to remember when they used to forget, and my Ansari brothers used to be busy with their properties and I was one of the poor men of Suffa. I used to remember the narrations when they used to forget. No doubt, Allah's Apostle once said, "Whoever spreads his garment till I have finished my present speech and then gathers it to himself, will remember whatever I will say." So, I spread my colored garment which I was wearing till Allah's Apostle had finished his saying, and then I gathered it to my chest. So, I did not forget any of their narrations'

His absolute resoluteness to always be close to the Holy Prophet (saw) is indicative of many of the As'hab us-Suffah. Hadhrat Bilal ibn Rabah (ra) was a close companion of the Holy Prophet (saw) and indeed the muezzin of the Holy Prophet (saw). Another member of the As'hab us-Suffah was Hadhrat Salman al-Farsi (ra) of whom the Promised Messiah (as) is a descendant. Hadhrat Salman (ra) was also a very close companion of the Holy Prophet (saw) and an expert in the Christian and the Zoroastrian faith. He is known as the first person to translate parts of the Qur'an into a different language translating it into Persian. Both Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud (ra) and Hadhrat Saalim (ra) were two of the four companions from whom the Holy Prophet (saw) said it is permissible to take the Qur'an. These great individuals were filled with such a great thirst for knowledge that one of the As'hab us-Suffah gave Hadhrat Ubaada ibn Saimat (ra) his bow in return that he would teach him, and the other As'hab us-Suffah, verses of the Qur'an and how to read and write³⁴.

Their services to Islam were not limited to the Suffah and whenever the call for Jihad was made they were ever ready to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield despite being hungry, without proper provisions and with insufficient armour. Let us here pause and remember some of the great members of the As'hab us-Suffah who laid their lives down for Islam and entered the fold of the Shuhudaa³⁵,

Battle of Badr

Safwan ibn Baidaa (ra)

Khuraim ibn Faatik (ra)

Al-Asdee (ra)

Khubaib ibn Yasaaf (ra)

Saalim ibn Umair (ra)

Haarithab ibn Al-No'maan Al-Ansari (ra)

³² Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi. Hadith Literature. Pg.27; '(Abu Huraira) was recognised by Muhammad himself as the most anxious Muslim for the knowledge of Hadith'

³³ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.3, Bk.34, No.263.

³⁴ As-Sallabee. Vol.2, Pg.738.

³⁵ IBID. Pg.738.

Battle of Uhud
Hanzala al-Ghaseel (ra)

Battle of Hudaibiyah
Jurbud ibn Khumailid (ra)
Abu Sareeba Al-Ghaffaree (ra)

Battle of Khaibar
Thaqeef ibn Ame (ra)

Battle of Tabook
Abdullah Dhul Bijadain (ra)

Battle of Yamaama
Saalim (ra)
Zaid ibn Al-Khattab (ra)

May Allah (swt) grant each of their blessed souls a lofty station in heaven,
Insha'Allah. Ameen³⁶

((وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ))

'Think not of those, who have been slain in the cause of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living, in the presence of their Lord, and are granted gifts from Him' [3:170]

The As'hab us-Suffah left behind a great legacy which is said by some to have been more acutely adopted by the members of the Ummah that are associated with the science of tasawwuf. It is suggested by some commentators that the Sufis have taken their title (Suf) from the As'hab us-Suffah. What is certainly clear is that the spirit of the People of the Bench, and their complete shunning of fitn³⁷, is to be found in the actions and words of all the great Sufis.

5. Love of the Holy Prophet (saw) for the As'hab us-Suffah

The relationship of the As'hab us-Suffah with the Holy Prophet (saw) was very similar to the relationship of the Promised Messiah (as) with a group of his close companions. The following extract from the writings of the Promised Messiah (as)

³⁶ Commenting on companions laying down their lives the Promised Messiah (as) writes, *'the hearts of the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were so inspired by the love of God, and they were so affected by the spiritual attention of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), that they sacrificed themselves in the cause of God like sheep and goats. Can anyone show us followers of any previous Prophet, who demonstrated such sincerity and devotion?' [Essence of Islam. Vol.3, Pg.150.]*

³⁷ Fitn is the plural of the Arabic word Fitnah (فتنة) and is defined by Lane as, *'a burning of fire, a melting of (metals) in order to distinguish the bad from the good, a means whereby the condition of aman is evinced in respect of good or evil, punishment, chastisement, conflict among people, faction and sedition, discord, dissension, difference of opinions, a misleading, causing to err, seduction, temptation'.* [Edward Lane. Arab-English Lexicon. Pg2336.]

matches the exact spirit the As'hab us-Suffah had in proximity to the Holy Prophet (saw)³⁸,

"Then there are those who would come and live here permanently with me, as did the As'hab al-Suffa in the time of Holy Prophet, only to listen and learn about religious matters. I have to look to heaven for their maintenance. I also know that means to run the five branches of the work will be found. They will be found by the Powerful Lord Himself"

The Holy Prophet (saw) could easily be described as the guardian of the As'hab us-Suffah as he not only looked after their every need but was ever filled with a unique love for them. He (saw), more than anyone, understood and knew the value of their sacrifice. The author sought after the appropriate words to describe the love of the Holy Prophet (saw) for the As'hab us-Suffah and found them in the very words of the Beloved of Allah (saw)³⁹,

"I am closer to the believers than their selves in this world and in the Hereafter, and if you like, you can read Allah's Statement: "The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves." (33.6) So, if a true believer dies and leaves behind some property, it will be for his inheritors (from the father's side), and if he leaves behind some debt to be paid or needy offspring, then they should come to me as I am the guardian of the deceased."

A close study of the As'hab us-Suffah is testament to the fact that the Holy Prophet (saw) was indeed so conscious about the needs of the companions that even they themselves were less aware of their own needs. Regarding their physical well being the Holy Prophet (saw) took great care to provide them with whatever he could from his own humble share. His willingness to share with them literally whatever he physically had in his house, and to even deny his own family, is illustrated when he invited some of the As'hab us-Suffah to his home and all that was on his table was barley. On the companions entering he (saw) said⁴⁰, *'By Him Whose hand is the soul of Mohammad, what you see here is all the food that is here tonight with the family of Mohammad'*. Even when the Holy Prophet (saw) would receive Sadaqa he would not take a penny but rather distribute it amongst the As'hab us-Suffah. Likewise if he was given any gift he only kept for himself a small portion and distributed the rest to the As'hab us-Suffah⁴¹.

The sincere love of the Holy Prophet (saw), and a pure manifestation of the above hadith, *I am closer to the believers than their selves*, was demonstrated in the following heart wrenching narration concerning Hadhrat Abu Hurairah⁴²,

'By Allah except Whom none has the right to be worshipped, (sometimes) I used to lay (sleep) on the ground on my liver (abdomen) because of hunger, and (sometimes) I used to

³⁸ Victory of Islam. P.18.

³⁹ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.3, Bk.41, No.584.

⁴⁰ Medinan Society at the Time of the Prophet. Pg.92; Also see Ibn Sa'd. Tabaqat. 1/256.

⁴¹ IBID

⁴² Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.8, Bk.76, No.459.

bind a stone over my belly because of hunger. One day I sat by the way from where they (the Prophet and his companions) used to come out. When Abu Bakr passed by, I asked him about a Verse from Allah's Book and I asked him only that he might satisfy my hunger, but he passed by and did not do so. Then Umar passed by me and I asked him about a Verse from Allah's Book, and I asked him only that he might satisfy my hunger, but he passed by without doing so. Finally Abu-l-Qasim (the Prophet) passed by me and he smiled when he saw me, for he knew what was in my heart and on my face. He said, "O Aba Hirr (Abu Huraira)!" I replied, "Labbaik, O Allah's Apostle!" He said to me, "Follow me." He left and I followed him.

Then he entered the house and I asked permission to enter and was admitted. He found milk in a bowl and said, "From where is this milk?" They said, "It has been presented to you by such-and-such man (or by such and such woman)." He said, "O Aba Hirr!" I said, "Labbaik, O Allah's Apostle!" He said, "Go and call the people of Suffa to me." These people of Suffa were the guests of Islam who had no families, nor money, nor anybody to depend upon, and whenever an object of charity was brought to the Prophet, he would send it to them and would not take anything from it, and whenever any present was given to him, he used to send some for them and take some of it for himself. The order of the Prophet upset me, and I said to myself, "How will this little milk be enough for the people of As-Suffa?" thought I was more entitled to drink from that milk in order to strengthen myself, but behold! The Prophet came to order me to give that milk to them. I wondered what will remain of that milk for me, but anyway, I could not but obey Allah and His Apostle so I went to the people of As-Suffa and called them, and they came and asked the Prophet's permission to enter. They were admitted and took their seats in the house.

The Prophet said, "O Aba-Hirr!" I said, "Labbaik, O Allah's Apostle!" He said, "Take it and give it to them." So I took the bowl (of Milk) and started giving it to one man who would drink his fill and return it to me, whereupon I would give it to another man who, in his turn, would drink his fill and return it to me, and I would then offer it to another man who would drink his fill and return it to me. Finally, after the whole group had drunk their fill, I reached the Prophet who took the bowl and put it on his hand, looked at me and smiled and said. "O Aba Hirr!" I replied, "Labbaik, O Allah's Apostle!" He said, "There remain you and I." I said, "You have said the truth, O Allah's Apostle!" He said, "Sit down and drink." I sat down and drank. He said, "Drink," and I drank. He kept on telling me repeatedly to drink, till I said, "No. By Allah Who sent you with the Truth, I have no space for it (in my stomach)." He said, "Hand it over to me." When I gave him the bowl, he praised Allah and pronounced Allah's Name on it and drank the remaining milk.⁴³

⁴³ Commenting about the miracles of the Holy Prophet (saw) the Promised Messiah (as) writes, 'On many occasions, he multiplied water so much by dipping his fingers into a cup of water that the whole host and their camels and horses drank of it and yet the original quantity of the water was not diminished. On many occasions, by putting his hand upon three or four loaves of bread, he satisfied the hunger of thousands. On some occasions, he blessed a small quantity of milk with his lips and a company of people drank from it and were filled. On some occasions, by adding his saliva into a well of brackish water, he rendered it sweet. On some occasions, he healed severely wounded people of their injuries by placing his hands upon them. On some occasions, he replaced the eyeballs of people which had fallen out in consequence of some injury received in battle and healed them with the

The Holy Prophet (saw) would instruct the companions that if they had any surplus food they should offer it to the As'hab us-Suffah or that they should invite the As'hab us-Suffah to their homes. Even in this the Holy Prophet (saw) excelled above the companions as is shown in one narration where Hadhrat Abu Bakr (ra) took home three people and the Holy Prophet (saw) took ten with him⁴⁴. Commenting on the blessing of this scheme Hadhrat Abdur Rahman ibn Abi Bakr said⁴⁵, *'By Allah, whenever any one of us (myself and the guests of Suffa companions) took anything from the food, it increased from underneath. We all ate to our fill and the food was more than it was before its serving'*.

On one occasion Hadhrat Fatima (ra) heard that the Holy Prophet (saw) had some prisoners of war and requested that he (saw) allot her one of them to work in her home. Despite Hadhrat Fatima (ra) being the daughter of the Holy Prophet (saw), and that the Holy Prophet (saw) knew that her and Imam Ali (ra) had next to no provisions at their home⁴⁶ and that Hadhrat Fatima (ra) would come home with blisters on her hands from her work he (saw) replied⁴⁷, *'Shall I give a servant and leave the Ahlil Suffah to suffer from hunger? I could not give to you (Ali and Fatima) and leave the Ahl al-Suffah suffering from hunger'*. The Holy Prophet (saw) thus sold the prisoners of war and distributed the money to the As'hab us-Suffah.

On the blessed occasion of the birth of Hadhrat Al-Hasan (ra) the Holy Prophet (saw) instructed Hadhrat Fatima (ra) to give to the As'hab us-Suffah silver equal in worth to the weight of Al-Hasan's (ra) hair⁴⁸.

It also became the practice of some of the companions to hang branches of dates on a rope, which was tied between two pillars of Masjid An-Nabawi, for the As'hab us-Suffah and other needy people. Even then the Holy Prophet's (saw) love for the As'hab us-Suffah was so dear that he would survey the quality of the dates being donated. On one occasion The Holy Prophet (saw) is said to have reprimanded one companion for bringing sub-standard dates⁴⁹.

blessings of his hand. In this way, he did many other things by his personal power behind which worked Divine Power. ' [Essence of Islam, Vol. pp.274-5]

⁴⁴ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.1, Bk.10, No.576.

⁴⁵ IBID

⁴⁶ The blanket which Hadhrat Ali (ra) and Hadhrat Fatima (ra) shared was not large enough to cover them at night.

⁴⁷ Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Al-Musnad. 1/79. 106; Sahih Al-Bukhari. Bk.57, No. 3113.

⁴⁸ IBID. 6/390. 391.

⁴⁹ Madinan Society at the Time of the Prophet. Pg.94; Also Al-Samhudi. Wafa. 1/324-5.

6. Conclusion

The As'hab us-Suffah set an astonishingly highly spiritual standard for us to follow. They were not people of this world but sacrificed everything temporal for the reward of the Hereafter. They were the great lovers of Allah (swt) and it was that very love which caused them to serve, day and night, the greatest of Allah's creation (saw)⁵⁰. They evaporated their hearts in the love of the Holy Prophet (saw) and thus became an embodiment of the saying of the Holy Prophet⁵¹, *'None of you can be a Mo'min until his love for me is more than his love for his parents, children and all the people in the world'*. It is to these great champions of humanity that the world is indebted to for the scrupulous transmission of much of the knowledge that we now utilise on a daily basis. This was only as a result of them spending the minutes and seconds of their lives in remembrance of Allah (swt) and at the every beckoning of the Holy Prophet (saw)⁵². When contemplating upon the lives of the As'hab us-Suffah one cannot help but recall upon the saying of Hadhrat Hujat-e-Islam Imam Al-Ghazali (ra)⁵³,

'Everyone who has sold this life for the Hereafter is an ascetic in the worldly life. And everyone who sells the Hereafter for this life is also an ascetic, but in the Hereafter.'

Despite the great sacrifice of the As'hab us-Suffah one cannot help but be humbled and reduced to worthlessness when reflecting upon the overshadowing love and deeds of the Holy Prophet (saw). He was completely resolute in his selfless love for the As'hab us-Suffah and, as has been shown, always put the needs of himself and his family after those of the As'hab us-Suffah. Indeed, the As'hab us-Suffah were owed nothing by the Holy Prophet (saw) yet he gave them everything. Never did mankind hear truer words than those stated in the Holy Qur'an when Allah (swt) revealed,

⁵⁰ The Promised Messiah (as) has written, *'...the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) demonstrated such steadfastness and were so reconciled to death that any mention of their devotion brings tears to one's eyes. What was it that inspired them with such devotion? Whose hand was it that brought about such a change in them? In their pre-Islamic ignorance, there was no sin and no wrong that they did not commit. On becoming the followers of the Holy Prophetsa, they were so drawn to God, as if God dwelt within them. I tell you truly that it was the spiritual attention of the Holy Prophetsa that pulled them out of a low life into a holy one. Those who later entered Islam in hosts did not do so under the threat of a sword. They did so in consequence of the sincere supplications and humble and passionate prayers which the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) offered in Mecca for thirteen years, so that even the soil of Mecca confessed that it was under the blessed feet of him whose heart proclaimed the Unity of God so passionately that heaven was filled with his cries. God is Self-Sufficient. He does not care whether anyone is rightly guided or goes astray. The light of guidance which was so extraordinarily manifest in Arabia, and then spread to the rest of the world, was a consequence of the heartfelt desire of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.) Followers of every religion had digressed and strayed away from the spring of Tauhid [belief in the Unity of God] but it continued to flow in Islam. All these blessings were granted in answer to the supplications of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as God Almighty has said: 'Will you grieve yourself to death because they did not believe?' '* [Essence of Islam. Vol.3, Pg.135.]

⁵¹ Faza'il-e-A'Maal. Pg.255.

⁵² The author is here reminded of the saying of Imam Ali (ra), *'By Allah! To us the prophet (saw) was dearer than our riches, our children and our mothers, and more cherishable than a drink of cold water at the time of severest thirst.'* Sheikhu'l Hadith Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Kaandhlawi. Faza'il-e-a-'maal. Pg.255.

⁵³ Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali. Ihya Ulum Al-Din. The Fourth Book; On Poverty and Ascetism. Pg.457.

((وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ))

“And We have not sent thee but as a mercy for all peoples.” [21:108]

The ways and examples of the As’hab us-Suffah are as important today, if not more so, than during the days of the Holy Prophet (saw). Many living in today’s world may feel that the example set by the Holy Prophet (saw) and his As’hab us-Suffaa is beyond them, however, never has it been more necessary for us to inculcate the spirit of their example into our lives than today. The temptations of Fitn which surround us in the temporal world today are so vast that it is incumbent upon us to place the spirit of their actions into our own deeds so that we may attain the blessings of the next life. It is only after we make this conscious decision that we can hope to take benefit from the following prayer⁵⁴,

*‘God be in my head,
And in my understanding.
God be in my eyes,
And in my looking.
God be in my mouth,
And in my speaking.
God be in my heart,
And in my thinking.
God be at my end,
And at my parting.*

Let us eat the fruits of paradise from the table of the Lord!’

⁵⁴ Guide Posts. Pg.80.

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