

The Rightly Guided Caliphs: 'Uthman ibn Affan



'Uthman ibn Affan was the third leader of the Muslim *Ummah* after the death of Prophet Mohammad. He ruled for 12 years from 644 CE to 656 CE. The first years of his reign were tranquil but the later years were marred by strife and a rebellious movement.

Approximately seven years after Prophet Muhammad was born, 'Uthman ibn Affan was born into the Umayyad branch of the Quraysh tribe. They were

Mecca's most influential clan and 'Uthman was their so called golden boy. Good looking, shy, and modest, also wealthy and generous, 'Uthman was well respected, literate and well-travelled. 'Uthman's father, a wealthy merchant, died when 'Uthman was young and he inherited a flourishing business.

'Uthman was thirty-four years old when Abu Bakr called him to Islam, and history tells us that he was the fourth man to embrace Islam. 'Uthman's immediate response to Abu Bakr's call was based on certainty and firm belief. 'Uthman saw Islam as a new way that embraced his own moral code. He considered Islam a call to virtue. The bonds of brotherhood in Islam between 'Uthman ibn Affan and Prophet Muhammad were strengthened when 'Uthman married Prophet Muhammad's daughter Ruqayyah.

In the very early days of Islam, abuse of the followers of the new religion was rife. Muslims were tortured and killed and even 'Uthman's status as the golden boy of Quraish could not protect him. He was abused and tortured by his own uncle, who bound his arms and legs and locked him in a dark enclosed space. It was not long after this event that 'Uthman and his wife Ruqayyah participated in the first *hijrah*. They were part of a small group of Muslims who sort refuge in Abyssinia. After hearing a false rumor that the people of Mecca had all converted to Islam 'Uthman and some others returned to Mecca. They stayed to be close to the Prophet and be a part of the struggling new community.

At this time 'Uthman formed a close relationship with his father-in-law Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Muhammad was heard to refer to 'Uthman as his assistant. There is little doubt that he was instrumental in helping Prophet Muhammad establish the new Muslim *Ummah* in Medina. One hundred and forty-six *hadiths* are narrated by 'Uthman ibn Affan thus it is through him that we are able to understand some of the intricacies of worship. He is now as he was then a reference point for those trying to understand their religion on a deeper level.

At the time of the first battle between the new Muslim *Ummah* and the forces of Mecca, 'Uthman's wife Ruqayyah became sick and died. 'Uthman stayed with his wife through her illness and thus did not participate in the Battle of Badr. He was deeply saddened to lose his wife; the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, soon afterwards married him his other daughter Umm Kulthum. He thus became known as the man possessing two lights. The fact that Prophet Muhammad was amenable to 'Uthman marrying two of his daughters stands as

testament to the man's good and upstanding character and his dedication to the new religion of Islam.

Throughout the *Sunnah* and historical Islamic texts, we find constant reference to 'Uthman's kindness and generosity. It is mentioned that every Friday 'Uthman would buy slaves solely for the purpose of setting them free. When the Muslim armies were going to fight the Byzantines at Tabuk, Prophet Muhammad called on the wealthier people to support and equip the soldiers. "'Uthman presented 200 saddled camels and 200 ounces of gold. He also gave 1,000 dinars. Prophet Muhammad kept asking for donations hoping to inspire others to give as freely as 'Uthman. However, it was 'Uthman who continued to surpass them all and gave a total of 900 equipped camels.

During the caliphates of both Abu Bakr and Umar, 'Uthman remained close to them both. 'Uthman and Abu Bakr remained close friends and 'Uthman was the first person after Umar to offer his allegiance when Abu Bakr became *khalifah* (caliph). During the small wars that took place during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, 'Uthman remained in Medina as Abu Bakr's deputy and it was to 'Uthman that Abu Bakr dictated his will. In turn 'Uthman was the first person to offer allegiance to Umar. In 644 CE 'Uthman was appointed the third leader of the Muslim *Ummah*. He continued the humane and just rule of Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, and Umar.



One day while the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, was on the Mount of Uhud in Madinah, it shook and he struck it with a stick and said: "O Uhud, be firm! Indeed, upon you is a Prophet, a *Sid'deeq* (truth-teller) and two martyrs." The term '*Sid'deeq*' was in reference to Abu Bakr, the first Caliph in Islam, and the two martyrs were Umar

and 'Uthman. 'Uthman became a *khalifah* (caliph) after the assassination of Umar ibn Al-Khattab in 644 CE. He reigned for 12 years, and during his rule, all of Iran, most of North Africa, the Caucuses and Cyprus were added to the Islamic Caliphate. As he lay dying, Umar, the second Caliph of the *Ummah* appointed a council of six men to choose a new leader. Thus 'Uthman ibn Affan was appointed Caliph through a process of consultation and careful deliberation. 'Uthman was turning 70 when he took up this appointment. For many years he had refrained from the pleasures of this life in order to seek nearness to Allah so when he addressed the people as the newly elected Caliph it was no surprise that he set a tone of piety and concern and that this would be the symbol of his reign.

'Uthman was the first Caliph to organize a navy. He reorganized the administrative divisions of the *Ummah* and expanded and initiated many public projects. Under 'Uthman's rule many mosques, schools and guest houses were built throughout the ever expanding Caliphate. He oversaw the building of canals to encourage agriculture and lifted the restrictions on buying land in the conquered territories. People loved 'Uthman as he was extremely generous and he organized a structured welfare system for those who were less fortunate. Through this system people enjoyed luxuries that the Caliph himself didn't enjoy. Along with this exemplary quality, 'Uthman was very firm and strict when it came to matters of justice. He had no favoritism towards his family in this regard; once his half-brother was brought forth to be punished for a crime that he had done, the punishment wasn't lessened or waived on account of his relation to the Caliph.

“Uthman was also a very humble and could be seen sleeping alone in the mosque wrapped in a blanket with no companions or body guards around him, or riding on a mule. He was a devout man who loved the Quran with a passion. It was during his reign that the various dialects in which the Quran can be recited were standardized into one copy known today as ‘*Mushaf ‘Uthman*’. This standardized copy was unanimously accepted by the *Ummah* and it is the same copy that we read today.

Although the Caliphate was expanding rapidly, people with ulterior motives began to spread seeds of dissent among the young and inexperienced; thus, the final years of “Uthman’s reign was marked by a rebellion. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, prophesized that this would occur, as he said: “Islam will run smoothly as a well-placed grinding stone, until the year 35.” The year 35 marks the year in which “Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him, was killed.

The rebels who had gathered in Madinah from various parts of the Caliphate besieged the home of “Uthman for 40 days, in which he was even prevented access to drinking water. “Uthman came out to address them, but some of them were unconvinced. At first, they were held at bay by the battalion of companions that stood guard by his home among whom were Al-Hasan and Al-Hussain (the children of Ali), may Allah be pleased with them all. “Uthman ordered them all back to their homes as he did not want to shed the blood of anyone. After they left the rebels broke into his house and murdered him in front of his wife. As the assassin’s sword struck, “Uthman was reciting the following: **“So Allah will suffice for you against them. And He is the All Hearer, the All Knower.” (Quran 2:137)**

Prophet Muhammad had prophesized that “Uthman would be placed in a very difficult situation when he said, “Perhaps God will clothe you with a shirt, “Uthman, and if the people want you to take it off, do not take it off for them.” Although these rebels demanded he step down as Caliph, he refused and did not give in to their demands. His love for God and his Messenger kept him both strong and humble in the face of old age and extreme difficulty.

Take the Quiz

1) Select a true statement with regards to the life of Uthman ibn Affan.

- A. *Due to his popularity he escaped the torture and abuse meted out to the followers during the very early days of Islam.*
- B. *He and his wife Ruqayyah participated in the first hijra.*
- C. *He was married to two of Prophet Muhammad's daughters simultaneously.*
- D. *He was the first person to offer his allegiance when Abu Bakr became caliph.*

2) Select a true statement.

- A. *The first years of his reign were tranquil but the later years were marred by strife and a rebellious movement.*
- B. *The entire period of Uthman ibn Affan's reign remained tranquil.*
- C. *The entire period of Uthman ibn Affan's reign was marred by internal conflict and strife.*
- D. *The first years of Uthman ibn Affan's reign were marred by internal conflict and strife however it became stable and tranquil in the later years.*

3) Which of the following characteristics belonged to Uthman ibn Affan?

- A. *Generous.*
- B. *Literate.*
- C. *Modest.*
- D. *All of the above.*

4) History shows that Uthman ibn Affan was called to embrace Islam by Abu Bakr ranking him as:

- A. *the second person to accept Islam.*
- B. *the third person to accept Islam.*
- C. *the fourth person to accept Islam.*
- D. *the fifth person to accept Islam.*

5) In what way was the bond of brotherhood in Islam between Uthman ibn Affan and Prophet Muhammad strengthened?

- A. *When Uthman ibn Affan married Prophet Muhammad's daughter.*
- B. *When Prophet Muhammad married the daughter of Uthman ibn Affan.*
- C. *When Uthman ibn Affan became the Prophet's business partner.*
- D. *When Uthman ibn Affan became Prophet Muhammad's father-in-law.*

- 6) Why did Uthman ibn Affan come to be known as the man possessing two lights?
- A. Because of his marriage to two of the daughters of Prophet Muhammad.
 - B. Because of his unique foresight, insight and intellect.
 - C. Because he was the close friend of two of the greatest companions of Prophet Muhammad.
 - D. Because his eyesight was sharp and he nothing could escape his eye.
- 7) Why did Uthman ibn Affan not participate in the Battle of Badr despite it being one of the greatest battles of Islam?
- A. He was still a disbeliever and had not yet converted to Islam.
 - B. He needed to remain close and care for his wife who was ill during that time.
 - C. He was financially unable to participate and lacked the means.
 - D. None of the above.
- 8) For how many years did Uthman ibn Affan rule over the Muslim *Ummah*?
- A. Ten years.
 - B. Twelve years.
 - C. Fifteen years.
 - D. Thirty years.
- 9) With regards to the Quran, what historical role did Uthman ibn Affan contribute to as a Caliph?
- A. It was during his reign that the various dialects in which the Quran can be recited were standardized into one copy.
 - B. He was the first to have the Quran printed in a printing press for mass distribution.
 - C. He beautified the text of the Quran by hiring the most skillful calligraphers of Cordoba.
 - D. He compiled multiple copies of the Quran in a book form in different Arabic dialects.
- 10) Amongst the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, what is Uthman ibn Affan credited to do?
- A. He was the first Caliph to organize a navy.
 - B. He was the first Caliph to expand the borders of the Islamic empire.
 - C. He was the first Caliph to establish the five daily prayers in the mosque.
 - D. He was the first Caliph to organize a Muslim army.
- 11) After assuming role of the leader of the Muslim *Ummah* Uthman ibn Affan:
- A. continued to remain humble and pious.
 - B. began to persecute the weaker members of the *Ummah*.
 - C. began to indulge in a luxurious and splendid life worthy of kings.
 - D. None of the above.

12) What caused the death of Uthman ibn Affan?

- A. *He was struck with a sword.*
- B. *He was struck by plague.*
- C. *He was stabbed while he led the prayer in the mosque.*
- D. *He died due to old age.*

13) What had Prophet Muhammad prophesized with regards to the future of Uthman ibn Affan?

- A. *That he would see only success and tranquility till the end of his reign.*
- B. *That he would come to be placed in a very difficult situation.*
- C. *That he would be chosen to be the most popular Caliph of all time.*
- D. *That he would meet with his death a year after being chosen as Caliph.*