



A Man Worth a Thousand

By: Amjad Shabanh

Throughout the ages, people have used the expression "a man worth a thousand men," meaning that the presence of this one man in an army significantly boosts its effective strength. Armies would use this concept to balance their forces; for example, if the right flank had 3,000 soldiers and the left had 2,000, they would send in a man worth a thousand to equalize the power on both fronts.

As usual, I start with questions that occupy my mind. I wonder here: did Muslims ever use this description? And if so, who were they, and how did they reach such a status—that is, to be "worth a thousand men"?

Imagine being the G.O.A.T. "**Greatest of All Time**." Your team rejoices when you join them. They are optimistic about certain victories simply because you are on their side. Yes, I want to be the best throughout the ages. Yes, I want to be a man worth a thousand.

Who are they?

The title "a man worth a thousand" was given to only five people during the time of the Rashidun Caliphate. And there's a surprise: there is only one person in Islamic history who was described as "a man worth a million." We'll discuss him at the end of the article, so stay tuned!

Studying the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs is as significant as studying the life of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as he said, "Hold on to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs after me." The events of that period are not merely incidental; they are an integral part of the Sunnah of our noble Prophet. All those who were given the title "a man worth a thousand men" earned this title during the time of Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab.



Tamkeeners' Reflections

If we understand the principles that these two companions relied on when assessing these individuals as "worth a thousand," we can grasp the foundation on which this concept was built. This understanding could allow us to apply it in our own lives, allowing us to become "worth a thousand" in some fields.

The Sound of Al-Qa'qa' in an Army is Better Than a Thousand Men

After Khalid ibn al-Walid had finished the final battles of the Ridda wars, including the Battle of Yamama, he received a letter from Abu Bakr al-Siddiq instructing him to continue his march to fight the Persians in Iraq. Many of Khalid's soldiers went back to their homes and families, so he requested reinforcements from Abu Bakr to help him combat the Persians. Imagine the situation: one narration states that Khalid's army numbered 12,000 - 18,000 while the Persian army had 300,000. Khalid requested more reinforcements.

How many did Abu Bakr send? Just one man. Yes, he sent only one man and told him, "An army with Al-Qa'qa' in it will not be defeated." In another narration, he said, "The sound of Al-Qa'qa' in an army is better than a thousand men."

What distinguished Al-Qa'qa' was not just physical strength. As Abu Bakr noted, he could inspire armies and raise morale simply with his voice. Abu Bakr mentioned only Al-Qa'qa's voice and words in his message to Khalid, without mentioning bravery, strength, or quick wit.

During the Battle of Chains, Khalid sent a message to Hormuz, the Persian commander, inviting him to Islam, to pay the jizya (tribute), or to engage in battle. When Hormuz received the letter, he assembled his troops and advanced quickly with them to Kazimah. Hormuz had secretly agreed with some of his soldiers to ambush and kill Khalid during single combat to break the Muslim spirit. Khalid charged at Hormuz and grappled with him, but at that moment, the Persian group with whom Hormuz had agreed rushed in to attack Khalid from all sides.

Al-Qa'qa' quickly intervened with great speed and precision, clearing the Persian soldiers surrounding Khalid. His arrival marked the beginning of a fierce battle between the two sides.



If Al-Qa'qa' was the first to be given the title "a man worth a thousand," then who were the other four?

4004 men?

In one of the first major battles for the conquest of Egypt led by the companion Amr ibn al-As, known as the Battle of the Babylon Fortress, Amr realized after the Battle of Umm Dunayn that he couldn't continue the conquest of Egypt with his army of only 4,000 men. So he sent a message to the Caliph at the time, Umar ibn al-Khattab, requesting reinforcements. Umar ibn al-Khattab prepared an additional 4,004 men and sent a message to Amr saying:

"I have sent you an army of 4,000 men, along with four men, each of whom is worth a thousand men. Now you have an army that effectively numbers 8,000 in reinforcements, plus the 4,000 men you already have, making a total of 12,000."

But why was Umar so intent on reaching the number of 12,000? This decision goes back to an authentic hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas, in which the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "Twelve thousand will not be defeated due to lack of numbers."



Tamkeeners' Reflections

Does this mean an army of 12,000 will never be defeated? Not exactly. They could be defeated, but not simply because of their number (not "from being few"). Other reasons, like insufficient preparation, weak faith, or other factors, could lead to defeat, but it wouldn't be due to their numbers alone.

So, who were the other four, and what qualities did they possess to be honored with this title? They were indeed Al-Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam, Al-Miqdad ibn Amr, Ubadah ibn al-Samit, and Maslama ibn Mukhallad.

Al-Zubayr, Al-Miqdad, and Ubadah shared several key qualities:

1. Pioneers in Faith.
2. They Witnessed Every Battle
3. Reluctant to Seek Leadership
4. Excellence in Their Field

These qualities set them apart as men "worth a thousand" due to their exceptional contributions and moral character.

صفة التفوق بالمجال

Excellence in Their Field



اصحاب السبق

Pioneers in Faith



لا يتسابقون للامارة

Reluctant to Seek Leadership



شهد المعارك كلها

Present in Every Battle





Tamkeeners' Reflections

1. Pioneers in Faith.

All of them possessed the quality of being pioneers. Al-Zubayr was among the earliest converts to Islam and one of the first to undertake both migrations. Likewise, Al-Miqdad ibn Amr held the status of a pioneer, being one of the seven who first openly declared Islam in Mecca, which included him among the earliest believers. Ubadah ibn al-Samit was one of the first from the Ansar to embrace Islam and was among those who pledged allegiance at both Aqabah gatherings.

A well-known story related to this is narrated by Jarir ibn Abdullah

Jarir b. Abdullah reported that some desert Arabs clad in woollen clothes came to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). He saw them in sad plight as they had been hard pressed by need. He (the Holy Prophet) exhorted people to give charity, but they showed some reluctance until (signs) of anger could be seen on his face. Then a person from the Ansar came with a purse containing silver. Then came another person and then other persons followed them in succession until signs of happiness could be seen on his (sacred) face. Thereupon Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

He who introduced some good practice in Islam which was followed after him (by people) he would be assured of reward like one who followed it, without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And he who introduced some evil practice in Islam which had been followed subsequently (by others), he would be required to bear the burden like that of one who followed this (evil practice) without their's being diminished in any respect.

حَدَّثَنِي زُهَيْرُ بْنُ حَرْبٍ، حَدَّثَنَا جَرِيرُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْحَمِيدِ، عَنِ الْأَعْمَشِ، عَنْ مُوسَى، بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ يَرِيدٍ وَأَبِي الصَّحْحَى عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ هِلَالِ الْعَبْسِيِّ، عَنْ جَرِيرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ جَاءَ نَاسٌ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَيْهِمُ الصُّوفُ فَرَأَى سُوءَ حَالِهِمْ قَدْ أَصَابَتْهُمْ حَاجَةٌ فَحَكَ النَّاسَ عَلَى الصَّدَقَةِ فَأَبْطَأُوا عَنْهُ حَتَّى رُئِيَ ذَلِكَ فِي وَجْهِهِ - قَالَ - ثُمَّ إِنَّ رَجُلًا مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ جَاءَ بِصِرَّةٍ مِنْ وَرَقِي ثُمَّ جَاءَ آخَرُ ثُمَّ تَتَابَعُوا حَتَّى عَرِفَ السُّرُورُ فِي وَجْهِهِ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " مَنْ سَنَّ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ سُنَّةً حَسَنَةً فَعَمِلَ بِهَا بَعْدَهُ كُتِبَ لَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ مَنْ عَمِلَ بِهَا وَلَا يَنْقُصُ مِنْ أَجْرِهِمْ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ سَنَّ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ سُنَّةً سَيِّئَةً فَعَمِلَ بِهَا بَعْدَهُ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ مِثْلُ وِزْرِ مَنْ عَمِلَ بِهَا وَلَا يَنْقُصُ مِنْ أُوزَارِهِمْ شَيْءٌ " .

Reference : Sahih Muslim 1017e
In-book reference : Book 47, Hadith 26
USC-MSA web (English) reference : Book 34, Hadith 6466
(deprecated numbering scheme)

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In other words, the Ansari man earned the reward of everyone who donated after him, simply because he was the first—he held the honor of being a pioneer.



وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَن أنْفَقَ مِن
قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَتْلِ أَوْلِيَّتِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا مِن بَعْدُ وَقَتَلُوا أَوْ كَلَّا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ
الْحُسْنَىَ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Sahih International: And why do you not spend in the cause of Allah while to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Not equal among you are those who spent before the conquest [of Makkah] and fought [and those who did so after it]. Those are greater in degree than they who spent afterwards and fought. But to all Allah has promised the best [reward]. And Allah , with what you do, is Acquainted.

This verse indicates that those who sacrificed and fought before the conquest are not equal to those who came after. This chapter has a great merit that I cannot do justice to in a few lines, and I am seriously thinking of dedicating a special article to this chapter.

2. They Witnessed Every Battle

Three of them shared this quality, which I believe is the most important point after being pioneers: it is that they never made excuses. They went out for jihad in every battle and were never deterred by any reason. They never said they had work, family, children, or any excuse that kept them from joining. Instead, they were among those who overcame excuses, which made them "worth a thousand."

None of them were ordinary people. It's important to note that fighting alongside the Prophet was voluntary; it was not a formal army where people received payment for service. It was a voluntary jihad, through which they exchanged worldly life for the hereafter. I conclude this point with Allah's words:



﴿لَا يَسْتَأْذِنُكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أَنْ يُجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ﴾
[التوبة: 44]

English - Sahih International

9:44 Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day would not ask permission of you to be excused from striving with their wealth and their lives. And Allah is Knowing of those who fear Him.

Tafsir Ibn Katheer in English

It is not a characteristic of those who truly have faith in Allah and the Day of Judgement to ask the Messenger (peace be upon him) for permission to stay behind from striving for Allah's sake with their wealth and their selves. Rather, it is their characteristic to rally when they are called to fight and to strive with their wealth and their persons. Allah knows those among His servants who are Mindful, who do not ask to be excused except for genuine reasons that prevent them from going with the Messenger.

3. Reluctant to Seek Leadership

Human nature is inclined toward a love for worldly things, positions, and status. Who among us wouldn't want to be a leader or king, able to command and prohibit? But this does not apply to those "worth a thousand." They are selfless and do not act for worldly gains, nor do they seek any position or status. Competing for worldly things, in general, is destructive, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "I do not fear poverty for you, but I fear that the world will be opened up for you as it was for those before you, and you will compete for it as they competed for it, and it will destroy you as it destroyed them."

What has destroyed states other than this—like the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, which fell due to disputes over leadership?

An example of this is Awwam's attitude toward leadership. Umar ibn al-Khattab offered him the governorship of Egypt, saying, "Would you like to take on the leadership of Egypt?" He meant that he would send Az-Zubair not as a soldier under Amr ibn al-As,



but as a leader, where he would assume governance after the conquest. Az-Zubair replied, "I have no need for it, but I will go as a fighter in the cause of Allah, assisting the Muslims. If I find that Amr has already conquered it, I will not interfere with his work, and I will seek out other shores to defend. And if I find him engaged in battle, I will join him." Indeed, he is a man "worth a thousand."



4. Excellence in Their Field

Umar ibn al-Khattab chose these men specifically for battle; he did not choose them to teach people the principles of jurisprudence or the Qur'an, as that was not their specialty. If, for instance, Umar wanted someone in the field of religious sciences, he would not call on them but would go straight to Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. When Umar wanted to send someone to Iraq to teach Islam and the Qur'an, he chose Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, saying, "I have favored you (people of Iraq) with Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, even though I am in great need of him."

In the Field of Memorization, is Abu Hurairah a man worth a thousand? Certainly, he is! In the field of Hadith narration, he is unmatched, as he narrated more Hadiths than anyone else. However, in the field of warfare, his name appears only occasionally. So ask yourself: what can you offer to this Ummah? Is it combat, computer science, the transmission of Islamic knowledge, engineering, or one of the many other fields? You should aim to be a person "worth a thousand" in your field.



Maslama Ibn Mukhallad

This Companion differed greatly in his qualities from the other three. It was as though Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, was opening the door for all Muslims to aspire to be “worth a thousand.” One does not have to be among the earliest Muslims or those who accompanied the Prophet throughout his life to achieve this level.

Maslama Ibn Mukhallad, an Ansari, was only 20 years old when he was sent as reinforcements to Amr ibn al-As. At the time of the Prophet’s death, he was just 11 years old, so he hadn’t participated in any battles with the Prophet. Later in his life, he served as the governor of Egypt during the time of Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, and he eventually also governed the Maghreb. He became the first man to govern both Egypt and the Maghreb, overseeing a vast region stretching from Egypt through Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and parts of Morocco.

All of this proves that Umar’s choice of Maslama was not arbitrary; rather, it reflected his keen insight. Maslama demonstrated courage, piety, and a strong fear of Allah. He was an outstanding leader who showed his abilities at a young age, which qualified him to be a man “worth a thousand.”

A Man Worth a Million Men

I’ve saved the best for last. Who is the one man considered worth a million men, and who bore witness to this? It is the commander who was undefeated in any battle, whether before or after his conversion to Islam, the conqueror of Iraq and the Levant, the defeater of the Persian and Roman empires. He was the brilliant commander who overcame armies without considering their numbers—it is Khalid ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughira.

When he passed away in the year 21 AH, news of his death reached Medina, and the whole city mourned him. His mother, in her eulogy, said, “You are better than a thousand thousand men,” and when Umar ibn al-Khattab heard this, he replied, “She spoke the truth—he was true as she described.”



Tamkeeners' Reflections

In Conclusion,

Manhood does not have a particular shape. It isn't about muscular physiques, dazzling golden hair, or big, thick beards and mustaches. Instead, true manhood lies in the qualities that the Companions of the Prophet embodied, and may Allah be pleased with them.

Islam has laid out guidelines for everything, neither going to extremes nor leaving anything out. The Qur'an and the noble Sunnah are timeless sources that will never change. Whoever relies on them in all aspects of life will succeed in this world and the Hereafter.

A question remains: Was there a woman in Islam who was titled "worth a thousand men"? And, is there an online course on Udemy or Coursera that teaches "manhood"? I honestly know some people who might benefit from it!

"سبحانك اللهم وبحمدك أشهد أن لا إله إلا أنت أستغفرك وأتوب إليك"