34577 - Who is better and more knowledgeable – Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, or ‘Ali?

the question

When one analyze as a neutral person contribution of hazrat ali is far more then other sahaba so are the hadith in favour of hazrat ali,not only as a warrior but as a visionary person, his knowldge,as a faqih , his command on quran, hazrat abu baker and specialy hazrat ummer always consulted him when they dont know the answer of anything then how come they rated superior to hazrat ali.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Undoubtedly the noble Sahabi ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib was one of the wisest and most determined of people. He is well known for his courage and bravery. He was the first youth to enter Islam, then he stayed close to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) before the Hijrah. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) left Makkah, accompanied by Abu Bakr, he stayed behind and slept in the Prophet’s bed (thus fooling the mushrikeen who wanted to kill the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)). Among his virtues are those mentioned in the hadeeth narrated by Sahl ibn Sa’d (may Allah be pleased with him), who said that he heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say, on the day of Khaybar, “I will give the flag to a man at whose hands Allah will grant victory.” They got up, wishing to see to whom the flag would be given, each of them hoping that he would be given the flag. Then he said, “Where is ‘Ali?” He was told that he was suffering from eye-trouble. He ordered that ‘Ali should be called to him, then he spat in his eyes and he was healed immediately, as if he has never had any problem in his eyes.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 2942; Muslim, 2406.

Just as ‘Ali had many virtues and good characteristics, other Sahabah also had other virtues and good characteristics. Among the virtues of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) is that which was narrated from Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri, who said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) delivered a khutbah and said: “Allah has given a slave the choice between this world and what is with Him, and he chose what is with Him.” Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq (may Allah be pleased with him) began to weep, and I said to myself, “What is making this old man cry if Allah has given a slave the choice between this world and what is with Him, and he chose what is with Him?” The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was that slave, and Abu Bakr was the most knowledgeable of us. He said, “O Abu Bakr, do not weep. Abu Bakr has favoured me greatly with his companionship and his wealth. If I were to have taken a close friend among my ummah, I would have chosen Abu Bakr, but the brotherhood of Islam is sufficient. Do not leave any door to the mosque without closing it off, apart from the door of Abu Bakr.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 466; Muslim, 2382

Another of his virtues is that he accompanied the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) during the Hijrah (migration to Madeenah), as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“If you help him (Muhammad) not (it does not matter), for Allah did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of the two; when they (Muhammad and Abu Bakr) were in the cave, he said to his companion (Abu Bakr): ‘Be not sad (or afraid), surely, Allah is with us.’ Then Allah sent down His Sakeenah (calmness, tranquillity, peace) upon him, and strengthened him with forces (angels) which you saw not, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowermost, while the Word of Allah that became the uppermost; and Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise” [al-Tawbah 9:40]

And ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed him as the commander of the army of Dhat al-Salasil. He said: So I came to him and said, “Which of the people is dearest to you?” He said, “ ‘Aa’ishah.” I said, “Who among men?” He said, “Her father.” I said, “Then who?” He said, “Then ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab,” and he mentioned some other men.

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3662; Muslim, 2384.

Another of his virtues is the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed him to lead the prayers in his stead at the end of his life, when he fell sick with his final illness, and he rebuked those who objected to this and said, “Tell Abu Bakr to lead the people in prayer.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 683; Muslim 418.

And it was narrated from Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) climbed Uhud with Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman, and it trembled beneath them. He said, ‘Stand firm, O Uhud, for there is no one on you but a Prophet, a Siddeeq and two martyrs.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3675.

With regard to ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), he also had many virtues and good characteristics which were proven in many reports. For example it was narrated that Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whilst I was sleeping, I saw the people were shown to me, and they were wearing shirts. Some shirts came down to the chest, and some were shorter than that. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab was shown to me and he was wearing a shirt that dragged along the ground.” They said, “How did you interpret that, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Religious commitment.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 23; Muslim, 2390.

It was narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: “Whilst I was sleeping, a cup of milk was brought to me and I drank until I saw its wetness coming out of my nails. Then I gave the rest to ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab.” They said, “How did you interpret that, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “(It is) knowledge.”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 82; Muslim, 2391.

And it was narrated from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to say, “Among the nations who came before you there were muhaddathoon (men who were inspired) and if there are any such men among my ummah, then ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab is one of them.”

Narrated by Muslim, 2398

And there is other evidence which points to the virtues of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them). But the fact that some of them were superior to others is something that makes sense and is proven in sharee’ah. It is not the matter of whims and desires, rather it should be referred to sharee’ah, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses, no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified is Allah, and exalted above all that they associate (as partners with Him)”

[al-Qasas 28:68]

So we should refer to the shar’i evidence in order to find out the status of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them). It was narrated that Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “We used to compare the people as to who was better at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). We used to regard Abu Bakr as the best, then ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, then ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (may Allah be pleased with them).” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3655. According to another report he said: “At the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) we did not regard anyone as equal with Abu Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthman, then we left the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and we did not differentiate between them.” Al-Bukhari, 2679.

This is testimony of all the Sahabah, narrated by ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Umar, that Abu Bakr was superior to all the Sahabah, followed by ‘Umar, then ‘Uthman.

Now let us turn to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) himself, and he see what he said. It was narrated that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah (who was the son of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib) said:

“I said to my father, ‘Which of the people was the best after the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?’ He said, ‘Abu Bakr.’ I said, ‘Then who?’ He said, ‘Then ‘Umar.’ I was afraid that he would say ‘Uthman. I said, ‘Then is it you?’ He said, ‘I am only one of the Muslims.’”

Narrated by al-Bukhari, 3671.

It was narrated that ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “No one is brought to me who regards me as superior to Abu Bakr and ‘Umar but I will punish him with a beating like a fabricator.” Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said: It was narrated that he used to speak from the minbar of Kufa and say that the best of this ummah after our Prophet was Abu Bakr, then ‘Umar. This was narrated from him via more than eighty isnads, and it was narrated by al-Bukhari and others. Hence the earlier Shi’ah all used to agree that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar were superior, as has been mentioned by more than one. Manhaj al-Sunnah, 1/308

It was narrated from Abu Juhayfah that ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) ascended the minbar and praised and glorified Allah and sent blessings upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), then he said: “The best of this ummah after its Prophet is Abu Bakr. The second is ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), and after that, whoever Allah wants to be good will be good.”

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 839. And Shaykh Shu’ayb al-Arna’oot said: its isnad is qawiy.

These ahadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and these reports from the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) all testify to the belief of Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jama’ah, amongst whom there is no dispute concerning it, that the best of this ummah after its Prophet is Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq (may Allah be pleased with him), then ‘Umar. May Allah be pleased with all of the Sahabah.

With regard to the idea that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar always used to ask ‘Ali questions and that they did not have knowledge, this is not proven in any report whatsoever. Rather it is proven that the

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ordered that Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) should lead the people in prayer when he was sick with his final illness. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would not have delegated this task except to one who had knowledge of the rulings on the prayer. And it was proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) to lead the Hajj before the Farewell Pilgrimage, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would not have appointed a man to such a position unless he was the most knowledgeable of them concerning it (the Hajj). Indeed it is narrated that ‘Ali learned some ahadith from Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with them both) concerning some issues. It was narrated that Asma’ bint al-Hakam al-Fazari said: “I heard ‘Ali say: I was a man who, if I heard a hadeeth from the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Allah would benefit me thereby as much as He willed to benefit me. If a man from among his companions told me a hadeeth I would ask him to swear to it; if he swore to it then I would believe him.” He told me that Abu Bakr said, and Abu Bakr spoke the truth, “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say, ‘There is no man who commits a sin then he gets up and purifies himself and prays, and seeks the forgiveness of Allah, but Allah will forgive him.’ Then he recited this verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“And those who, when they have committed Faahishah (illegal sexual intercourse) or wronged themselves with evil, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their sins; — and none can forgive sins but Allah — and do not persist in what (wrong) they have done, while they know”

[Aal ‘Imran 3:135]

Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 406; classed as hasan by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

Al-Tirmidhi (3682) narrated from ‘Ibn ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah has placed truth on the tongue of ‘Umar and in his heart.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi, 2908.

And we have quoted above the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

concerning ‘Umar: “Among the nations who came before you there were muhaddathoon (men who were inspired) and if there are any such men among my ummah, then ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab is one of them.”

The point is that the belief of Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jama’ah, on which they are unanimously agreed, is that the best of this ummah after its Prophet is Abu Bakr, then ‘Umar – may Allah be pleased with them both.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “No one among the respectable Muslim scholars has said that ‘Ali was more knowledgeable or had more understanding of Islam than Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, or even than Abu Bakr alone. Those who claim that there is consensus on that are among the most ignorant of people and the greatest liars. Rather, more than one of the scholars have stated that there is scholarly consensus that Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq was more knowledgeable than ‘Ali, such as Imam Mansoor ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar al-Sam’ani al-Marwadhi, one of the leading scholars of the Sunnah among the companions of al-Shafa’i, who mentioned in his book Taqweem al-Adillah ‘ala’l-Imam that there was consensus among the scholars of the Sunnah that Abu Bakr was more knowledgeable than ‘Ali. I do not know of anyone among the famous imams who disputes this point. How could it be otherwise when Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq used to issue rulings and commands and prohibitions, and pass judgements, and deliver khutbahs in the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), as he used to do when he and Abu Bakr would go out to call the people to Islam, and when they migrated together, and on the day of Hunayn, and on other occasions, when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) remained silent and approved of what Abu Bakr said; no one else enjoyed such status. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) consulted with the wise and knowledgeable men among his companions, he would consult Abu Bakr and ‘Umar first, because they were the first to speak about matters of Islam in the presence of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) before the rest of his companions; for example when he consulted them about the prisoners of Badr, the first ones who spoke about that were Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, and this also happened on other occasions… In Saheeh Muslim it is narrated that the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were with him on a journey

and he said: “If the people obey Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, they will be guided aright.” And it was narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas that he used to give his fatwas based on the Book of Allah, and if he could not find anything then he would look at the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), then if he could not find anything he would refer to the fatwas of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, then if he did not find anything he would refer to the fatwas of ‘Uthman and ‘Ali – and Ibn ‘Abbas was the habr al-ummah (scholar of the ummah) and the most knowledgeable of the Sahabah of his time, and he would consult the words of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar and give them precedence over the words of anyone else among the Sahabah. And it was proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed for Ibn ‘Abbas and said, “O Allah, cause him to understand the religion of Islam and teach him the correct interpretation (of the Quran).”

Majmoo’ al-Fatawa, 4/398

See:

Al-Fasl fi’l-Milal wa’l-Nihal, 4/212

Bal dalalta, p. 252

Al-Shi’ah al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna ‘ashariyyah, p. 120