

# The Rightly Guided Caliphs: Uthman ibn Affan (Part 1 of 2)

**Description:** A short biography of Prophet Muhammad's companion, friend and the third Rightly Guided Caliph of Islam. We concentrate mainly on his life before he became a caliph.

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## Objective:

- To learn about the life of Uthman ibn Affan and understand his importance in the history of Islam.

## Arabic Terms:

- *Khalifah* (plural: *Khulafa'*) " Caliph. Sometimes spelled Khalif. He is the chief Muslim religious and civil ruler, regarded as the successor of Prophet Muhammad. A Caliph is not a monarch.
- *Ummah* - Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of color, race, language or nationality.
- *Hijrah* - the act of migration from one place to another. In Islam, the *Hijrah* refers to the Muslims migrating from Mecca to Medina and also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Hadith* - (plural " *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, and his companions.

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 Quraish 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 sought refuge in Abyssinia. After hearing a false rumour 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 *ahadith* 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.<sup>[1]</sup>

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.

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Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> The Sealed Nectar. Safi Ur Rahman Al Mubarakpuri

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