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This article delves into the personality, character, and faith of Salman, the first Persian to accept Islam, and a great companion of the Prophet (S), as seen in the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt, as well as several Sunni sources.

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Salman al-Farsi: A Great Companion of the Prophet Muhammad

Mohammad Reza Javaheri

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Abstract

Salman al-Farsi was the first Persian to convert to Islam. He was raised as a Zoroastrian, then converted to Christianity, and then after meeting the Prophet Muhammad, he converted to Islam, and played a fundamental role in promoting Muslim unity. After becoming Muslim, Salman grew under the guidance of the Prophet and Imam Ali until he reached the peak of faith and was the best of the Ahlul Bayt's companions. This article delves into the personality, character, and faith of Salman as seen in the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt, as well as several Sunni sources.

Salman's personality

Familiarizing ourselves with Salman al-Farsi's personality has many advantages; attention to them clarifies the importance and need of it.

1. Some of the Prophet's companions could succeed in being "Mohammadi" or being "like Mohammad." By accepting Islam through believing in God and the Qur'an entitled the Iranian Salman al-Farsi to "Salman Mohammadi" who ranked as a highly faithful companion of the Ahlul Bayt. Therefore, "Mohammadi" and the "Alawite" (pertaining to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib) behaviour are not out of our reach in our developmental progress.
2. Acquainting ourselves with the life, virtues, and manners of Salman al-Farsi as a loyal companion of the Prophet is a life guide for those fascinated with the true divine path. Recognizing Salman al-Farsi's characteristics are a step in the path of recognition of attaining good qualities in the school of the holy Prophet, who himself was the greatest role model for humanity.
3. Knowing Salman al-Farsi is an endeavour in the path of the Shi'a's recognition during the Prophetic mission. Considering Salman, Ibn Abil Hadid, the Mutazilite Sunni writes: "Salman was Ali's Shi'a." Proving Salman al-Farsi's Shi'a belief clears the deep rootedness of Shi'ism. Salman's existence during the Prophet's life lights the connection of the Shi'a sect with the Prophet and the establishment of Shi'a sect by the Prophet's aid conveyed to him by the divine revelation. At the beginning of his political divine will, Imam Khomeini writes: "We are proud of following the religion that the Prophet established based on the Almighty's command." Salman al-Farsi's Shi'ism is a clear sign of its truth, a formation of which goes back to the Prophet's time in Medina. Salman was a Muslim before Islam's emergence in Iran.
4. Salman al-Farsi's Islam is an example of the conscious, voluntary and freely chosen Islam of majority of Iranian nation, chosen thoughtfully with reason, knowledge, and insight, alone with a humble spirit seeking the truth.
5. Salman al-Farsi is the forerunner in combining the "Iranian Civilization" with "Islam". Iranian intelligence, talent and skills were first used in serving Islam and helping Muslims when the Iranian Salman al-Farsi converted to Islam. Salman's services in Khaybar and Ahzaab Battles, in providing aid for the Prophet's companions are the ring leaders of numerous services of Iranians to Islam. The Islamic Republic of Iran's achievements for Islam and Muslims in contemporary political history are the result of contemplating Iranian talent and knowledge in the path of defending Islam in the present time.
6. Salman al-Farsi's Islam reminds us of the reality that Islam is not limited to geological areas of Mecca and Medina, and is not specified to the Arab race. Salman al-Farsi accepted the Prophet's invitation and believed him out of his truth-seeking nature. The Prophet also confirmed his Islam and faith. Islam is a universal religion: a religion for humanity.

7. Salman al-Farsi is a multi-dimensional and complete person. All dimensions of his personality are based on reliance in God and the Ahlul Bayt. His individual and religious behaviour mingled with spirituality and morals, social and political approaches, leadership and management, knowledge and belief, creativities, eloquence, and wisdom. His discussion and debates with rulers all had religiously based reasoning approved by the Prophet and his family. Throughout Salman's life are numerous hidden lessons in individual, social, political, moral, cultural and educational arenas.

Salman in the Infallible's words

Salman is best known through the narrations of the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt. Through this study, we come to realize the dimensions of Salman's life and personality.

Salman al-Farsi in hadith literature

Shi'a hadith compilations report the behavioural and moral characteristics of Salman, some of which are as follows:

1. Salman wept upon the demise of the Prophet.
2. He was present in the prayer performed for her highness Fatima al-Zahra (s.a.)
3. Practicing the divine commands gained him closeness to the Prophet's family, the Ahlul Bayt. He was known to be persistent and loyal.
4. According to him, friendship of Ahlul Bayt was obligatory for every Muslim.
5. He was Ali's Shi'a who never disagreed with Imam Ali.
6. He consistently mentioned the brotherhood of Ali and the Prophet; in his will he spoke of Ali's authority (wilayah) and offered evidence.
7. Based on the divine commands, he believed obeying Imam Ali was an obligation; obeying the Ahlul Bayt was the same as obeying God and the Prophet.
8. He was not an apostate after the holy Prophet's demise.
9. He accepted the invitation of the Prophet's heir and came to action in supporting and establishing the government and caliphate of Imam Ali.
10. He warned the people that no one other than Ali is aware of the secrets of prophethood; Ali has knowledge no one else could attain.
11. He interpreted the Qur'an and shared the Prophet's hadiths. Imam Ali had also certified him.

12. He is one of the true believers who did not change after the demise of the Prophet. Therefore, using him as a role model, accepting his guardianship (wilayah) through following and referring to him is mandatory for all.

13. He followed Imam Ali and avoided the caliphate of Abu Bakr. On a Friday, next to the Prophet's pulpit, Salman objected to Abu Bakr and questioned him over and over.

14. God loved Salman and revealed it to the Prophet, who was asked to love Salman as well.

15. God loves those who love Salman.

16. If the earth's inhabitants, like the angels, love Salman because of his love for the Prophet Mohammad and Ali, and are enemies with their enemies, God will never punish them.

17. He was placed among the disciples of Prophet Mohammad.

18. Among the companions of the Prophet, he is like Gabriel among the divine angles.

19. He knew the greatest divine name of God.

20. Gabriel conveyed God's command to the Prophet to convey His regards to Salman.

21. Once Salman visited the Prophet and his highness gave Salman his own pillow and cushion to use.

22. The name "Salman al-Farsi" was changed to "Salman Mohammadi" and is one of the members of the Ahlul Bayt.

23. Salman narrated hadiths, and the divine angles spoke to him.

24. He was a sea of knowledge and possessed a high level of thinking and logical reasoning.

25. He had a position higher than the wise Prophet Luqman.

26. Several points in this hadith: Salman a) prioritized Imam Ali's commands to his own will, b) liked the poor and needy and preferred their company to the rich, c) liked scholars, d) was a virtuous man of God, e) was a sincere Muslim, f) the Infallibles leaders remembered him and spoke of him, titling him "Mohammadi Salman."

27. He possessed the greatest degree of faith and was the best of Prophet's disciples.

Heaven is eager for Salman

The followers of the divine prophets endeavour to enter the heaven as it is the main aim and destination of the best, and the purest. The same heaven is eager for Salman al-Farsi's arrival. Anas has stated that the Prophet said, "Heaven is eager for three people, 'Ali, Salman, Abu Dharr, and Ammar Yasser'".

The Prophet has also stated, “Gabriel informed me: ‘O Mohammad! Heaven is eager for three of your companions: Ali, Ammar and Salman.’” In another narration, concerning all Muslims, the Prophet states: “Be aware! That heaven is eager for four of my companions: Ali, Miqdad, Salman, and Abu Dharr. Anas also mentioned that the Prophet said, “There are three people the heavenly angles are eager to meet: Ali, Ammar, and Salman.”

These companions are the forerunners of the Shi’a whom are placed in the same group with the best companion, minister, heir of Prophet, and the first Shi’a: Imam Ali.

The beloved of God and the Prophet

God has granted everybody with strength and ability for growth, development, and achieving prosperity. Some use these talents and achieve high levels of spirituality and happiness. One of the faces of this group is Salman al-Farsi. God likes this group of people and has commanded his Prophet to like them. Barideh stated that the Prophet said, “God commanded me to like and be friends with four people, and has informed me that he himself likes them: Ali is among them, and Abu Thar, Miqdad, and Salman.”

According to these hadiths, Salman has a special position. He is dear to God and God announced His liking for him to his Prophet through his loyal Angel. The public announcement of this reality through the divine Prophet is to convey the divine message to the people and invite them to like Salman. The one who is dear to God and his Prophet is to be dear to the people and the followers of the Prophet, and liking him is the duty of all Muslims and true believers.

Salman among the group of believers

Every prophet had his own chosen companions. This group has a higher position, and their service to religion and supporting their prophet was well-known among the general followers of that Prophet. Salman al-Farsi is one of these companions. Prophet Muhammad mentioned his nobles and comrades and introduced them to Muslims. He states,

“Every Prophet is granted with seven nobles and comrades and I am granted with fourteen.” As the hadith continues, fourteen names follow, and Salman is one of them. In another narration, the Prophet has said:

There has never been a prophet unless he was granted with seven chiefs, ministers, nobles, and comrades and I am granted with seventeen ministers, chiefs, and nobles; seven from the Quraysh and seven from the immigrants among immigrants.

Salman al-Farsi’s name is yet again present in this hadith. In another narration stated by the Prophet, Salman al-Farsi is among the group of Prophet’s special people. Being among the special comrades of Prophet of Prophet Mohammad is a great and high value not granted to many. The value of this

superiority will be clearer by paying attention to its source which is a divine blessing and a choice made by God.

A pioneer in Islam entering heaven

The first Iranian to convert to Islam during the life of Prophet was Salman al-Farsi. He is the imitating connector of the Iranian civilization and Islam. By Salman al-Farsi's conversion to Islam, the Iranian intelligence service to Islam, and with the Iranians' conversion to Islam,

Iran's general service to Islam expanded. The Prophet introduced these forerunners in a hadith, saying: "I am the forerunner of the Arabs, Sahib is the pioneer of Rome, Salman is the forerunner of the Farsi speakers, and Bilal is the pioneer of Ethiopia."

Abu Enameh stated that the Prophet said, "I am the pioneer forerunner of Arabs towards heaven, Salman is the pioneer of Iranians towards heaven, Sahib is the pioneer of Romans towards heaven, and Bilal is the pioneer of Ethiopians towards heaven."

In another hadith in Salman's praise it is said, "Salman is respected among Farsi speakers." "Farsi" generally refers to Iranians. Abu Saeed stated that the Prophet stated, "Salman is an intellectual who is not understood." Abu Bakhtari says:

A group wanted Ali ibn Abi Talib to talk about the companions of the Prophet and introduce them. As they continued with their questions about the Prophet's companions, they asked about Salman's position. Ali Ibn Abu Talib said, 'Salman realized the first and last knowledge. He is a sea whose depth cannot be measured, and he is one of us – the Ahlul Bayt'.

In narrating this hadith by Ibn Abel Hadid Motazeli in praise of Salman's knowledge, it is said, "Salman is the sea that never finishes; he is one of us "Ahlul Bayt". These two Prophetic and Alawite maxims, narrated by Shi'as and Sunnis, remind us of Salman al-Farsi's vast knowledge. It is obvious that someone whom the Prophet and his caliphate recognize as a scholar and emphasize on the different dimension of his knowledge is definitely a great scholar and is a pattern and role model for intellectuals. Salman's knowledge was to the extent that even his enemies acknowledged it, such as Abu Saleh, who said, "I hope Salman's mother loses him; he's too vast in his knowledge."

One of Ahlul Bayt

Even though Salman al-Farsi's conversion is years after some of the others companion's conversions to Islam, such as Abu Dharr; however, he acquired such a high level that he was considered one of the Ahlul Bayt. Being part of the Prophet's family is a credit only for those who are Mohammadi in their behaviour and speech, and are no different in their words and actions to the Prophet. Amr ibn Ouf narrated that the Prophet said, "Salman is one of us Ahlul Bayt." Imam Ali also stated,

“Salman is one of us. He is benevolent, so choose him as a friend.” Imam Ali has also informed all Muslims about this great privilege, saying, “A human who achieves the great pleasure of being one of the Ahlul Bayt, is like the Ahlul Bayt: He is a role model for Muslims and following and referring to him is obligatory.”

Salman's character

Only actions done with sincerity are accepted and will be divine and eternal. Salman al-Farsi's actions were such. Abu Emameh said, “The day the Prophet was looking at the sky, we asked, “What are you looking at, O Prophet of Allah?” He answered, “I saw an angel was taking Salman's deeds to the sky.” These words are a proof to Salman's purity of his words and deeds.

The heart of Salman

If divine light shines in the human heart, one's knowledge and awareness will expand. Salman al-Farsi had a heart enlightened with divine rays; Abu Harireh heard the Prophet saying, “Anybody who wants to look at someone whose heart is enlightened with the divine rays should look at Salman.” Salman al-Farsi is introduced as a man with a bright heart to the common people.

A hardworking, pious person

Some do not have interest in acquiring divine faith and do not have a curious spirit with regards to knowledge and religion, and lack the preparedness for sacrifices concerning their religion and achieving and maintaining faith. But some people have an unlimited thirst for achieving their divine faith and moving forward in acquiring the highest degree in their faith and religion. Salman al-Farsi was such a person. The Prophet has reminded us of this great character of Salman, saying, “If religion was in the sky, Salman would acquire it.”

Salman al-Farsi – Islam's wise “Luqman”

Even though the wise Luqman was not a prophet, he acted upon divine words and practices and reached a point where a chapter in the Qur'an is named after him. Regarding this, Imam Ali said, “Salman al-Farsi is the same as the wise Luqman.”

The companions sitting with the Prophet

Salman al-Farsi was thirsty for the divine knowledge and made use of every opportunity for his awareness. He was a talented person and in search of completeness: day and night he looked for opportunities to speak to the Prophet. He was an intimate companion during the Prophet's lonely nights and was an all-time associate of his. Their nightly meetings were long and consistent which led to

objection of Aishah, the Prophet's wife, saying: "There was an individual session for Salman with the Prophet held at night in a way that it was about to dominate my sessions with the Prophet."

The freedom palms

Salman al-Farsi—a freedom seeker—came to Arabia in search of knowledge and the true religion. In this travel, a group of Arabs caught him as a slave and sold him. After he accepted the Prophet's words, he wrote to his master for his freedom. They agreed to free him on the condition that he planted date palms, and he would be free when they began to bear fruit. The Prophet planted palm trees for Salman al-Farsi's freedom and with the divine power they quickly ripened and he was set free.

The virtuous ruler and upright commander

Salman al-Farsi followed the path of his master Imam Ali in virtue and simplicity. He would say, "I do not like to eat unless it is with my own earnings." The second Caliph had set Salman's salary to six thousand dirhams; Salman spent his earnings for charity and earned his living with hard earned labour. He used his cloak both as a rug and as clothing. He was content with dried bread, salt, and water. As he had no home, someone asked for his permission to build him a house. Salman did not permit, saying, "I do not need a house."

The man insisted, saying, "I'll build a house you would appreciate: a house in which whenever you stand up your head would touch the ceiling, and when you lie down your feet would touch the walls." Then Salman accepted. Amer bin Atiyeh said, "I realized Salman does not like food and eating. When I asked for the reason, he said, 'What I have heard is enough for me,'" indicating the wisdom he learned from the Prophet, who said, "The hungriest people in the Day of Judgment are the fullest in the world. Salman, this world is a prison for true believers and a heaven for infidels."

Salman's anger is God's anger

Salman al-Farsi's virtue, sincerity and faith were to the extent that his anger was the criteria for the God's anger. One day, Abu Sufyan passed by a group of Muslims, including Salman, Soheib, and Bilal and heard them say "The swords quenched their thirst from God's enemy's throat." Abu Sufyan heard what they said. A companion angrily told them, "You are saying this about the sheikh and great man of the Quraysh." The Prophet was told about what was said, and he addressed that companion, saying, "You were angry with them; if you make them angry, God would be angry with you."

Salman: Islam's child

Salman al-Farsi labelled entering Islam as the best stage of his life. Even though he was an Iranian and was proud of his Iranian heritage, he labelled himself a child of Islam and placed Islam above everything

else. One day there was a debate between him and Saad Bin Abi Vaqaaz. Saad told some of those present there, “Talk about your ancestors’ nobility” and they did so. When it was Salman’s turn, he said, “I do not know a father for myself in Islam. Salman is the child of Islam.”

Good end

Salman al-Farsi is an Islamic universal personality in which all sects know him as a respected personality. The Prophet’s respect, including Ali, his companions, various Islamic sects and scholars’ respect for Salman is a factor for Muslim unity. Many religious privileges and Salman al-Farsi’s virtues are mentioned in the Prophet’s hadiths are included in both Sunni and Shi’a sources. The context of these hadiths in both sources is a sign of their being issued by the Prophet and therefore a cause of great respect for Muslims all over the globe.

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