

Salim Mawla Abi Hudhayfah

In giving advice to his companions, the noble Prophet, peace be on him, once said: "Learn the Quran from four persons: Abdullah ibn Masud, Salim Mawla Abi Hudhayfah, Ubayy ibn Kab and Muadh ibn Jabal."

We have read about three of these companions before. But who was this fourth companion in whom the Prophet had so much confidence that he considered him a hujjah or competent authority to teach the Quran and be a source of reference for it?

Salim was a slave and when he accepted Islam he was adopted as a son by a Muslim who was formerly a leading nobleman of the Quraysh. When the practice of adoption (in which the adopted person was called the son of his adopted father) was banned, Salim simply became a brother, a companion and a mawla (protected person) of the one who had adopted him, Abu Hudhayfah ibn Utbah. Through the blessings of Islam, Salim rose to a position of high esteem among the Muslims by virtue of his noble conduct and his piety.

Both Salim and Abu Hudhayfah accepted Islam early. Abu Hudhayfah himself did so in the face of bitter opposition from his father, the notorious Utbah ibn Rabi'ah who was particularly virulent in his attacks against the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions.

When the verse of the Quran was revealed abolishing adoption, people like Zayd and Salim had to change their names. Zayd who was known as Zayd ibn Muhammad had to be called after his own natural father. Henceforth he was known as Zayd ibn Harithah. Salim however did not know the name of his father. Indeed he did not know who his father was. However he remained under the protection of Abu Hudhayfah and so came to be known as Salim Mawla Abi Hudhayfah.

In abolishing the practice of adoption, Islam wanted to emphasize the bonds and responsibilities of natural kinship. However, no relationship was greater or stronger than the bond of Islam and the ties of faith which was the basis of brotherhood. The early Muslims understood this very well. There was nobody dearer to anyone of them after Allah and His Messenger than their brethren in faith.

We have seen how the Ansar of Madinah welcomed and accepted the Muhajirin from Makkah and shared with them their homes and their wealth and their hearts. This same spirit of brotherhood we see in the relationship between the Quraysh aristocrat, Abu Hudhayfah, and the despised and lowly slave, Salim. They remained to the very end of their lives something more than brothers; they died together, one body beside the other one soul with the other. Such was the unique greatness of Islam. Ethnic background and social standing had no worth in the sight of God. Only faith and taqwa mattered as the verses of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet emphasized over and over again:

"The most honorable of you in the sight of God, is the most God-fearing of you," says the Quran.

"No Arab has an advantage over a non-Arab except in taqwa (piety)," taught the noble Prophet who also said: "The son of a white woman has no advantage over the son of a black woman except in taqwa."

In the new and just society rounded by Islam, Abu Hudhayfah found honor for himself in protecting the one who was a slave.

In this new and rightly-guided society rounded by Islam, which destroyed unjust class divisions and false social distinctions Salim found himself, through his honesty, his faith and his willingness to sacrifice, in the front line of the believers. He was the "imam" of the Muhajirin from Makkah to Madinah, leading them in Salat in the masjid at Quba which was built by the blessed hands of the Prophet himself. He became a

competent authority in the Book of God so much so that the Prophet recommended that the Muslims learn the Quran from him. Salim was even further blessed and enjoyed a high estimation in the eyes of the Prophet, peace be on him, who said of him.

"Praise be to God Who has made among my Ummah such as you."

Even his fellow Muslim brothers used to call him "Salim min as-Salihin - Salim one of the righteous". The story of Salim is like the story of Bilal and that of tens of other slaves and poor persons whom Islam raised from slavery and degradation and 'made them, in the society of guidance and justice - imams, leaders and military commanders.

Salim's personality was shaped by Islamic virtues. One of these was his outspokenness when he felt it was his duty to speak out especially when a wrong was committed.

A well-known incident to illustrate this occurred after the liberation of Makkah. The Prophet sent some of his companions to the villages and tribes around the city. He specified that they were being sent as du'at to invite people to Islam and not as fighters. Khalid ibn al-Walid was one of those sent out. During the mission however, to settle an old score from the days of Jahiliyyah, he fought with and killed a man even though the man testified that he was now a Muslim.

Accompanying Khalid on this mission was Salim and others. As soon as Salim saw what Khalid had done he went up to him and reprimanded him listing the mistakes he had committed. Khalid, the great leader and military commander both during the days of Jahiliyyah and now in Islam, was silent for once.

Khalid then tried to defend himself with increasing fervor. But Salim stood his ground and stuck to his view that Khalid had committed a grave error. Salim did not look upon Khalid then as an abject slave would look upon a powerful Makkan nobleman. Not at all. Islam had placed them on an equal footing. It was justice and truth that had to be defended. He did not look upon him as a leader whose mistakes were to be covered up or justified but rather as an equal partner in carrying out a responsibility and an obligation. Neither did he come out in opposition to Khalid out of prejudice or passion but out of sincere advice and mutual self-criticism which Islam has hallowed. Such mutual sincerity was repeatedly emphasized by the Prophet himself when he said:

"Ad-dinu an-Nasihah. Ad-din u an-Nasihah. Ad-din u an-Nasihah." "Religion is sincere advice. Religion is sincere advice. Religion is sincere advice."

When the Prophet heard what Khalid had done, he was deeply grieved and made long and fervent supplication to his Lord. "O Lord," he said, "I am innocent before you of what Khalid has done." And he asked: "Did anyone reprimand him?"

The Prophet's anger subsided somewhat when he was told:

"Yes, Salim reprimanded him and opposed him." Salim lived close to the Prophet and the believers. He was never slow or reluctant in his worship nor did he miss any campaign. In particular, the strong brotherly relationship which existed between him and Abu Hudhayfah grew with the passing days.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, passed away to his Lord. Abu Bakr assumed responsibility for the affairs of Muslims and immediately had to face the conspiracies of the apostates which resulted in the terrible battle of Yamamah. Among the Muslim forces which made their way to the central heartlands of Arabia was Salim and his "brother", Abu Hudhayfah.

At the beginning of the battle, the Muslim forces suffered major reverses. The Muslims fought as individuals and so the strength that comes from solidarity was initially absent. But Khalid ibn al-Walid regrouped the Muslim forces anew and managed to achieve an amazing coordination.

Abu Hudhayfah and Salim embraced each other and made a vow to seek martyrdom in the path of the religion of Truth and thus attain felicity in the hereafter. Yamamah was their tryst with destiny. To spur on the Muslims Abu Hudhayfah shouted: "Yaa ahl al-Quran - O people of the Quran! Adorn the Quran with your deeds," as his sword flashed through the army of Musaylamah the imposter like a whirlwind. Salim in his turn shouted:

"What a wretched bearer of the Quran am I, if the Muslims are attacked from my direction. Far be it from you, O Salim! Instead, be you a worthy bearer of the

With renewed courage he plunged into the battle. When the standard-bearer of the Muhajirin, Zayd ibn al-Khattab, fell. Salim bore aloft the flag and continued fighting. His right hand was then severed and he held the standard aloft with his left hand while reciting aloud the verse of the glorious Quran:

"How many a Prophet fought in God's way and with him (fought) large bands of godly men! But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are firm and steadfast." What an inspiring verse for such an occasion! And what a fitting epitaph for someone who had dedicated his life for the sake of Islam!

A wave of apostates then overwhelmed Salim and he fell. Some life remained with him until the battle came to an end with the death of Musaylamah. When the Muslims went about searching for their victims and their martyrs, they found Salim in the last throes of death. As his life-blood ebbed away he asked them: "What has happened to Abu Hudhayfah?" "He has been martyred," came the reply. "Then put me to lie next to him," said Salim.

"He is close to you, Salim. He was martyred in this same place." Salim smiled a last faint smile and spoke no more. Both men had realized what they had hoped for. Together they entered Islam. Together they lived. And together they were martyred.

Salim, that great believer passed away to his Lord. Of him, the great Umar ibn al-Khattab spoke as he lay dying: "If Salim were alive, I would have appointed him my successor."

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