

Mus`ab Ibn Umayr

Mus'ab ibn Umayr was born and grew up in the lap of affluence and luxury. His rich parents lavished a great deal of care and attention on him. He wore the most expensive clothes and the most stylish shoes of his time. Yemeni shoes were then considered to be very elegant and it was his privilege to have the very best of these.

As a youth he was admired by the Quraysh not only for his good looks and style but for his intelligence. His elegant bearing and keen mind endeared him to the Makkan nobility among whom he moved with ease. Although still young, he had the privilege of attending Quraysh meetings and gatherings. He was thus in a position to know the issues which concerned the Makkans and what their attitudes and strategies were.

Among Makkans there was a sudden outburst of excitement and concern as Muhammad, known as al-Ameen (the Trustworthy), emerged saying that God had sent him as a bearer of good tidings and as a warner. He warned the Quraysh of terrible chastisement if they did not turn to the worship and obedience of God and he spoke of Divine rewards for the righteous. The whole of Makkah buzzed with talk of these claims. The vulnerable Quraysh leaders thought of ways of silencing Muhammad. When ridicule and persuasion did not work, they embarked on a campaign of harassment and persecution.

Mus'ab learnt that Muhammad and those who believed in his message were gathering in a house near the hill of as-Safa to evade Quraysh harassment. This was the house of al-Arqam. To satisfy his curiosity, Mus'ab proceeded to the house undeterred by the knowledge of Quraysh hostility. There he met the Prophet teaching his small band of companions, reciting the verses of the Qur'an to them and performing Salah with them in submission to God, the Great, the Most High.

The Prophet welcomed him, and with his noble hand tenderly touched Musab's heart as it throbbed with excitement. A deep feeling of tranquility came over him.

Mus'ab was totally overwhelmed by what he had seen and heard. The words of the Qur'an had made a deep and immediate impression on him.

In this first meeting with the Prophet, the young and decisive Mus'ab declared his acceptance of Islam. It was a historic moment. The keen mind of Mus'ab, his tenacious will and determination, his eloquence and his beautiful character were now in the service of Islam and would help change the course of men's destinies and of history.

On accepting Islam Mus'ab had one major concern... his mother. Her name was Khunnas bint Malik. She was a woman of extraordinary power. She had a dominant

personality and could easily arouse fear and terror. When Mus'ab became a Muslim, the only power on earth he might have feared was his mother. All the powerful nobles of Makkah and their attachment to pagan customs and traditions were of little consequence to him. Having his mother as an opponent, however, could not be taken lightly.

Mus'ab thought quickly. He decided that he should conceal his acceptance of Islam until such time as a solution should come from God. He continued to frequent the House of al-Arqam and sit in the company of the Prophet. He felt serene in his new faith and by keeping all indications of his acceptance of Islam away from her, he managed to stave off his mother's wrath, but not for long.

It was difficult during those days to keep anything secret in Makkah for long. The eyes and ears of the Quraysh were on every road. Behind every footstep imprinted in the soft and burning sand was a Quraysh informer. Before long, Mus'ab was seen as he quietly entered the House of al-Arqam, by someone called 'Uthman ibn Talhah.

At another time, 'Uthman saw Mus'ab praying in the same manner as Muhammad prayed. The conclusion was obvious.

As winds in a storm, the devastating news of Mus'ab's acceptance of Islam spread among the Quraysh and eventually reached his mother.

Mus'ab stood before his mother, his clan and the Quraysh nobility who had all gathered to find out what he had done and what he had to say for himself.

With a certain humility and calm confidence, Mus'ab acknowledged that he had become a Muslim and no doubt he explained his reasons for so doing. He then recited some verses of the Qur'an - verses which had cleansed the hearts of the believers and brought them back to the natural religion of God. Though only few in number, their hearts were now filled with wisdom, honor, justice and courage.

As Mus'ab's mother listened to her son on whom she had lavished so much care and affection, she became increasingly incensed. She felt like silencing him with one terrible blow. But the hand which shot out like an arrow staggered and faltered before the light which radiated from Mus'ab's serene face. Perhaps, it was her mother's love which restrained her from actually beating him, but still she felt she had to do something to avenge the gods which her son had forsaken. The solution she decided upon was far worse for Musab than a few blows could ever have been. She had Mus'ab taken to a far corner of the house. There he was firmly bound and tethered. He had become a prisoner in his own home.

For a long time, Musab remained tied and confined under the watchful eyes of guards whom his mother had placed over him to prevent him from any further contact with Muhammad and his faith. Despite his ordeal, Mus'ab did not waver. He must have

had news of how other Muslims were being harassed and tortured by the idolators. For him, as for many other Muslims, life in Makkah was becoming more and more intolerable. Eventually he heard that a group of Muslims were preparing secretly to migrate to Abyssinia to seek refuge and relief. His immediate thoughts were how to escape from his prison and join them. At the first opportunity, when his mother and his warders were off-guard, he managed to slip away quietly. Then with utmost haste he joined the other refugees and before long they sailed together across the Red Sea to Africa.

Although the Muslims enjoyed peace and security in the land of the Negus, they longed to be in Makkah in the company of the noble Prophet. So, when a report reached Abyssinia that the conditions of the Muslims in Makkah had improved, Mus'ab was among the first to return to Makkah. The report was in fact false and Mus'ab once again left for Abyssinia.

Whether he was in Makkah or Abyssinia, Mus'ab remained strong in his new faith and his main concern was to make his life worthy of his Creator.

When Mus'ab returned to Makkah again, his mother made a last attempt to gain control of him and threatened to have him tied up again and confined. Mus'ab swore that if she were to do that, he would kill everyone who helped her. She knew very well that he would carry out this threat for she saw the iron determination he now had.

Separation was inevitable. When the moment came, it was sad for both mother and son but it revealed a strong persistence in kufr on the part of the mother and an even greater persistence in iman on the part of the son. As she threw him out of her house and cut him off from all the material comforts she used to lavish on him, she said:

"Go to your own business. I am not prepared to be a mother to you." Mus'ab went up close to her and said:

"Mother, I advise you sincerely. I am concerned about you. Do testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger."

"I swear by the shooting stars, I shall not enter your religion even if my opinion is ridiculed and my mind becomes impotent," she insisted.

Mus'ab thus left her home and the luxury and comforts he used to enjoy. The elegant, well-dressed youth would henceforth be seen only in the coarsest of attire. He now had more important concerns. He was determined to use his talents and energies in acquiring knowledge and in serving God and His Prophet.

One day, several years later, Mus'ab came upon a gathering of Muslims sitting around the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. They bowed their heads

and lowered their gaze when they saw Mus'ab, and some were even moved to tears. This was because his jalbab was old and in tatters and they were immediately taken back to the days before his acceptance of Islam when he was a model of sartorial elegance. The Prophet looked at Mus'ab, smiled gracefully and said:

"I have seen this Mus'ab with his parents in Makkah. They lavished care and attention on him and gave him all comforts. There was no Quraysh youth like him. Then he left all that seeking the pleasure of God and devoting himself to the service of His Prophet." The Prophet then went on to say:

"There will come a time when God will grant you victory over Persia and Byzantium. You would have one dress in the morning and another in the evening and you would eat out of one dish in the morning and another in the evening."

In other words, the Prophet prophesied that the Muslims would become rich and powerful and that they would have material goods in plenty. The companions sitting around asked the Prophet,

"O Messenger of Allah, are we in a better situation in these times or would we be better off then?"

He replied: "You are rather better off now than you would be then. If you knew of the world what I know you would certainly not be so much concerned with it."

On another occasion, the Prophet talked in a similar vein to his companions and asked them how they would be if they could have one suit of clothes in the morning and another in the evening and even have enough material to put curtains in their houses just as the Ka'bah was fully covered. The companions replied that they would then be in a better situation because they would then have sufficient sustenance and would be free for 'ibadah (worship). The Prophet however told them that they were indeed better off as they were.

After about ten years of inviting people to Islam, most of Makkah still remained hostile. The noble Prophet then went to Ta'if seeking new adherents to the faith. He was repulsed and chased out of the city. The future of Islam looked bleak.

It was just after this that the Prophet chose Mus'ab to be his "ambassador" to Yathrib to teach a small group of believers who had come to pledge allegiance to Islam and prepare Madinah for the day of the great Hijrah.

Mus'ab was chosen above companions who were older than he or were more closely related to the Prophet or who appeared to possess greater prestige. No doubt Mus'ab was chosen for this task because of his noble character, his fine manners and his sharp intellect. His knowledge of the Qur'an and his ability to recite it beautifully and movingly was also an important consideration.

Mus'ab understood his mission well. He knew that he was on a sacred mission to invite people to God and the straight path of Islam and to prepare what was to be the territorial base for the young and struggling Muslim community.

He entered Madinah as a guest of Sa'd ibn Zurarah of the Khazraj tribe. Together they went to people, to their homes and their gatherings, telling them about the Prophet, explaining Islam to them and reciting the Qur'an. Through the grace of God, many accepted Islam. This was especially pleasing to Mus'ab but profoundly alarming to many leaders of Yathribite society.

Once Mus'ab and Sa'd were sitting near a well in an orchard of the Zafar clan. With them were a number of new Muslims and others who were interested in Islam. A powerful notable of the city, Usayd ibn Khudayr, came up brandishing a spear. He was livid with rage. Sa'd ibn Zararah saw him and told Mus'ab: "This is a chieftain of his people. May God place truth in his heart."

Musab replied, displaying all the calm and tact of a great da'iy,
"If he sits down, I will speak to him."

The angry 'Usayd shouted abuse and threatened Mus'ab and his host. "Why have you both come to us to corrupt the weak among us? Keep away from us if you want to stay alive." Mus'ab smiled a warm and friendly smile and said to 'Usayd:

"Won't you sit down and listen? If you are pleased and satisfied with our mission, accept it and if you dislike it we would stop telling you what you dislike and leave."

"That's reasonable," said Usayd and, sticking his spear in the ground, sat down. Mus'ab was not compelling him to do anything. He was not denouncing him. He was merely inviting him to listen. If he was satisfied, well and good. If not, then Mus'ab would leave his district and his clan without any fuss and go to another district.

Mus'ab began telling him about Islam and recited the Qur'an to him. Even before 'Usayd spoke, it was clear from his face, now radiant and expectant, that faith had entered his heart. He said: "How beautiful are these words and how true! What does a person do if he wants to enter this religion?"

"Have a bath, purify yourself and your clothes. Then utter the testimony of Truth (Shahadah), and perform Salat."

'Usayd left the gathering and was absent for only a short while. He returned and testified that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. He then prayed two rak'ats and said: "After me, there is a man who if he follows you, every one of his people will follow him. I shall send him to you now. He is Sa'd ibn Mu'adh."

Sa'd ibn Mu'adh came and listened to Mus'ab. He was convinced and satisfied and declared his submission to God. He was followed by another important Yathribite, Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah. Before long, the people of Yathrib were all in a flurry, asking one another:

"If Usayd ibn Khudayr, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh and Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah have accepted the new religion, how can we not follow? Let's go to Mus'ab and believe with him. They say that truth emanates from his lips."

The first ambassador of the Prophet, peace be on him, was thus supremely successful. The Prophet had chosen well. Men and women, the young and the old, the powerful and the weak accepted Islam at his hands. The course of Yathribite history had been changed forever. The way was being prepared for the great Hijrah. Yathrib was soon to become the center and the base for the Islamic state.

Less than a year after his arrival in Yathrib, Mus'ab returned to Makkah. It was again in the season of pilgrimage. With him was a group of seventy-five Muslims from Madinah. Again at 'Aqabah, near Mina, they met the Prophet. There they solemnly undertook to defend the Prophet at all cost. Should they remain firm in their faith, their reward, said the Prophet, would be nothing less than Paradise. This second bay'ah or pledge which the Muslims of Yathrib made came to be called the Pledge of War.

From then on events moved swiftly. Shortly after the Pledge, the Prophet directed his persecuted followers to migrate to Yathrib where the new Muslims or Ansar (Helpers) had shown their willingness to give asylum and extend their protection to the afflicted Muslims. The first of the Prophet's companions to arrive in Madinah were Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr and the blind 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum. 'Abdullah also recited the Qur'an beautifully and according to one of the Ansar, both Mus'ab and 'Abdullah recited the Qur'an for the people of Yathrib.

Mus'ab continued to play a major role in the building of the new community. The next momentous situation in which we meet him was during the great Battle of Badr. After the battle was over, the Quraysh prisoners of war were brought to the Prophet who assigned them to the custody of individual Muslims. "Treat them well," he instructed.

Among the prisoners was Abu 'Azeez ibn 'Umayr, the brother of Mus'ab. Abu 'Azeez related what happened: "I was among a group of Ansar...Whenever they had lunch or dinner they would give me bread and dates to eat in obedience to the Prophet's instructions to them to treat us well.

My brother, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, passed by me and said to the man from the Ansar who was holding me prisoner:

"Tie him firmly... His mother is a woman of great wealth and maybe she would ransom him for you."

Abu 'Azeez could not believe his ears. Astonished, he turned to Mus'ab and asked: "My brother, is this your instruction concerning me?"

"He is my brother, not you," replied Mus'ab.

Thus, affirming that in the battle between iman and kufr, the bonds of faith were stronger than the ties of kinship.

At the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet called upon Mus'ab, now well-known as Mus'ab al-Khayr (the Good), to carry the Muslim standard. At the beginning of the battle, the Muslims seemed to be gaining the upper hand. A group of Muslims then went against the orders of the Prophet and deserted their positions. The mushrikeen forces rallied again and launched a counterattack. Their main objective, as they cut through the Muslim forces, was to get to the noble Prophet.

Mus'ab realized the great danger facing the Prophet. He raised the standard high and shouted the takbeer. With the standard in one hand and his sword in the other, he plunged into the Quraysh forces. The odds were against him. A Quraysh horseman moved in close and severed his right hand. Mus'ab was heard to repeat the words:

"Muhammad is only a Messenger. Messengers have passed away before him,"

showing that however great his attachment was to the Prophet himself, his struggle above all was for the sake of God and for making His word supreme. His left hand was then severed also and as he held the standard between the stumps of his arms, to console himself he repeated:

"Muhammad is only a Messenger of God. Messengers have passed away before him."

Mus'ab was then hit by a spear. He fell and the standard fell. The words he repeated, every time he was struck were later revealed to the Prophet and completed, and became part of the Qur'an.

After the battle, the Prophet and his companions went through the battlefield, bidding farewell to the martyrs. When they came to Mus'ab's body, tears flowed. Khabbab related that they could not find any cloth with which to shroud Mus'ab's body, except his own garment. When they covered his head with it, his legs showed and when his legs were covered, his head was exposed and the Prophet instructed:

"Place the garment over his head and cover his feet and legs with the leaves of the idhkhir (rue) plant."

The Prophet felt deep pain and sorrow at the number of his companions who were killed at the Battle of Uhud. These included his uncle Hamzah whose body was horribly mutilated. But it was over the body of Mus'ab that the Prophet stood, with great emotion. He remembered Mus'ab as he first saw him in Makkah, stylish and elegant, and then looked at the short burdah which was now the only garment he possessed and he recited the verse of the Quran:

"Among the believers are men who have been true to what they have pledged to God."

The Prophet then cast his tender eyes over the battlefield on which lay the dead companions of Mus'ab and said: "The Messenger of God testifies that you are martyrs in the sight of God on the day of Qiyamah."

Then turning to the living companions around him he said: "O People! Visit them, send peace on them for, by Him in whose hand is my soul, any Muslim who sends peace on them until the day of Qiyamah, they would return the salutation of peace."

As-salamu 'alayka ya Mus'ab...

As-salamu alaykum, ma'shar ash-shudhada.

As-salamu alaykum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuhu.

Peace be on you, O Mus'ab...

Peace be on you all, O martyrs...

Peace be on you and the mercy and blessings of God.

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