

Umm Sulaym bint Milhan

Writing about Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) is multidimensional. Incidences which mention her presence around the Prophet (pbuh) are many. Yet they all revolve around solely one thing: her deep love for Allah and His Messenger (pbuh). Keeping in mind this great love, which emanated and implemented into action, will actually make it easier for us to understand the personality of Umm Sulaym and cast light on her exceptional qualities as a Muslim woman.

While I present her life, I - with due humility and respect to my Sisters- beseech Allah to inspire our Sisters by the example of Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her), so that they arise from the abyss of stagnation and insolence to a high ground, a place of rest, security and flowing streams... Then the Muslim women, who are the half of society, will no longer remain captive to blind imitation and vain desire.

Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) was an Ansari woman from Madinah. She embraced Islam with the early Muslims. The historians disagree over her real name; some said her name was Sahlah, some said it was Rumaylah, others say it is Malikah and some say it is Ghumaysa or Rumaysah. Perhaps this difference over her name was caused due to the popularity of her nick name, Umm Sulaym.

When Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) embraced Islam she was married to Malik ibn Nadr; he disagreed with her regarding Islam and continued in his polytheism. He blocked his heart from guidance and his eyes from seeing the light of Islam. This led to their separation, for how can a Muslim woman share the deep union of marriage with a disbelieving man?

That was the first stand of Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) for Islam after she embraced Islam. The love of Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) was more precious to her than the love for marital and family relations, even if the person concerned was her husband, her close relative and the father of her only son, Anas.

Malik did not only divorce his wife, Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her), but also left Madinah. It was unbearable for him to live in Madinah in the presence the Messenger of Allah (pbuh). So he headed for Syria where he died after a short while as a lonely refugee. He was not only exiled from his homeland, but also from Allah's mercy.

This stand of Malik reminds me of a saying of Allah's Messenger (pbuh), "Indeed, Madinah expels (bad) persons as a furnace removes the impurities of iron." Truly, the Messenger of Allah said the truth.

Umm Sulaym proceeded in her way to Allah. If every step and breath she took and every progress she made indicated anything, it is no more than her overwhelming love for Allah and her wish to attain and excel to the highest degree.

After her divorce from Malik and his departure for exile, the rich Abu Talhah al-Ansari came to ask for her hand in marriage, although he was then still a polytheist.

What was the response of Umm Sulaym, who preferred the love of Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) above the love of husband and the father of her only child?

She said with faith and certainty,

“Abu Talhah, don’t you know that your deity that you worship grew from the earth?”

He answered in the affirmative. She said,

“Are you then not ashamed of worshipping a tree?”

After this severe rebuke of the wooden deity, without fearing Abu Talhah who was known for his bravery, strength and position among his people, Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) then spoke gently and said,

“I have embraced Islam and I do not want any sadaq (bridal gift) more than your acceptance of Islam.”

Abu Talhah said, “Let me think over it.”

He came back after a while and said, “I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!”

Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) then told her young son Anas,

“Anas give me in marriage to Abu Talhah.”

And the marriage took place.

Umm Sulaym was the first Muslim woman to accept a suitor’s testimony of faith as mahr (bridal money). This was a new, memorable and commendable trend, and it is one of stances recorded in Umm Sulaym’s (May Allah be pleased with her) great and glorious record. It is undoubtedly a manifestation of her great love for Allah and His Messenger (pbuh).

The spring of pure love continued to gush forth copiously and abundantly. She actually brought her son, Anas who was only a ten-year old boy to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and said,

“O Allah’s Messenger! This is Anas, I brought him to serve you!”

The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) excellently received him and accepted him into his household.

Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) remained with the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) serving him throughout the ten years which the Prophet spent in Madinah after his migration from Makkah until he died. Never did he leave his company whether he was at home or on a journey. No wonder that he was able to memorize many Ahadith (Prophetic Narrations) about the Prophet's (pbuh) deeds and sayings. He was in fact, an authority and a treasure of this blessed knowledge.

Her Home

Milhan's house which was also the home of Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) and Umm Haram (May Allah be pleased with her) was the only house that the Prophet (pbuh) used to enter besides the apartments of his wives, for which there was a reason. Anas (May Allah be pleased with him) spoke about this when he said, "The Prophet (pbuh) would visit Umm Sulaym who would present him with something she specially made for him." He added, "The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) did not use to enter any house except that of Umm Sulaym, and of course, those of his wives. When he was asked of that he said, "Her brother was killed while he was fighting on my side."

Ibn Hajar said in al-Isabah:

"And I say that the reason for his visiting Umm Haram and her sister, Umm Sulaym, is that both sisters lived in the same apartment."

Dear reader, these blessed visits of Allah's Messenger (pbuh) would of course take place in the presence of mahram(s). For, it is illogical that the Prophet of mercy, guidance, excellent morals and pure laws could have visited women who were not members of his household in the absence of their mahram(s). He was as described by Allah:

{Indeed in the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] you have a good example to follow for him who hopes for [the meeting with] Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much} (Qur'an 33: 21)

Her Wisdom and Patience

We will now learn a new lesson of faith from this great Sahabiyyah. It is a lesson that is full of wisdom and an understanding of the fundamentals of the marital relationship, which should be built on tranquility, love and affection. Allah says:

{And among His signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy.} (Qur'an 30: 21)

It is authentically reported that a son of hers born to Abu Talhah (May Allah be pleased with him) who died. He had been sick and was being treated. When Abu Talhah (May Allah be pleased with him) came back from a journey she requested members of the household that they must not inform him of the death of his son until she herself had done so. When Abu Talhah (May Allah be pleased with him) came and he asked of the boy, she said,

“He has never been as relaxed and quiet as he is now.”

Abu Talhah was happy to hear this apparent improvement in his health and stood up and ate his food.

After that, Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) adorned herself for her husband and wore perfume and he had relations with her. When it was morning, she told him,

“Seek your reward from Allah. Your son is now with Allah!”

Abu Talhah (May Allah be pleased with him) went to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh), sorrow visible and apparent from his face. He informed him of what had happened. Upon that, the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, “May Allah bless your night for you both!”

Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) then became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy named ‘Abdullah ibn Abu Talhah. Abdullah was blessed with many children, ten of whom memorised the Qur'an completely!

The Islamic home in its social and family context is the foundation stone for building the Ummah and its strong and solid structure. Women like Umm Sulaym are successful and wise in achieving this.

Participation in Battles

The Historians and writers of Seerah unanimously agree that Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) used to participate with the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and the Muslims in their battles. She struggled and fought in the way of Allah and strove with all her abilities and capabilities. Her great love for Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) was the driving force behind the great feats she performed, which can be seen in a number of battles, although her participation in the battle of Hunayn is the most famously mentioned.

The Battle of Hunayn chronologically took place after the conquest of Makkah and before the Battle of Ta'if. Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) was among the Muslim army throughout the Battle and hard journey.

Ibn Sa'd narrated with a authentic chain of transmission that Umm Sulaym (May Allah be pleased with her) took a dagger in the Battle of Hunayn. When Abu Talhah (May Allah be pleased with him) saw her he went to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and told him, "Allah's Messenger here is Umm Sulaym holding a dagger!" To which she retorted,

"I am taking it to rip the belly of one of the polytheists with it!"

A Narrator of Hadith

A number of the Prophet's companions related Prophetic Narrations from her. Among these companions were:

- Her son Anas,
- Ibn 'Abbas,
- Zayd ibn Thabit,
- Abu Salamah ibn 'Abdur-Rahman

as well as many others.

My dear Sisters! Her footsteps await your succession.

May Allah be pleased with Umm Sulaym and please her!

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