

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Umar as Caliph

Umar's Allowance

Before becoming the Caliph Umar lived by trade. After assuming the Caliph he could no longer carry on charge as his business. He accordingly agreed to accept a daily allowance from the Baitul Mal. Different amounts of daily allowance were suggested by different people. Umar sought the advice of Ali as to the amount of the allowance he should accept. Ali suggested that he should take as much amount as might moderately suffice for an average Arab, neither too much, nor too little. Umar accepted this suggestion and a modest amount of allowance was settled for him. The exact amount of the allowance thus settled is, however, not reported in any history.

Later on some companions including Ali, Usman, Zubair, and Talhah thought of increasing the allowance of Umar as it was not sufficient to meet the minimum requirements of Umar. These companions could not have the courage to broach this subject to Umar direct. They accordingly approached Hafsa the daughter of Umar, and asked her to ascertain Umar's reaction to the proposal.

When Hafsa talked about the matter to Umar, he became angry and wanted to know who were the persons who had made that suggestion. Hafsa said that before she could tell who were the persons concerned she wanted his reaction to the proposal.

Thereupon Umar wanted Hafsa to tell what was the Holy Prophet's best dress in her house. She said that it was a pair of clothes of red colour which the Holy Prophet wore on Fridays or when receiving envoys.

Umar then asked what was the best of food that the Holy Prophet took. She said that the Holy Prophet's food was simple barley bread. Umar next asked as to what was the best bedding that the Holy Prophet ever used. She said that it was a piece of thick cloth. In summer it was spread in four layers and in winter in two, half he spread underneath, and with the other half he covered himself.

Thereupon Umar said:

"Hafsa, go and tell the people who have deputed you that the Holy Prophet has set a standard by his personal example. I must follow him. My case and that of the Holy Prophet and Abu Bakr is like the case of three men travelling on the same road. The first man started with a provision and reached the goal. The second followed the first and joined him. Now the third is on his way. If he follows their way he will also join them, otherwise he can never reach them."

When Hafsa told of Umar's reaction to the proposal to the companions who had deputed her they said: "May God bless Umar. He excels all of us in the matter of virtue."

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