

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Inter-Personal Relations and Interactions

Abdullah Bin Qart

Abdullah bin Qart was appointed by Umar as the Governor of Emessa. When Umar went on a tour of Syria, he enquired of the people of Emessa as to how was their Governor. The concensus of opinion was:

"He is a good man, but he has some pride and haughtiness about him, and he has constructed a double storeyed house for himself, while the houses of all other Muslims are single storeyed."

Umar deputed an agent to verify whether Abdullah had in fact built a double storeyed house. The agent was further instructed that if the house was in fact double storeyed the door on the upperstorey should be burnt as indicative of the displeasure of the Caliph. The agent found that a double storeyed house had actually been constructed. He, therefore, in compliance with the order of Umar had the door burnt. Abdullah watched the burning of the door with a sense of hurt pride. This was reported to Umar.

When Umar returned to Madina, he summoned Abdullah bin Qart to Madina. Having arrived at Madina, Abdullah bin Qart waited on Umar. Umar did not see him for three days and kept him waiting.

When after three days, Abdullah was admitted to the presence of Umar, Umar asked him whether he had built the second storey with his own money, or with money produced through unlawful means. Abdullah produced accounts to show that the house had been constructed with his own money. Umar showed his satisfaction on that count. Thereupon Abdullah behaved haughtily and asked "When the house was constructed with my own money, where lay the offence."

Umar cast a searching look at Abdullah and then said with some show of anger, "As a Governor of a Muslim state, you had to set a standard of equality among the Muslims. You have violated this principle by constructing a double storeyed house for yourself, thus placing yourself above the people."

Umar ordered Abdullah to see him at Harrah the following day. Harrah was the state pasture a few miles from Madina. When Abdullah appeared at Harrah, Umar ordered him, "Take off your costly clothes, and don this dress of a shepherd. Till further orders you have to look after the camels in this pasture". Abdullah reluctantly complied with the orders. Umar visited Harrah a fortnight later and asked Abdullah as to how he felt. Abdullah said, "I feel I repentant". Thereupon Umar said, "A Muslim Governor cannot be haughty or proud. If you are repentant I send you back as Governor. I hope you have learnt the lesson that a Governor is not superior to the people; he is only one of them, with great responsibilities."

Abdullah returned to Emessa a changed man.

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