

Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl

He was at the end of the third decade of his life on the day the Prophet made public his call to guidance and truth. He was held in high regard by the Quraysh, being wealthy and of noble lineage. Some others like him, Saud ibn Abi Waqqas, Musab ibn Umayr and other sons of noble families in Makkah had become Muslims. He too might have followed their example were it not for his father. His father, Abu Jahl, was the foremost proponent of Shirk and one of the greatest tyrants of Makkah. Through torture, he sorely tested the faith of the early believers but they remained steadfast. He used every stratagem to make them waver but they continued to affirm the truth.

Ikrimah found himself defending the leadership and authority of his father as he pitted himself against the Prophet. His animosity towards the Prophet, his persecution of his followers and his attempts to block the progress of Islam and the Muslims won the admiration of his father.

At Badr, Abu Jahl led the Makkan polytheists in the battle against the Muslims. He swore by al-Laat and al-Uzza that he would not return to Makkah unless he crushed Muhammad. At Badr he sacrificed three camels to these goddesses. He drank wine and had the music of singing girls to spur the Quraysh on to fight.

Abu Jahl was among the first to fall in the battle. His son Ikrimah saw him as spears pierced his body and heard him let out his last cry of agony. Ikrimah returned to Makkah leaving behind the corpse of the Quraysh chieftain, his father. He wanted to bury him in Makkah but the crushing defeat they suffered made this impossible.

From that day, the fire of hatred burned even more fiercely in the heart of Ikrimah. Others whose fathers were killed at Badr, also became more hostile to Muhammad and his followers. This eventually led to the Battle of Uhud.

At Uhud Ikrimah was accompanied by his wife, Umm Hakim. She and other women stood behind the battle lines beating their drums, urging the Quraysh on to battle and upbraiding any horseman who felt inclined to flee.

Leading the right flank of the Quraysh was Khalid ibn Walid. On the left was Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl. The Quraysh inflicted heavy losses on the Muslims and felt that they had avenged themselves for the defeat at Badr. This was not, however, the end of the state of conflict.

At the battle of the Ditch, the Quraysh mushrikun besieged Madinah. It was a long siege. The resources and the patience of the mushrikun were wearing out. Ikrimah, feeling the strain of the siege, saw a place where the ditch, dug by the Muslims, was relatively narrow. With a gigantic effort, he managed to cross. A small group of Quraysh followed him. It was a foolhardy undertaking. One of them was immediately killed and it was only by turning on his heels that Ikrimah managed to save himself.

Nine years after his hijrah, the Prophet returned with thousands of his companions to Makkah. The Quraysh saw them approaching and decided to leave the way open for them because they knew that the Prophet had given instructions to his commanders not to open hostilities. Ikrimah and some others however went against the consensus of the Quraysh and attempted to block the progress of the Muslim forces. Khalid ibn al-Walid, now a Muslim, met and defeated them in a small engagement during which some of Ikrimah's men were killed and others who could fled. Among those who escaped was Ikrimah himself.

Any standing or influence that Ikrimah may have had was now completely destroyed. The Prophet, peace

be upon him, entered Makkah and gave a general pardon and amnesty to all Quraysh who entered the sacred mosque, or who stayed in their houses or who went to the house of Abu Sufyan, the paramount Quraysh leader. However he refused to grant amnesty to a few individuals whom he named. He gave orders that they should be killed even if they were found under the covering of the Kabah. At the top of this list was Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl. When Ikrimah learnt of this, he slipped out of Makkah in disguise and headed for the Yemen.

Umm Hakim, Ikrimah's wife, then went to the camp of the Prophet. With her was Hind bint Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyan and the mother of Muawiyah, and about ten other women who wanted to pledge allegiance to the Prophet. At the camp, were two of his wives, his daughter Fatimah and some women of the Abdulmuttalib clan. Hind was the one who spoke. She was veiled and ashamed of what she had done to Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle, at the battle of Uhud.

"O Messenger of God," she said, "Praise be to God Who has made manifest the religion He has chosen for Himself. I beseech you out of the bonds of kinship to treat me well. I am now a believing woman who affirms the Truth of your mission." She then unveiled herself and said:

"I am Hind, the daughter of Utbah, O Messenger of God. "

"Welcome to you," replied the Prophet, peace be on him.

"By God, O Prophet" continued Hind, "there was not a house on earth that I wanted to destroy more than your house. Now, there is no house on earth that I so dearly wish to honor and raise in glory than yours."

Umm Hakim then got up and professed her faith in Islam and said: "O Messenger of God, Ikrimah has fled from you to the Yemen out of fear that you would kill him. Grant him security and God will grant you security."

"He is secure," promised the Prophet. Umm Hakim set out immediately in search of Ikrimah. Accompanying her was a Greek slave. When they had gone quite far on the way, he tried to seduce her but she managed to put him off until she came to a settlement of Arabs. She sought their help against him. They tied him up and kept him. Umm Hakim continued on her way until she finally found Ikrimah on the coast of the Red Sea in the region of Tihamah. He was negotiating transport with a Muslim seaman who was saying to him:

"Be pure and sincere and I will transport you."

"How can I be pure?" asked Ikrimah.

"Say, I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

"I have fled from this very thing," said Ikrimah.

At this point, Umm Hakim came up to Ikrimah and said:

"O cousin, I have come to you from the most generous of men, the most righteous of men, the best of men . . . from Muhammad ibn Abdullah. I have asked him for an amnesty for you. This he has granted. So do not destroy yourself. "

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes, I have spoken to him and he has granted you amnesty," she assured him and he returned with her. She told him about the attempt of their Greek slave to dishonor her and Ikrimah went directly to the Arab settlement where he lay bound and killed him.

At one of their resting places on their way back, Ikrimah wanted to sleep with his wife but she vehemently refused and said:

"I am a Muslimah and you are a Mushrik."

Ikrimah was totally taken aback and said, "Living without you and without your sleeping with me is an impossible situation." As Ikrimah approached Makkah, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told his companions: "Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl shall come to you as a believer and a muhajir (a refugee). Do not insult his father. Insulting the dead causes grief to the living and does not reach the dead."

Ikrimah and his wife came up to where the Prophet was sitting. The Prophet got up and greeted him enthusiastically.

"Muhammad," said Ikrimah, "Umm Hakim has told me that you have granted me an amnesty."

"That's right," said the Prophet, "You are safe."

"To what do you invite?" asked Ikrimah.

"I invite you to testify that there is no god but Allah and that I am the servant of Allah and His messenger, to establish Prayer and pay the Zakat and carry out all the other obligations of Islam."

"By God," responded Ikrimah, "You have only called to what is true and you have only commanded that which is good. You lived among us before the start of your mission and then you were the most trustworthy of us in speech and the most righteous of us." Stretching forth his hands he said, "I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger." The Prophet then instructed him to say, "I call on God and those present here to witness that I am a Muslim who is a Mujahid and a Muhajir". This Ikrimah repeated and then said:

"I ask you to ask God for forgiveness for me for all the hostility I directed against you and for whatever insults I expressed in your presence or absence." The Prophet replied with the prayer:

"O Lord, forgive him for all the hostility he directed against me and from all the expeditions he mounted wishing to put out Your light. Forgive him for whatever he has said or done in my presence or absence to dishonor me."

Ikrimah's face beamed with happiness.

"By God, O messenger of Allah, I promise that whatever I have spent obstructing the way of God, I shall spend twice as much in His path and whatever battles I have fought against God's way I shall fight twice as much in His way."

From that day on, Ikrimah was committed to the mission of Islam as brave horseman in the field of battle and as a steadfast worshiper who would spend much time in mosques reading the book of God. Often he would place the mushaf on his face and say, "The Book of my Lord, the words of my Lord" and he would cry from the fear of God.

Ikrimah remained true to his pledge to the Prophet. Whatever battles the Muslims engaged in thereafter, he participated in them and he was always in the vanguard of the army. At the battle of Yarmuk he plunged into the attack as a thirsty person after cold water on a blistering hot day. In one encounter in which the Muslims were under heavy attack, Ikrimah penetrated deep into the ranks of the Byzantine. Khalid ibn al-Walid rushed up to him and said, "Don't, Ikrimah. Your death will be a severe blow to the Muslims."

"Let us carry on, Khalid," said Ikrimah, now at the peak of motivation. "You had the privilege of being with

the Messenger of God before this. As for myself and my father, we were among his bitterest enemies. Leave me now to atone for what I have done in the past. I fought the Prophet on many occasions. Shall I now flee from the Byzantines? This shall never be." Then calling out to the Muslims, he shouted, "Who shall pledge to fight until death?"

Four hundred Muslims including al-Harith ibn Hisham and Ayyash ibn Abi Rabi'ah responded to his call. They plunged into the battle and fought heroically without the leadership of Khalid ibn al-Walid. Their daring attack paved the way for a decisive Muslim victory.

When the battle was over, the bodies of three wounded mujahideen lay sprawled on the battleground, among them Al-Harith ibn Hisham, Ayyash ibn Abi Rabi'ah and Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl. Al-Harith called for water to drink. As it was brought to him, Ayyash looked at him and Harith said:

"Give it to Ayyash." By the time they got to Ayyash, he had just breathed his last. When they returned to al-Harith and Ikrimah, they found that they too had passed away.

The companions prayed that God may be pleased with them all and grant them refreshment from the spring of Kawthar in Paradise, a refreshment after which there is thirst no more.

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