

Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah

His appearance was striking. He was slim and tall. His face was bright and he had a sparse beard. It was pleasing to look at him and refreshing to meet him. He was extremely courteous and humble and quite shy. Yet in a tough situation he would become strikingly serious and alert, resembling the flashing blade of a sword in his severity and sharpness.

He was described as the Amin or Custodian of Muhammad's community. His full name was Aamir ibn Abdullah ibn al-Jarrah. He was known as Abu Ubaydah. Of him Abdullah ibn Umar, one of the companions of the Prophet, said:

"Three persons in the tribe of Quraysh were most prominent, had the best character and were the most modest. If they spoke to you, they would not deceive you and if you spoke to them, they would not accuse you of Lying: Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, Uthman ibn Affan and Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah."

Abu Ubaydah was one of the first persons to accept Islam. He became a Muslim one day after Abu Bakr. In fact, it was through Abu Bakr that he became a Muslim. Abu Bakr took him, Abdur Rahman ibn Aut, Uthman ibn Mazun and al-Arqam ibn Abu al Arqam to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and together they declared their acceptance of the Truth. They were thus the first pillars on which the great edifice of Islam was built.

Abu Ubaydah lived through the harsh experience, which the Muslims went through in Makkah, from beginning to end. With the early Muslims, he endured the insults and the violence, the pain and the sorrow of that experience. In every trial and test he remained firm and constant in his belief in God and His prophet. One of the most harrowing experiences he had to go through however, was at the battle of Badr.

Abu Ubaydah was in the vanguard of the Muslim forces, fighting with might and main and as someone who was not at all afraid of death. The Quraysh cavalry were extremely wary of him and avoided coming face to face with him. One man in particular, however, kept on pursuing Abu Ubaydah wherever he turned and Abu Ubaydah tried his best to keep out of his way and avoid an encounter with him.

The man plunged into the attack. Abu Ubaydah tried desperately to avoid him. Eventually the man succeeded in blocking Abu Ubaydah's path and stood as a barrier between him and the Quraysh. They were now face to face with each other. Abu Ubaydah could not contain himself any longer. He struck one blow to the man's head. The man fell to the ground and died instantly.

Do not try to guess who this man was. It was, as stated earlier, one of the most harrowing experiences that Abu Ubaydah had to go through, how harrowing, it is almost impossible to imagine. The man in Fact was Abdullah ibn al-Jarrah, the father of Abu Ubaydah!

Abu Ubaydah obviously did not want to kill his father but in the actual battle between faith in God and polytheism, the choice open to him was profoundly disturbing but clear. In a way it could be said that he did not kill his father--he only killed the polytheism in the person of his father.

It is concerning this event that God revealed the following verses of the Quran:

"You will not find a people believing in God and the Last Day making friends with those who oppose God and His messenger even if these were their fathers, their sons, their brothers or their clan. God has placed faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him. He will cause them to enter gardens beneath which streams flow that they may dwell therein. God is well pleased with them and they well pleased with Him. They are the party of God. Is not the party of God the successful ones?" (Surah al-

Mujactilah 58:22)

The response of Abu Ubaydah at Badr when confronted by his father was not unexpected. He had attained a strength of faith in God, devotion to His religion and a level of concern for the ummah of Muhammad to which many aspired.

It is related by Muhammad ibn Jafar, a Companion of the Prophet, that a Christian delegation came to the Prophet and said, 'O Abu-l Qasim, send one of your companions with us, one in whom you are well pleased, to judge between us on some questions of property about which we disagree among ourselves. We have a high regard for you Muslim people.'

"Come back to me this evening," replied the Prophet, "and I will send with you one who is strong and trustworthy."

Umar ibn al-Khattab heard the Prophet saying this and later said: "I went to the Zuhr (midday) Prayer early hoping to be the one who would fit the description of the Prophet. When the Prophet had finished the Prayer, he began looking to his right and his left and I raised myself so that he could see me. But he continued looking among us until he spotted Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah. He called him and said, 'Go with them and judge among them with truth about that which they are in disagreement.'" And so Abu Ubaydah got the appointment."

Abu Ubaydah was not only trustworthy. He displayed a great deal of strength in the discharge of his trust. This strength was shown on several occasions.

One day the Prophet dispatched a group of his Sahabah to meet a Quraysh caravan. He appointed Abu Ubaydah as amir (leader) of the group and gave them a bag of dates and nothing else as provisions. Abu Ubaydah gave to each man under his command only one date every day. He would suck this date just as a child would suck at the breast of its mother. He would then drink some water and this would suffice him for the whole day.

On the day of Uhud when the Muslims were being routed, one of the mushrikeen started to shout, "Show me Muhammad, show me Muhammad." Abu Ubaydah was one of a group of ten Muslims who had encircled the Prophet to protect him against the spears of the Mushrikeen.

When the battle was over, it was found that one of the Prophet's molar teeth was broken, his forehead was bashed in and two discs from his shield had penetrated into his cheeks. Abu Bakr went forward with the intention of extracting these discs but Abu Ubaydah said, "Please leave that to me."

Abu Ubaydah was afraid that he would cause the Prophet pain if he took out the discs with his hand. He bit hard into one of the discs. It was extracted but one of his incisor teeth fell to the ground in the process. With his other incisor, he extracted the other disc but lost that tooth also. Abu Bakr remarked, "Abu Ubaydah is the best of men at breaking incisor teeth!"

Abu Ubaydah continued to be fully involved in all the momentous events during the Prophet's lifetime. After the beloved Prophet had passed away, the companions gathered to choose a successor at the Saqifah or meeting place of Banu Saaadah. The day is known in history as the Day of Saqifah. On this day, Umar ibn al-Khattab said to Abu Ubaydah, "Stretch forth your hand and I will swear allegiance to you for I heard the Prophet, peace be upon him say, 'Every ummah has an amin (custodian) and you are the amin of this ummah.' "

"I would not," declared Abu Ubaydah, "put myself forward in the presence of a man whom the Prophet, upon whom be peace, commanded to lead us in Prayer and who led us right until the Prophet's death." He then gave bayah (the oath of allegiance) to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. He continued to be a close adviser to Abu Bakr and his strong supporter in the cause of truth and goodness. Then came the caliphate of Umar and Abu Ubaydah also gave him his support and obedience. He did not disobey him in any matter, except one.

The incident happened when Abu Ubaydah was in Syria leading the Muslim forces from one victory to another until the whole of Syria was under Muslim control. The River Euphrates lay to his right and Asia Minor to his left.

It was then that a plague hit the land of Syria, the like of which people had never experienced before. It devastated the population. Umar dispatched a messenger to Abu Ubaydah with a letter saying:

"I am in urgent need of you. If my letter reaches you at night I strongly urge you to leave before dawn. If this letter reaches you during the day, I strongly urge you to leave before evening and hasten to me.

When Abu Ubaydah received Umar's letter, he said, "I know why the Amir al-Mumineen needs me. He wants to secure the survival of someone who, however, is not eternal." So he wrote to Umar:

"I know that you need me. But I am in an army of Muslims and I have no desire to save myself from what is afflicting them. I do not want to separate from them until God wills. So, when this letter reaches you, release me from your command and permit me to stay on."

When Umar read this letter tears filled his eyes and those who were with him asked, "Has Abu Ubaydah died, O Amir al-Mumineen?"

"No," said he, "But death is near to him."

Umar's intuition was not wrong. Before long, Abu Ubaydah became afflicted with the plague. As death hung over him, he spoke to his army:

"Let me give you some advice which will cause you to be on the path of goodness always. "Establish Prayer. Fast the month of Ramadan. Give Sadaqah. Perform the Hajj and Umrah. Remain united and support one another. Be sincere to your commanders and do not conceal anything from them. Don't let the world destroy you for even if man were to live a thousand years he would still end up with this state that you see me in.

Peace be upon you and the mercy of God."

Abu Ubaydah then turned to Muadh ibn Jabal and said, "O Muadh, perform the prayer with the people (be their leader)." At this, his pure soul departed. Muadh got up and said:

"O people, you are stricken by the death of a man. By God, I don't know whether I have seen a man who had a more righteous heart, who was further from all evil and who was more sincere to people than he. Ask God to shower His mercy on him and God will be merciful to you. "

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