

Umayr ibn Sad al-Ansari

Umayr ibn Sad became an orphan at an early age. His father died leaving him and his mother poor and destitute. His mother eventually married again, to one of the richest men in Madinah. His name was Julas ibn Suwayd who was from the powerful tribe of al-Aws.

Umayr was well looked after by Julas and loved him as a son would love a father. Indeed he began to forget that he was an orphan. As Umayr grew older, Julas fondness and love for him grew. Julas would marvel at the intelligence he displayed in everything he did and at the honesty and trustworthiness which characterized his behavior.

When he was barely ten years old, Umayr became a Muslim. Faith found in his tender heart a secure niche and penetrated deeply into his being. In spite of youthfulness, he would never delay in the performance of salat behind the noble Prophet. Often he would be found in the first row of worshippers, hoping for the thawab promised those who attend mosques early and sit in the foremost rows. His mother was particularly pleased whenever she saw him going to and coming from the mosque, sometimes with her husband and sometimes alone.

Umayr's days passed in this fashion with no major disturbance to upset his calm and contentment. This idyllic state, however, could not last forever. Umayr was soon to face a most difficult test for a boy of his age, a test which shook the peaceful and loving atmosphere of his home and challenged the steadfastness of his faith.

In the ninth year after the Hijrah, the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, announced his intention to lead an expedition to Tabuk against the Byzantine forces. He ordered the Muslims to get themselves ready and make the necessary preparations.

Usually when the Prophet wanted to go on a military campaign he would not give precise details of his objective or he would set off in a direction opposite to his intended destination. This was for security purposes and to confound the enemy's intelligence service. This he did not do in announcing the expedition to Tabuk. This was perhaps because of the great distance of Tabuk from Madinah, the enormous difficulties expected and the overwhelming strength of the enemy.

The preparations needed for this expedition had to be extensive. In spite of the fact that summer had set in and the intense heat produced languor and listlessness, and in spite of the fact that the date crops needed harvesting, the Muslims responded enthusiastically to the call of the Prophet and busied themselves in preparing for the arduous campaign ahead.

There was however a group of munafiqun or hypocrites who outwardly had declared their acceptance of Islam but inwardly did not believe in it. They were critical of the expedition and tried to weaken the resolve of the Muslims. They even ridiculed the Prophet in their private gatherings. Disbelief and hatred remained in their hearts.

One day, shortly before the army was due to set out, the young Umayr ibn Sad returned home after performing Salat in the mosque. He was all agog with excitement. He had just witnessed the great generosity and the spontaneous spirit of sacrifice which the Muslims displayed in preparing for the expedition. He had seen women of the Muhajirin and the Ansar donating their jewellery and their ornaments to buy provisions and equipment for the army. He had seen Uthman ibn Affan handing over a purse containing a thousand gold dinars to the Prophet and Abdur Rahman ibn Awf carrying on his shoulders two hundred awqiyah of gold and placing it before the noble Prophet. Indeed he had even seen a man trying to sell his bed in order to purchase a sword for himself.

At home, he recalled these moving and inspiring scenes. He was surprised however that Julas was so slow in preparing for the expedition with the Prophet and at his delay in contributing especially since he was quite rich and could afford to give generously. Umayr felt that he had to arouse his ardor or stir his sense of generosity and manliness. So with great enthusiasm he related what he had seen and heard at the mosque particularly the case of those believers who, with great fervor, had come to enlist themselves in the army and were turned away by the Prophet because there was not sufficient means of transport. He related how sad and disappointed these people were at not realizing their desire to go on the path of Jihad and sacrifice for the sake of Islam. Julas' response was sharp and shocking.

"If Muhammad is true in claiming that he is a Prophet," he shouted angrily, "then we are all worse than donkeys."

Umayr was flabbergasted. He could not believe what he had heard. He did not think that a man as intelligent as Julas could have uttered such words, words which put him instantly outside the pale of faith.

A host of questions paced through his mind and he immediately began to consider what action he should take. He saw in Julas' silence and his tardiness to respond to the Prophet's call, clear signs of a traitor to God and His Prophet, who wanted to bring harm to Islam in just the same way as the munafiqun who were plotting and conspiring against the Prophet. At the same time he saw a man who had treated him as a father and who was kind and generous to him, who had taken him as an orphan and had saved him from poverty.

Umayr had to choose between preserving this close relationship with Julas on the one hand and dealing with his treachery and hypocrisy on the other. The choice was painful but his decision was swift. He turned to Julas and said:

"By God, O Julas, there is no one on the face of the earth, after Muhammad ibn Abdullah, dearer to me than you. You are the closest of men to me and you have been most generous to me. But you have uttered words which, if I should mention them will expose and humiliate you. If I conceal them, however, I will be a traitor to my trust and destroy myself and my religion. I will, therefore, go to the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and tell him what you have said. It is up to you to clarify your position."

The young Umayr went to the mosque and told the Prophet what he had heard from Julas. The Prophet asked him to stay with him and sent one of his companions to summon Julas.

Julas came, greeted the Prophet and sat in front of him. The Prophet, peace be upon him straightaway asked him: "What did you say that Umayr ibn Sad heard?" and he mentioned what Umayr had reported to him.

"He has lied against me, O Messenger of God, and has fabricated this. I have not uttered anything of the sort" asserted Julas.

The companions of the Prophet looked alternately at Julas and Umayr hoping to detect on their faces what their hearts concealed. They began to mutter among themselves. One of those in whose hearts was the disease of hypocrisy asserted:

"The youth is a nuisance. He is bent on defaming someone who has been good to him." Others replied: "Not at all. He is a youth who grew up in obedience to God. The expressions on his face attest to his truthfulness."

The Prophet, peace be on him, turned to Umayr and saw his flushed face and the tears streaming down his cheeks. Umayr prayed:

"O Lord, send down a revelation on Your Prophet to verify what I have told him." Julas meanwhile continued to defend what he had said: "What I have told you, O Messenger of God, is certainly the truth. If

you wish, make us swear an oath in your presence. I swear by God that I did not say anything of the sort that Umayr reported to you."

As the companions turned to Umayr to hear what he had to say, they saw the Prophet come under a special mood of serenity and they realized that he was being inspired. Immediately there was complete silence as they gazed intently at the Prophet in anticipation.

At this point, fear and terror gripped Julas and he began to look tremulously at Umayr. The Prophet, having received the revelation, recited the words of God:

"(The hypocrites) swear by God that they have said (nothing wrong); yet most certainly they have uttered a saying which is a denial of the truth, and have thus denied the truth after having professed their self-surrender to God; for they were aiming at something which was beyond their reach. And they could find no fault (with the Faith) save that God had enriched them and (caused) His Apostle to enrich them out of His bounty. Hence, if they repent, it will be for their own good; but if they turn away, God will cause them to suffer a grievous suffering in this world and in the life to come and they will find no helper on earth, and none to give them succour." (The Quran, Surah at-Tawbah, 9:74).

Julas trembled with fear at what he heard and in his anguish, could hardly speak. Finally, he turned to the Prophet and said: "I do repent, O Messenger of God. I do repent. Umayr told the truth and I lied. I beseech God to accept my repentance..."

The Prophet turned to the young Umayr. Tears of joy moistened his youthful face, radiant with the light of faith. With his noble hand, the Prophet tenderly took his

ear and said:

"Young man, your ear has been true in what it heard and your Lord has confirmed the truth of what you said." Julas returned to the fold of Islam and was a good and faithful Muslim thereafter. The companions realized that by his generosity and good treatment of Umayr, he had reformed. Whenever Umayr was mentioned, Julas would say:

"My God reward Umayr with goodness on my behalf. He certainly saved me from kufr and preserved my neck from the fire of hell."

Umayr grew up and distinguished himself in later years with the same devotion and firmness which he had shown in early life.

During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, the people of Hims in Syria complained much and bitterly of the governors appointed to the city even though Umar in particular used to pay special attention to the type of men he chose as his provincial governors. In selecting a governor, Umar would say: "I want a man who when he is among the people and is not their amir, should not behave as their amir, and when he is among them as an amir, he should behave as one of them.

"I want a governor who will not distinguish himself from the people by the clothes he wears, or the food he eats or the house he lives in."

"I want a governor who would establish Salat among the people, treat them equitably and with justice and does not close his door when they come to him in need."

In the light of the complaints of the people of Hims and going by his own criteria for a good governor, Umar ibn al-Khattab decided to appoint Umayr ibn Sad as governor of the region. This was despite the fact that Umayr at that time was at the head of a Muslim army traversing the Arabian peninsula and the region of great Syria, liberating towns, destroying enemy fortifications, pacifying the tribes and establishing masjids wherever he went. Umayr accepted the appointment as governor of Hims reluctantly because he preferred

nothing better than Jihad in the path of God. He was still quite young, in his early twenties.

When Umayr reached Hims he called the inhabitants to a vast congregational prayer. When the prayer was over he addressed them. He began by praising and giving thanks to God and sending peace and blessings on His Prophet Muhammad. Then he said:

"O people! Islam is a mighty fortress and a sturdy gate. The fortress of Islam is justice and its gate is truth. If you destroy the fortress and demolish the gate you would undermine the defences of this religion.

"Islam will remain strong so long as the Sultan or central authority is strong. The strength of the Sultan neither comes from flogging with the whip, nor killing with the sword but from ruling with justice and holding fast to truth."

Umayr spent a full year in Hims during which, it is said, he did not write a single letter to the Amir al-Muminin. Nor did he send any taxes to the central treasury in Madinah, neither a dirham nor a dinar.

Umar was always concerned about the performance of his governors and was afraid that positions of authority would corrupt them. As far as he was concerned, there was no one who was free from sin and corrupting influences apart from the noble Prophet, peace be upon him. He summoned his secretary and said:

"Write to Umayr ibn Sad and say to him: "When the letter of the Amir al-Muminin reaches you, leave Hims and come to him and bring with you whatever taxes you have collected from the Muslims."

Umayr received the letter. He took his food pouch and hung his eating, drinking and washing utensils over his shoulder. He took his spear and left Hims and the governorship behind him. He set off for Madinah on foot.

As Umayr approached Madinah, he was badly sunburnt, his body was gaunt and his hair had grown long. His appearance showed all the signs of the long and arduous journey. Umar, on seeing him, was astonished. What's wrong with you, Umayr?" he asked with deep concern.

"Nothing is wrong with me, O Amir al-Muminin," replied Umayr. "I am fine and healthy, praise be to God, and I carry with me all (my) worldly possessions."

"And what worldly possessions have you got?" asked Umar thinking that he was carrying money for the Bayt al-mal or treasury of the Muslims."

"I have my pouch in which I put my food provisions. I have this vessel from which I eat and which I use for washing my hair and clothes. And I have this cup for making wudu and drinking..." "Did you come on foot?" asked Umar. "Yes, O Amir al-Muminin." "Weren't you given from your amirship an animal to ride on?" "They did not give me one and I did not ask them."

"And where is the amount you brought for the Bayt al-mal?"

"I didn't bring anything."

"And why not?"

"When I arrived at Hims," said Umayr, "I called the righteous persons of the town to a meeting and gave them the responsibility of collecting the taxes. Whenever they collected any amounts of money I would seek their advice and spent it (all) on those who were deserving among them."

At this point, Umar turned to his secretary and said:

"Renew the appointment of Umayr to the governorship of Hims." "Oh, come now," protested Umayr. "That is something which I do not desire. I shall not be a governor for you nor for anyone after you, O Amir al-Muminin."

With that Umayr asked the Khalifah's permission to go to his village on the outskirts of Madinah to live there with his family. This Umar granted.

A long time passed since Umayr had gone to his village and Umar decided to put him through a test to make sure of his circumstances. He said to one of his trusted aides called al-Harith:

"Harith, go to Umayr ibn Sad and stay with him as though you were a guest. If you see on him any signs of luxury or good living, return quietly as you went. If, however, you find him in straitened circumstances give him these dinars." Umar handed Harith a bag with a hundred dinars.

Al-Harith set out for Umayr's village and found his home after making enquiries.

"As-salamu alaykum wa rahmatullah," he greeted Umayr.

"Wa alaykum as-salam wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu," replied Umayr and asked, "From where have you come?"

"From al-Madinah."

"How are the Muslims there?"

"Fine."

"How is the Amir al-Muminin?"

"He is fine and doing well."

"Has he applied the hudud laws?"

"Yes. He carried out the sentence of punishment on his own son for committing the crime of adultery. His son died as a result of the punishment." Al-Harith continued: "O Allah, help Umar. I only know that he has a great love for you."

Al-Harith stayed as Umayr's guest for three nights. On each night he was given only a small flat piece of barley bread. On the third day a local man said to Harith:

"Umayr and his family are suffering great hardship. They only have these loaves which they have given you in preference to themselves. They are hungry and in great distress. Harith went to Umayr and gave him the bag of money.

"What is this?" asked Umayr.

"The Amir al-Muminin sent it to you."

"Return it to him. Give him my greetings of peace and tell him that Umayr has no need of it."

"Take it, O Umayr," shouted his wife who was listening to the conversation between her husband and his guest. "If you need it, you can spend it. If not, you can spend it in other appropriate ways, for those in need here are many."

When al-Harith heard what she had said, he placed the dinars in front of Umayr and left. Umayr took the

money and placed it in a small bag. He only went to sleep that night after he had distributed the money to those in need and especially to the children of those who had been martyred.

Al-Harith returned to Madinah and was questioned by Umar al-Faruq.

"What have you seen, Harith?"

"A very distressing situation, O Amir al-Muminin."

"Did you give him the dinars?"

"Yes, O Amir al-Muminin."

"What did he do with them?"

"I don't know. But I think that he did not keep a single dirham of it for himself."

Al-Faruq wrote to Umayr: "When you receive this letter, I do not put it down until you come to me."

Umayr proceeded straightaway to Madinah. Umar greeted and welcomed him and proceeded to question him.

"What did you do with the dinars, Umayr?" "You have no responsibility for the money after you have donated it to me."

"I adjure you to tell me what you did with it."

"I stored it away for myself so that I could benefit from

it a day when neither wealth nor children will be of any avail." Tears came to Umar's eyes as he said:

"I swear that you are one of those who are hard against themselves even when they are in dire need." And he ordered a camel load of food and two garments to be given to Umayr who protested:

"About the food, we do not need it, O Amir al-Mumineen. I left two saas of barley with my family and when we have finished that, Allah- Great and Exalted is He - will provide. As for the two garments, I will take them for (my wife). Her dress is now in tatters and she is almost naked."

Not long after that meeting with Umar al-Faruq, Umayr ibn Sad passed away to his Lord. He was not weighted down with the cares and burdens of the world and he was concerned to provide plenty of provisions for the hereafter. Umar received the news of his death with a heavy heart and said in deep sorrow: "I have wished to have men like Umayr ibn Sad whose help I could seek in dealing with the affairs of Muslims."

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