

Rabiah ibn Kab

Here is the story of Rabiah told in his own words: "I was still quite young when the light of iman shone through me and my heart was opened to the teachings of Islam. And when my eyes beheld the Messenger of God, for the first time, I loved him with a love that possessed my entire being. I loved him to the exclusion of everyone else.

One day I said to myself:

'Woe to you, Rabi'ah. Why don't you put yourself completely in the service of the Messenger of God, peace be on him. Go and suggest this to him. If he is pleased with you, you would find happiness in being near him. You will be successful through love for him and you will have the good fortune of obtaining the good in this world and the good in the next.'

This I did hoping that he would accept me in his service. He did not dash my hopes. He was pleased that I should be his servant. From that day, I lived in the shadow of the noble Prophet. I went with him wherever he went. I moved in his orbit whenever and wherever he turned. Whenever he cast a glance in my direction, I would leap to stand in his presence. Whenever he expressed a need, he would find me hurrying to fulfil it.

I would serve him throughout the day. When the day was over and he had prayed Salat al-Isha and retired to his home, I would think about leaving. But I would soon say to myself:

'Where would you go, Rabi'ah? Perhaps you may be required to do something for the Prophet during the night.' So I would remain seated at his door and would not leave the threshold of his house. The Prophet would spend part of his night engaged in Salat. I would hear him reciting the opening chapter of the Quran and he would continue reciting sometimes for a third or a half of the night. I would become tired and leave or my eyes would get the better of me and I would fall asleep.

It was the habit of the Prophet, peace be on him, that if someone did him a good turn, he loved to repay that person with something more excellent. He wanted to do something for me too in return for my service to him. So one day he came up to me and said: 'O Rabi'ah ibn Kab.' 'Labbayk ya rasulullah wa Sadark - At your command, O Messenger of God and may God grant you happiness,' I responded. 'Ask of me anything and I will give it to you.'

I thought a little and then said: 'Give me some time, O Messenger of God, to think about what I should ask of

you. Then I will let you know.' He agreed.

At that time, I was a young man and poor. I had neither family, nor wealth, nor place of abode. I used to shelter in the Suffah of the mosque with other poor Muslims like myself. People used to call us the "guests of Islam". Whenever any Muslim brought something in charity to the Prophet, he would send it all to us. And if someone gave him a gift he would take some of it and leave the rest for us.

So, it occurred to me to ask the Prophet for some worldly good that would save me from poverty and make me like others who had wealth, wife and children. Soon, however, I said: 'May you perish Rabi'ah. The world is temporary and will pass away. You have your share of sustenance in it which God has guaranteed and which must come to you. The Prophet, peace be on him, has a place with his Lord and no request would be refused him. Request him therefore, to ask Allah to grant you something of the bounty of the hereafter.'

I felt pleased and satisfied with this thought. I went to the Prophet and he asked: 'What do you say, O Rabi'ah?' 'O Messenger of God,' I said, 'I ask you to beseech God most High on my behalf to make me your companion in Paradise.'

'Who has advised you thus?' asked the Prophet.

'No by God,' I said, 'No one has advise me. But when you told me 'Ask of me anything and I will give to you,' I thought of asking you for something of the goodness of this world. But before long, I was guided to choose what is permanent and lasting against what is temporary and perishable. And so I have asked you to beseech God on my behalf that I may be your companion in Paradise.'

The Prophet remained silent for a long while and then asked: 'Any other request besides that, Rabi'ah?' 'No, O Messenger of God, Nothing can match what I have asked you.' 'Then, in that case, assist me for your sake by performing much prostration to God.'

So I began to exert myself in worship in order to attain the good fortune of being with the Prophet in Paradise just as I had the good fortune of being in his service and being his companion in this world.

Not long afterwards, the Prophet called me and asked: 'Don't you want to get married, Rabi'ah?' 'I do not want anything to distract me from your service,' I replied. 'Moreover, I don't have anything to give as mahr (dowry) to a wife nor any place where I can accommodate a wife.'

The Prophet remained silent. When he saw me again he asked: 'Don't you want to get married, Rabi'ah?' I gave him the same reply as before. Left to myself again, I regretted what I had said and chided myself: 'Woe to you, Rabi'ah. By God, the Prophet knows better than you what is good for you in this world and the next and he also knows better than you what you possess. By God, if the Prophet, peace be on him, should ask me again to marry, I would reply positively.'

Before long, the Prophet asked me again: 'Don't you want to get married 'Rabi'ah?'

'Oh yes, Messenger of God,' I replied, 'but who will marry me when I am in the state you know.' 'Go to the family of so-and-so and say to them: the Prophet has instructed you to give your daughter in marriage to me.'

Timidly, I went to the family and said: 'The Messenger of God, peace be on him, has sent me to you to ask you to give your daughter in marriage to me.' 'Our daughter?' they asked, incredulously at first. 'Yes,' i replied.

'Welcome to the Messenger of God, and welcome to his messenger. By God, the messenger of God's Messenger shall only return with his mission fulfilled. 'So they made a marriage contract between me and her. I went back to the Prophet and reported:

'O Messenger of Allah. I have come from the best of homes. They believed me, they welcomed me, and they made a marriage contract between me and their daughter. But from where do I get the mahr for her?'

The Prophet then sent for Buraydah ibn al-Khasib, one of the leading persons in my tribe, the Banu Asiam, and said to him: 'O Buraydah, collect a nuwat's weight in gold for Rabi'ah.

This they did and the Prophet said to me: 'Take this to them and say, this is the sadaq of your daughter.' I did so and they accepted it. They were pleased and said, This is much and good.' I went back to the Prophet and told him: 'I have never yet seen a people more generous than they. They were pleased with what I gave them in spite of its being little...Where can I get something for the walimah (marriage feast), O Prophet of God?'

The Prophet said to Buraydah 'Collect the price of a ram for Rabi'ah.' They bought a big fat ram for me and then the Prophet told me: 'Go to Aishah and tell her to give you whatever barley she has.'

Aishah gave me a bag with seven saas of barley and said: 'By God, we do not have any other food.' I set off with the ram and the barley to my wife's family. They said: 'We will prepare the barley but get your friends to prepare the ram for you.'

We slaughtered, skinned and cooked the ram. So we had bread and meat for the walimah. I invited the Prophet and he accepted my invitation.

The Prophet then gave me a piece of land near Abu Bakr's. From then I became concerned with the dunya, with material things. I had a dispute with Abu Bakr over a palm tree.

'It is in my land,' I insisted. 'No, it is in my land,' Abu Bakr countered. We started to argue. Abu Bakr cursed me, but as soon as he had uttered the offending word. he felt sorry and said to me: 'Rabiah, say the same word to me so that it could be considered as qisas -just retaliation.' 'No by God, I shall not,' I said.

'In that case, replied Abu Bakr. 'I shall go the Messenger of God and complain to him about your refusal to retaliate against me measure for measure.'

He set off and I followed him. My tribe, the Banu Asiam, also set off behind me protesting indignantly: 'He's the one who cursed you first and then he goes off to the Prophet before you to complain about you!' I turned to them and said: 'Woe to you! Do you know who this is? This is As-Siddiq... and he is the respected elder of the Muslims. Go back before he turns around, sees you and thinks that you have come to help me against him. He would then be more incensed and go to the Prophet in anger. The Prophet would get angry on his account. Then Allah would be angry on their account and Rabi'ah would be finished.' They turned back.

Abu Bakr went to the Prophet and related the incident as it had happened. The Prophet raised his head and said to me:

'O Rabi'ah, what's wrong with you and as-Siddiq?' 'Messenger of God, he wanted me to say the same words to him as he had said to me and I did not.'

'Yes, don't say the same word to him as he had said to you. Instead say: 'May God forgive you Abu Bakr.' With tears in his eyes, Abu Bakr went away while saying: 'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabiah ibn Kab... 'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabiah ibn Kaab...'

[View Page](#)

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