

Abu-I Aas ibn ar-Rabiah

Abu-I Aas belonged to the Abd ash-Shams clan of the Quraysh. He was in the prime of his youth, handsome and very impressive looking. He was the epitome of Arab chivalry and was endowed with all the characteristics of pride, manliness and generosity. He took great pride in the traditions of his ancestors.

Abu-I Aas inherited the Quraysh love for trade. The Quraysh of course were known to be masters of the two annual trading expeditions. the winter expedition to the south, to Yemen. and the summer expedition to the north. to Syria. These two expeditions are mentioned in the Quran in the chapter named after the Quraysh.

The caravans of Abu-I Ads always plied between Makkah and Syria. Each caravan was made up of two hundred men and a hundred camels. People would entrust their wealth and their goods to him to trade on their behalf because of his skill as a merchant. his honesty and his trustworthiness.

The maternal aunt of Abu-I Aas was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, the wife of Muhammad ibn Abdullah. She treated him like a mother would her own son, with love and affection. Muhammad too was extremely fond of him.

The years went by quickly in the household of Muhammad and Khadijah. Zanaib, their eldest daughter, soon grew up and blossomed forth like a lovely flower. She was much sought after in marriage by the sons of respectable Makkan nobles. And why not? She was one of the most distinguished Makkan girls in lineage and social standing. She was blessed with the most honorable father and mother. And she had the finest morals and behavior.

Which one of these scions of Makkan nobility would win her hand? Abu-I Aas ibn Rabi'ah was the one who did.

Abu-I Aas and Zaynab were only married a few years when the Divine light of Islam radiated over Makkah. Muhammad, the father of Zaynab, was now the Prophet of God, sent to convey the religion of guidance and truth. He was commanded to convey the message of Islam first to his family and nearest relatives. The first women to believe in him and accept Islam were his wife Khadijah and his daughters Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah. Fatimah was very young at the time.

Zaynab's husband however did not like leaving the religion of his forefathers and he refused to adopt the religion which his wife now followed although he was completely devoted to her and loved her dearly with a pure and sincere love.

Before long, the confrontation between the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Quraysh developed and grew bitter. The Quraysh felt that it was intolerable for their sons to remain married to Muhammad's daughters. They also considered that it would be an embarrassing and difficult situation for Muhammad if his daughters were to be returned to his household. So they went to Abu-I Aas and said:

"Divorce your wife, Abu-I Aas, and send her back to her father's house. We shall then marry you to any of the most charming and noble women of the Quraysh you desire."

"No, by God," said Abu-I Aas firmly. "I shall not divorce my wife and I do not wish to have in her place any woman in all the world."

Muhammad's other two daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum were divorced by their husbands and

returned to his home. The Prophet in fact was delighted when they came back to him and he had hoped that Abu-I Aas would also return Zaynab to him except that at that time he had no power to compel him to do so. The law forbidding the marriage of a Muslim woman to a nonbelieving man was not yet in force.

The Prophet, peace be on him, migrated to Madinah and his mission became stronger. The Quraysh felt even more threatened by him, and went out to confront him at Badr. Abu-I Aas was compelled to go along with the Quraysh army. He did not really have a desire to fight the Muslims nor did he feel any inclination to join them. But his position among the Quraysh- one of honor and trust - impelled him to go along with their campaign against Muhammad. The battle of Badr ended in a terrible defeat for the Quraysh and the forces of shirk. Some were killed, some were taken prisoner and some managed to escape. Among those who were taken prisoner was Abu-I Aas, the husband of Zaynab.

The Prophet fixed amounts for the ransom of the prisoners of war varying from one thousand to four thousand dirhams, according to the wealth and social standing of the prisoner. Quraysh messengers went to and fro between Makkah and Madinah bearing the ransom money to free their relatives held in Madinah. Zaynab sent her messenger to Madinah bearing the ransom demand to free her husband. The ransom amount included a necklace which her mother, Khadijah, had given to her before she died. When the Prophet saw the necklace, his face at once became covered with a veil of sadness and he felt a surge of tenderness for his daughter. He turned to his companions and said:

"Zaynab has sent this amount to ransom Abu-I Aas. If you see fit to set free her prisoner and return her possession to her, then do so."

"Yes," his companions agreed. "We shall do whatever we can to soothe your eyes and make you happy."

The Prophet set one condition on Abu-I Aas before he freed him, that he should send his daughter Zaynab to him without delay.

As soon as he reached Makkah, Abu-I Aas began making arrangements to carry out his promise. He ordered his wife to prepare herself for the journey and told her that her father's messengers were waiting for her just outside Makkah. He prepared provisions and a mount for her and instructed his brother, Amr ibn ar-Rabi'ah, to accompany her and hand her over personally to the Prophet's emissaries.

Amr slung his bow over his shoulders, took up his quiver of arrows, placed Zaynab in her hawdaj and left Makkah with her in the broad light of day, in full view of the Quraysh.

The Quraysh were furious. They pursued Zaynab and Amr until they caught up with them. Zaynab was scared. Amr stood poised with his bow and arrow and shouted:

"By God, if any man come near to her, I would plunge this arrow in his neck". Amr was known to be an excellent marksman.

Abu Sufyan ibn Hath, who had by this time joined the Quraysh group, went up to Amr and said: "Son of my brother, put away your arrow and let me talk to you."

This Amr did and Abu Sufyan went on: "What you have done is not prudent. You left with Zaynab in full view of the people. All the Arabs know the disasters we suffered at Badr at the hands of her father, Muhammad. If you leave with his daughter in the open as you have done, the tribes would accuse us of cowardice and they would say that we have been humiliated. Return with her and ask her to stay in her husband's house for a few days so that people could say that we brought her back. Thereafter you can take her away quietly and secretly from us and take her to her father. We have no need to detain her."

Amr agreed to this and Zaynab returned to Makkah. A few days later, in the middle of the night Amr took Zaynab and handed her over to the Prophet's emissaries just as his brother had instructed.

After the departure of his wife, Abu-I Aas stayed on in Makkah for several years. Then, shortly before the conquest of Makkah, he left for Syria on a trading mission. On the return journey from Syria his caravan consisted of some one hundred camels and one hundred and seventy men.

As the caravan approached Madinah, a detachment of Muslims took them by surprise. They impounded the camels and took the men as captives to the Prophet. Abu-I Aas however managed to escape. During the night which was pitch black, Abu-I Aas entered Madinah fearful and alert. He searched around until he came to Zaynab's house. He asked her for protection and she gave it to him.

At dawn, the Prophet, peace be on him, came out to the masjid to perform the Dawn Prayer. He stood erect in the mihrab and said "Allahu Akbar" to begin the Prayer. The Muslims behind him did the same. At that point Zaynab shouted from the women's section of the masjid:

"O people! I am Zaynab the daughter of Muhammad. I have given protection to Abu-I Aas. Do give him your protection also."

When the Prayer was finished, the Prophet turned to the congregation and said: "Have you heard what I heard?" "Yes, Messenger of Allah," they replied.

"By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I knew nothing of this until I heard what you heard. He is asking protection from the Muslims."

Back at home the Prophet said to his daughter: "Prepare a place of rest for Abu-I Aas and let him know that you are not lawful for him." He then summoned the men of the expeditionary force which had taken the camels and the men of the caravan and said to them:

"You have taken the possessions of this man. If you are kind to him and return his property, we would be pleased. If however you do not agree then the goods is booty sanctioned by God which you have a right to."

"We would certainly return his possessions to him, Messenger of God," they replied and when Abu-I Aas came to collect his goods, they said to him:

"You belong to the Quraysh nobility. You are the nephew of the Messenger of God and his son-in-law. Would you accept Islam? We would hand over all this wealth to you. You would then have for your own enjoyment whatever wealth and possessions the Makkans entrusted to you, and stay with us here in Madinah."

"What an evil thing you are asking me do, to enter a new religion while committing an act of treachery!" Abu-I Aas retorted.

Abu-I Aas returned to Makkah with the caravan and handed over all the wealth and goods to their rightful owners. Then he asked:

"O people of Quraysh! Is there any money left with me belonging to any one of you which he has not taken?"

"No," came the reply. "And may God bless you with goodness. We have indeed found you noble and trustworthy."

Then Abu-I Aas announced: "Since I have now handed over to you what is rightfully yours, I now declare that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. By God, the only thing that prevented me from declaring my acceptance of Islam while I was with Muhammad in Madinah was my fear that you would think that I did so only to appropriate your wealth. Now that I have discharged my trust in this matter, I now declare that I am a Muslim..."

Abu-I Aas then left for Madinah where the Prophet received him hospitably and returned his wife to him. The Prophet used to say about him: "He spoke to me and was truthful to me. He made promises to me and remained faithful to his word."

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