

Talhah ibn Ubaydullah

Returning to Makkah in haste after a trading trip to Syria, Talhah asked his family: "Did anything happen in Makkah since we left?" "Yes," they replied. "Muhammad ibn Abdullah emerged alleging that he is a Prophet and Abu Quhafah (Abu Bakr) has followed him."

"I used to know Abu Bakr," said Talhah. "He is an easy-going, amiable, gentle man. He was an honest and upright trader. We were quite fond of him and loved sitting in his company because of his knowledge of Quraysh history and genealogy."

Later, Talhah went to Abu Bakr and asked: "Is it true what they say, that Muhammad ibn Abdullah has appeared as a Prophet and that you follow him." "Yes," replied Abu Bakr and went on to tell Talhah about Muhammad and what a good thing it would be if he too followed him. Talhah in turn told Abu Bakr the story of his strange recent encounter with an ascetic in the market-place of Busra in Syria. The ascetic is said to have told Talhah that someone called "Ahmad" would appear in Makkah about that time and that he would be the last of the Prophets. He also told Talhah, so the story goes, that the Prophet would leave the sacred precincts of Makkah and migrate to a land of black soil, water and palm trees...

Abu Bakr was astonished by the story and took Talhah to Muhammad. The Prophet, peace be on him, explained Islam to Talhah and recited some portions of the Quran to him. Talhah was enthusiastic. He related to the Prophet his conversation with the ascetic of Busra. There and then, Talhah pronounced the Shahadah - that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. He was the fourth person who had been introduced to Islam by Abu Bakr.

The Quraysh were astounded by the young Talhah's acceptance of Islam. The one who was most dismayed and unhappy was his mother. She had hoped that he would one day be a leader in his community because of his noble character and his outstanding virtues. Some of the Quraysh, anxious and worried, went to Talhah as soon as they could to wean him away from his new religion but found him firm and unshakable as a rock. When they despaired of using gentle persuasion to achieve their aim, they resorted to persecution and violence. The following story is related by Masud ibn Kharash:

"While I was making saiy between as-Safa and al-Marwa, there appeared a crowd of people pushing a young man whose hands were tied behind his back. As they rushed behind him, they rained down blows on his head. In the crowd was an old woman who lashed him repeatedly and shouted abuses at him. I asked: 'What's the matter with this young man?' 'This is Talhah ibn Ubaydullah. He gave up his religion and now follows the Banu Hashim man.' 'And who is the woman behind him?' I asked. 'She is as-Sabah bint al-Hadrami, the young man's mother,' they said.

The Quraysh did not stop there. Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, nicknamed the 'lion of the Quraysh' bound Talhah with a rope and with the same rope he tied up Abu Bakr and then handed them over to the mindless and violent mob of Makkah to be beaten and tortured. The shared experience no doubt drew Talhah and Abu Bakr closer together!

Years passed and events of great significance took place. Talhah grew in stature as he bore the pain and suffering of being tested in the path of God and His Prophet. He gained the unique reputation among Muslims of being called the "living martyr". The Prophet, peace be on him, also called him "Talhah the Good" and "Talhah the Generous".

The name of the "living martyr" was earned during the Battle of Uhud. Talhah had missed the Battle of Badr. He and Said ibn Zayd had been sent outside Madinah on a mission by the Prophet and when they returned, the Prophet and his companions were already on the way back from Badr. They were both sad

at having missed the opportunity of taking part in the first campaign with the Prophet but were tremendously pleased when he told them they would get the same reward as those who actually fought.

At the Battle of Uhud, when the Muslims fell into disarray at the beginning of hostilities the Prophet became dangerously exposed. There were about eleven men of the Ansar at his side and one Muhajir - Talhah ibn Ubaydullah. The Prophet clambered up the mountain hotly pursued by some mushrikin. The Prophet, peace be on him, shouted:

"The one who repulses these people from us will be my companion in Paradise." "I, O Messenger of god," shouted Talhah.

"No, stick to your position," replied the Prophet. A man from the Ansar volunteered and the Prophet agreed. He fought until he was killed. The Prophet went further up the mountain with the mushrikin still in close pursuit. "Isn't there someone to combat these?"

Talhah again volunteered but the Prophet ordered him to maintain his position. Another person immediately came forward, fought and was killed. This happened until all who stood by the Prophet were martyred except Talhah.

"Now, yes," signalled the Prophet and Talhah went into battle. By this time, the Prophet's teeth had been broken, his forehead had been slashed, his lips had been wounded and blood was streaming down his face. He was drained of energy. Talhah plunged into the enemy and pushed them away from the Prophet. He turned back to the Prophet and helped him a little further up the mountain and put him to lie on the ground. He then renewed his attack and successfully repulsed the enemy. About this occasion Abu Bakr said:

"At that moment, Abu Ubayd ibn al-Jarrah and I were far from the Prophet. When we came close to him to render assistance to him, the Prophet said: 'Leave me and go to your companion (meaning Talhah).'"

There was Talhah, bleeding profusely. He had numerous wounds, from sword, spear and arrow. His foot had been cut and he had fallen into a hollow where he lay unconscious.

Thereafter, the Prophet, peace be on him, said: "Whoever is pleased to see a man still walking on earth who had completed his span (of life), let him look at Talhah ibn Ubaydallah."

And, whenever Uhud was recalled, As-Siddiq, may God be pleased with him, would say: "That day, that entire day, belonged to Talhah."

That was the story of how Talhah became to be called the "living martyr". There were unnumerable incidents which led to him being called "Talhah the Good" and "Talhah the Generous".

Talhah was an astute and successful merchant who travelled widely to the north and south of the Arabian peninsula. It is said that after one of his trips to Hadramawt, he had profits amounting to some seven hundred thousand dirhams. His nights would be anxious and worried on account of this vast wealth. On one such night, his wife, Umm Kulthum the daughter of Abu Bakr, said to him:

"What's wrong with you, O father of Muhammad? Perhaps I have done something to hurt you.?" "No ,," replied Talhah. "You are a wonderful wife for a Muslim man. But I have been thinking since last night: How can a man think of his Lord and Sustainer when he goes to sleep with this wealth in his house?"

"Why should it bother you so much ,," remarked Umm Kulthum. "What about all the needy ones in your community and all your friends? When you get up in the morning share it out among them."

"God bless you. You are really marvellous, the daughter of a marvellous man," said Talhah to his wife. In the morning, Talhah gathered up the money in bags and distributed it among the poor Muhajirin and

Ansar.

It is related that a man came up to Talhah requesting help and also mentioning some common family connection between them.

"This family connection someone has mentioned to me before," said Talhah who was in fact known for his generosity to all members of his clan. Talhah told the man that he had just sold a piece of land to Uthman ibn Affan for several thousand dirhams. The man could have the money or the land which could be re-purchased from Uthman. The man opted for the money and Talhah gave it all to him.

Talhah was well-known for helping persons who had debt problems, heads of families who experienced hardship, and widows. One of his friends, as-Saib ibn Zayd, said of him: "I accompanied Talhah ibn Ubaydallah on journeys and I stayed with him at home and I have not found anyone who was more generous with money, with clothes and with food than Talhah."

No wonder he was called "Talhah the Good" and "Talhah the Generous".

The name Talhah is also connected with the first fitnah or civil war among Muslims after the death of the prophet, peace be on him.

The seeds of trouble were sown during the caliphate of Uthman ibn Affan. There were many complaints and accusations against him. Some mischief-makers were not content with accusations only but were determined to finish him off. In the year 35 AH (656 CE) a group of insurgents stormed Uthman's house and murdered him while he was reading the Quran. It was one of the most shocking events in the early history of Islam.

Ali was persuaded to accept the responsibility of the Caliphate and all Muslims swore allegiance to him, including Talhah and Zubayr ibn al-Awwam. Talhah and Zubayr were deeply shocked by the murder of Uthman. They were horrified and felt strongly that the murderers should be punished and that justice should be done. But the punishment of the murderers was not an easy task in as much as the crime was not just the work of a few individuals but involved a large number of persons.

Talhah and Zubayr sought Ali's permission to go to Makkah to perform Umrah. They met Aishah the wife of the Prophet. She was greatly shocked when she heard of the assassination of Uthman. From Makkah, Talhah, Zubayr and Aishah set off for Basrah where large numbers were gathering to seek revenge for the death of Uthman.

The forces gathered at Basrah seemed to present an open challenge to Ali. As the caliph of the Muslims and the head of the entire Muslim State, he could not tolerate any insurrection or armed revolt against the State. But what a difficult and awesome task he faced! To deal with the revolt, he had to confront his brothers, his companions and his friends-followers of the Prophet and his religion, those who often fought side by side with him against the forces of shirk, those whom he respected and loved.

The forces clamoring for vengeance for Uthman and those supporting Ali met at a place called Kuraybah, near Basrah. Ali desired to avoid war and settle matters by peaceful means. He used every means at his disposal to achieve peace. He clung to every hope of avoiding confrontation. But the dark forces at work against Islam and how numerous were these, were determined that matters should come to a terrible and bloody end.

Ali wept. He wept bitterly when he saw Aishah, the "Mother of the Believers" in her hawdaj or palanquin astride a camel at the head of the army which now emerged to fight him. And when he saw Talhah and Zubayr, two close companions of the Prophet, in the midst of the army, he shouted to them to come out to him. They did and Ali said to Talhah:

"O Talhah, have you come with the wife of the Messenger of Allah to fight along with her...?" And to

Zubayr he said:

"O Zubayr, I implore you, by God, do you remember the day when the Prophet. peace be on him, passed by you and we were in such and such a place and he asked you: 'Do you love Ali?' and you said: 'Why shouldn't I love my cousin and one who follows my religion...?'"

Ali continued talking to them reminding them of the bonds of brotherhood and faith. In the end both Talhah and Zubayr withdrew from participation in this civil war. They withdrew immediately when they saw the situation in a different light. But they paid for that withdrawal with their lives.

As they withdrew, a man named Amr ibn Jarmouz followed Zubayr and cowardly murdered him while he performed Salat. Talhah was killed by an arrow allegedly shot by Marwan - a cousin of Uthman who was too blinded by rage and the desire to seek revenge for his kinsman to respond to the possibility of avoiding war and bloodshed among Muslims.

The murder of Uthman had become Talhah's tryst with destiny. He did not participate in the fighting and killing that followed that came to be known in history as the "Battle of the Camel". Indeed, if he had known that the fitnah would have degenerated into such insane hatred and bitterness and resulted in such a bloody outcome, he would have resisted it. He was not keen to fight Ali. He was simply appalled by the murder of Uthman and wanted to see justice done. Before the beginning of the battle he had said in a voice choked with emotion:

"O Lord, for the sake of Uthman, take from me this day until You are pleased." Then when Ali faced him and Zubayr, they saw the correctness of his position and withdrew from the field of battle. Yet, in these difficult circumstances, martyrdom was reserved for them.

The Battle of Camel came to an end. Aishah, the mother of the believers, realized that she had precipitated matters and left Basrah for the Sacred Mosque and then to Madinah distancing herself from the conflict. Ali provided well for her journey giving her all the comfort and honor due to her.

When the numerous dead from the battle were brought together, Ali led the funeral prayer for them all, those who were with him and those who were against him. And when he had finished burying Talhah and Zubayr he bade farewell to them with a heavy heart, a heart filled with tenderness and love.

"I really hope," he said in simple and sublime words, "that Talhah, az-Zubayr, Uthman and I will be among those of whom God has said: 'And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury and rancor; they will be brothers joyfully facing each other on thrones of dignity.' "(The Quran, Surah al-Hijr, 15:47)

Then he looked tenderly and sorrowfully on the graves of his brothers in faith and said: "I have heard with these two ears of mine the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, saying: "Talhah and az-Zubayr are my companions in Paradise!"

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