

Umm Salamah

Umm Salamah! What an eventful life she had! Her real name was Hind. She was the daughter of one of the notables in the Makhzum clan nicknamed "Zad ar-Rakib" because he was well known for his generosity particularly to travelers. Umm Salamah's husband was Abdullah ibn Abdulasad and they both were among the first persons to accept Islam. Only Abu Bakr and a few others, who could be counted on the fingers of one hand, became Muslims before them.

As soon as the news of their becoming Muslims spread, the Quraysh reacted with frenzied anger. They began hounding and persecuting Umm Salamah and her husband. But the couple did not waver or despair and remained steadfast in their new faith.

The persecution became more and more intense. Life in Makkah became unbearable for many of the new Muslims. The Prophet, peace be upon him, then gave permission for them to emigrate to Abyssinia. Umm Salamah and her husband were in the forefront of these muhajirun, seekers of refuge in a strange land. For Umm Salamah it meant abandoning her spacious home and giving up the traditional ties of lineage and honor for something new, hope in the pleasure and reward of Allah.

Despite the protection Umm Salamah and her companions received from the Abyssinian ruler, the desire to return to Makkah, to be near the Prophet and the source of revelation and guidance persisted.

News eventually reached the muhajirun that the number of Muslims in Makkah had increased. Among them were Hamzah ibn Abdulmuttalib and Umar ibn al-Khattab. Their faith had greatly strengthened the community and the Quraysh they heard, had eased the persecution somewhat. Thus a group of the muhajirun, urged on by a deep longing in their hearts, decided to return to Makkah.

The easing of the persecution was but brief as the returnees soon found out. The dramatic increase in the number of Muslims following the acceptance of Islam by Hamzah and Umar only infuriated the Quraysh even more. They intensified their persecution and torture to a pitch and intensity not known before. So the Prophet gave permission to his companions to emigrate to Madinah. Umm Salamah and her husband were among the first to leave.

The hijrah of Umm Salamah and her husband though was not as easy as they had imagined. In fact, it was a bitter and painful experience and a particularly harrowing one for her.

Let us leave the story now for Umm Salamah herself to tell...

When Abu Salamah (my husband) decided to leave for Madinah, he prepared a camel from me, hoisted me on it and placed our son Salamah on my lap. My husband then took the lead end went on without stopping or waiting for anything. Before we were out of Makkah however some men from my clan stopped us and said to my husband:

"Though you are free to do what you like with yourself, you have no power over your wife. She is our daughter. Do you expect us to allow you to take her away from us?"

They then pounced on him and snatched me away from him. My husband's clan, Banu Abdulasad, saw them taking both me and my child. They became hot with rage.

"No! By Allah," they shouted, "we shall not abandon the boy. He is our son and we have a first claim over him." They took him by the hand and pulled him away from me. Suddenly in the space of a few moments, I found myself alone and lonely. My husband headed for Madinah by himself and his clan had snatched my

son away from me. My own clan, Banu Makhzum, overpowered me and forced me to stay with them.

From the day when my husband and my son were separated from me, I went out at noon every day to that valley and sat in the spot where this tragedy occurred. I would recall those terrible moments and weep until night fell on me.

I continued like this for a year or so until one day a man from the Banu Umayyah passed by and saw my condition. He went back to my clan and said: "Why don't you free this poor woman? You have caused her husband and her son to be taken away from her." He went on trying to soften their hearts and play on their emotions. At last they said to me. 'Go and join your husband if you wish."

But how could I join my husband in Madinah and leave my son, a piece of my own flesh and blood, in Makkah among the Banu Abdulasad? How could I be free from anguish and my eyes be free from tears were I to reach the place of hijrah not knowing anything of my little son left behind in Makkah?

Some realized what I was going through and their hearts went out to me. They petitioned the Banu Abdulasad on my behalf and moved them to return my son. I did not now even want to linger in Makkah till I found someone to travel with me and I was afraid that something might happen that would delay or prevent me from reaching my husband. So I promptly got my camel ready, placed my son on my lap and left in the direction of Madinah .

I had just about reached Tanim (about three miles from Makkah) when I met Uthman ibn Talhah. (He was a keeper of the Kabah in pre-Islamic times and was not yet a Muslim.)

"Where are you going, Bint Zad ar-Rakib?" he asked.

"I am going to my husband in Madinah."

"And there isn't anyone with you?"

"No, by Allah. Except Allah and my little boy here."

"By Allah. I shall never abandon you until you reach Madinah," he vowed.

He then took the reins of my camel and led us on. I have, by Allah, never met an Arab more generous and noble than he. When we reached a resting place, he would make my camel kneel down, wait until I dismounted, lead the camel to a tree and tether it. He would then go to the shade of another tree. When we had rested he would get the camel ready and lead us on.

This he did every day until we reached Madinah. When we got to the village near Quba (about two miles from Madinah) belonging to Banu Amr ibn Awf, he said, "Your husband is in this village. Enter it with the blessings of God. "

He turned back and headed for Makkah. Their roads finally met after the long separation. Umm Salamah was overjoyed to see her husband and he was delighted to see his wife and son.

Great and momentous events followed one after the other. There was the battle of Badr in which Abu Salamah fought. The Muslims returned victorious and strengthened. Then there was the battle of Uhud in which the Muslims were sorely tested. Abu Salamah came out of this wounded very badly. He appeared at first to respond well to treatment, but his wounds never healed completely and he remained bedridden.

Once while Umm Salamah was nursing him, he said to her: "I heard the Messenger of God saying. Whenever a calamity afflicts anyone he should say, "Surely from Allah we are and to Him we shall certainly return." And he would pray, 'O Lord, give me in return something good from it which only You Exalted and Mighty, can give."

Abu Salamah remained sick in bed for several days. One morning the Prophet came to see him. The visit was longer than usual. While the Prophet was still at his bedside Abu Salamah passed away. With his blessed hands, the Prophet closed the eyes of his dead companion. He then raised these hands to the heavens and prayed:

"O Lord, grant forgiveness to Abu Salamah. Elevate him among those who are near to You. Take charge of his family at all times. Forgive us and him, O Lord of the Worlds. Widen his grave and make it light for him."

Umm Salamah remembered the prayer her husband had quoted on his deathbed from the Prophet and began repeating it, "O Lord, with you I leave this my plight for consideration . . ." But she could not bring herself to continue . . . "O Lord give me something good from it", because she kept asking herself, "Who could be better than Abu Salamah?" But it did not take long before she completed the supplication.

The Muslims were greatly saddened by the plight of Umm Salamah. She became known as "Ayyin al-Arab"-- the one who had lost her husband. She had no one in Madinah of her own except her small children, like a hen without feathers.

Both the Muhajirun and Ansar felt they had a duty to Umm Salamah. When she had completed the Iddah (three months and ten days), Abu Bakr proposed marriage to her but she refused. Then Umar asked to marry her but she also declined the proposal. The Prophet then approached her and she replied:

"O Messenger of Allah, I have three characteristics. I am a woman who is extremely jealous and I am afraid that you will see in me something that will anger you and cause Allah to punish me. I am a woman who is already advanced in age and I am a woman who has a young family."

The Prophet replied: "Regarding the jealousy you mentioned, I pray to Allah the Almighty to let it go away from you. Regarding the question of age you have mentioned. I am afflicted with the same problem as you. Regarding the dependent family you have mentioned, your family is my family."

They were married and so it was that Allah answered the prayer of Umm Salamah and gave her better than Abu Salamah. From that day on Hind al Makhzumiyah was no longer the mother of Salamah alone but became the mother of all believers, Umm al-Mumineen.

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