

Umayr ibn Wahb

Umayr ibn Wahb al-Jumahi returned safely from the Battle of Badr. His son, Wahb, was left behind, a prisoner in the hands of the Muslims. Umar feared that the Muslims would punish the youth severely because of the persecution he himself had meted out to the Prophet and the torture he had inflicted on his companions.

One morning Umayr went to the Sacred Mosque to make tawaf around the Kabah and worship his idols. He found Safwan ibn Umayyah sitting near the Kabah, went up to him and said:

Im Sabahan (Good Morning), Quraysh chieftain."

"Im Sabahan, Ibn Wahb," replied Safwan. "Let us talk for some time. Time only goes by with conversation."

Umayr sat next to him. The two men began to recall Badr, the great defeat they had suffered and they counted the prisoners who had fallen into the hands of Muhammad and his companions. They became deeply distressed at the number of great Quraysh men who had been killed by the swords of the Muslims and who lay buried in the mass grave at al-Qalib in Badr.

Safwan ibn Umayyah shook his head and sighed, "By God, there can be no better after them."

"You are right," declared Umar. He remained silent for a while and then said, "By the God of the Kabah, if I had no debts and no family whose loss I fear after me, I would go to Muhammad and kill him, finish off his mission and check his evil." He went on in a faint, subdued voice, "And as my son Wahb is among them, my going to Yathrib would be beyond doubt."

Safwan ibn Umayyah listened intently to the words of Umayr and did not wish this opportunity to pass. He turned to him and said:

"Umar, place all your debt in my hands and I will discharge it for you whatever the amount. As for your family, I shall take them as my own family and give them whatever they need. I have enough wealth to guarantee them a comfortable living."

"Agreed," said Umar. "But keep this conversation of ours secret and do not divulge any of it to anyone."

"That shall be so," said Safwan.

Umar left the Masjid al-Haram with the fire of hatred against Muhammad blazing in his heart. He began to count what he needed for the task he had set himself. He knew that he had the full support and confidence of the Quraysh who had members of their families held prisoner in Madinah .

Umar had his sword sharpened and coated with poison. His camel was prepared and brought to him. He mounted the beast and rode in the direction of Madinah with evil in his heart.

Umar reached Madinah and went directly towards the mosque looking for the Prophet. Near the door of the mosque, he alighted and tethered his camel.

At that time, Umar was sitting with some of the Sahabah near the door of the Mosque, reminiscing about Badr, the number of prisoners that had been taken and the number of Quraysh killed. They also recalled the acts of heroism shown by the Muslims, both the Muhajirun and the Ansar and gave thanks to God for

the great victory He had given them.

At that very moment Umar turned around and saw Umayr ibn Wahb alighting from his camel and going towards the Mosque brandishing his sword. Alarmed, he jumped up and shouted. "This is the dog, the enemy of God, Umayr ibn Wahb. By God, he has only come to do evil. He led the Mushrikeen against us in Makkah and he was a spy for them against us shortly before Badr. Go to the Messenger of God, stand around him and warn him that this dirty traitor is after him."

Umar himself hastened to the Prophet and said, "O Rasulullah, this enemy of God, Umayr ibn Wahb, has come brandishing his sword and I think that he could only be up to something evil." "Let him come in," said the Prophet.

Umar approached Umayr, took hold of him by the tails of his robes, pressed the back of his sword against his neck and took him to the Prophet.

When the Prophet saw Umayr in this condition he said to Umar: "Release him." He then turned to Umayr and said: "Come closer." Umayr came closer and said, "Im Sabaha" (the Arab greeting in the days of Jahiliyyah)."

"God has granted us a greeting better than this, Umayr," said the Prophet. "God has granted us the greeting of Peace--it is the greeting of the people of Paradise." "What have you come for?" continued the Prophet.

"I came here hoping to have the prisoner in your hands released, so please oblige me." "And what is this sword around your neck for?" quizzed the Prophet. "Tell me the truth. What have you come for, Umayr?" prodded the Prophet. "I have only come to have the prisoner released," insisted Umar.

"No. You and Safwan ibn Umayyah sat near the Kabah recalling your companions who lie buried at al-Qalib and then you said, 'If I had no debt or no family to look after, I would certainly go out to kill Muhammad.' Safwan took over your debt and promised to look after your family in return for your agreeing to kill me. But God is a barrier between you and your achieving your aim."

Umar stood stupefied for a moment, then said: "I bear witness that you are the messenger of God." "We used, O messenger of God," he continued, "to reject whatever good you had brought and whatever revelation came to you. But my conversation with Safwan ibn Umayyah was not known to anyone else. By God, I am certain that only God could have made this known to you. Praise be to God Who has led me to you that He may guide me to Islam." He then testified that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah and became a Muslim. Thereupon, the Prophet instructed his companions: "instruct your brother in his religion. Teach him the Quran and set free his prisoner."

The Muslims were extremely happy with Umayr's acceptance of Islam. Even Umar who once said of him, "A pig is certainly dearer to me than Umayr ibn Wahb" came up to the Prophet and exclaimed "Today, he is dearer to me than some of my own children."

Thereafter Umayr spent much time increasing his knowledge of Islam and filling his heart with the light of the Quran. There, in Madinah, he spent the sweetest and richest days of his life away from what he had known in Makkah .

Back in Makkah, Safwan was filled with hope and would say to the Quraysh, "I will soon give you some great news that would make you forget the events of Badr." Safwan waited for a long time and then gradually became more and more anxious. Greatly agitated, he would go out and ask travelers what news they had of Umayr ibn Wahb but no one was able to give him a satisfactory reply. Eventually a rider came and said "Umar has become a Muslim."

The news hit Safwan like a thunderbolt. He was certain that Umayr would never become a Muslim and if

he ever did then everyone on the face of the earth would become Muslim also. "Never shall I speak to him and never shall I do anything for him," he said.

Umar meanwhile kept on striving to gain a good understanding of his religion and memorize whatever he could of the words of God. When he felt he had achieved a certain degree of confidence, he went to the Prophet and said:

"O Rasulallah, much time has passed since I used to try to put out the light of God and severely tortured whoever was on the path of Islam. Now, I desire that you should give me permission to go to Makkah and invite the Quraysh to God and His Messenger. If they accept it from me, that will be good. And if they oppose me, I shall harass them as I used to harass the companions of the Prophet."

The Prophet gave his consent and Umayr left for Makkah. He went straight to the house of Safwan ibn Umayyah and said: "Safwan, you are one of the chieftains of Makkah and one of the most intelligent of the Quraysh. Do you really think that these stones you are worshiping and making sacrifice to, deserve to be the basis of a religion? As for myself, I declare that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." At Umayr's hands, many Makkans became Muslims, but Safwan did not.

Later, during the liberation of Makkah, Safwan ibn Umayyah attempted to flee from the Muslim forces. Umar, however, obtained an amnesty from the Prophet for him and he too became a Muslim and distinguished himself in the service of Islam.

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