

Abu Ayyub al-Ansari

Khalid ibn Zayd ibn Kulayb from the Banu Najjar was a great and close companion of the Prophet. He was known as Abu Ayyub (the father of Ayyub) and enjoyed a privilege which many of the Ansar in Madinah hoped they would have.

When the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, reached Madinah after his hijrah from Makkah, he was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Ansar of Madinah. Their hearts went out to him and their eyes followed him with devotion and love. They wanted to give him the most generous reception anyone could be given.

The Prophet first stopped at Quba on the outskirts of Madinah and stayed there for some days. The first thing he did was to build a mosque which is described in the Quran as the "mosque built on the foundation of piety (taqwa)". (Surah At-Tawhah 9: 108).

The Prophet entered Madinah on his camel. The chieftains of the city stood along his path, each one wishing to have the honor of the Prophet alighting and staying at his house. One after the other stood in the camel's way entreating, "Stay with us, O Rasulullah." "Leave the camel," the Prophet would say. "It is under command. "

The camel continued walking, closely followed by the eyes and hearts of the people of Yathrib. When it went past a house, its owner would feel sad and dejected and hope would rise in the hearts of others still on the route.

The camel continued in this fashion with the people following it until it hesitated at an open space in front of the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. But the Prophet, upon whom be peace, did not get down. After only a short while, the camel set off again, the Prophet leaving its reins loose. Before long, however, it turned round, retraced its steps and stopped on the same spot as before. Abu Ayyub's heart was filled with happiness. He went out to the Prophet and greeted him with great enthusiasm. He took the Prophet's baggage in his arms and felt as if he was carrying the most precious treasure in the world.

Abu Ayyub's house had two stories. He emptied the upper floor of his and his family's possessions so that the Prophet could stay there. But the Prophet, peace be on him, preferred to stay on the lower floor.

Night came and the Prophet retired. Abu Ayyub went up to the upper floor. But when they had closed the door, Abu Ayyub turned to his wife and said:

"Woe to us! What have we done? The messenger of God is below and we are higher than he! Can we walk on top of the messenger of God? Do we come between him and the Revelation (Wahy)? If so, we are doomed."

The couple became very worried not knowing what to do. They only got some peace of mind when they moved to the side of the building which did not fall directly above the Prophet. They were careful also only to walk on the outer parts of the floor and avoid the middle.

In the morning, Abu Ayyub said to the Prophet: "By God, we did not sleep a wink last night, neither myself nor Umm Ayyub." "Why not, Abu Ayyub?" asked the Prophet. Abu Ayyub explained how terrible they felt being above while the Prophet was below them and how they might have interrupted the Revelation. "Don't worry, Abu Ayyub," said the Prophet. "We prefer the lower floor because of the many people coming to visit us." "We submitted to the Prophet's wishes," Abu Ayyub related, "until one cold night a jar of ours broke and the water spilled on the upper floor. Umm Ayyub and I stared at the water. We only had

one piece of velvet which we used as a blanket. We used it to mop up the water out of fear that it would seep through to the Prophet. In the morning I went to him and said, 'I do not like to be above you,' and told him what had happened. He accepted my wish and we changed floors."

The Prophet stayed in Abu Ayyub's house for almost seven months until his mosque was completed on the open space where his camel had stopped. He moved to the roots which were built around the mosque for himself and his family. He thus became a neighbor of Abu Ayyub. What noble neighbor to have had!

Abu Ayyub continued to love the Prophet with all his heart and the Prophet also loved him dearly. There was no formality between them. The Prophet continued to regard Abu Ayyub's house as his own. The following anecdote tells a great deal about the relationship between them.

Abu Bakr, may God be pleased with him, once left his house in the burning heat of the midday sun and went to the mosque. Umar saw him and asked, "Abu Bakr, what has brought you out at this hour? Abu Bakr said he had left his house because he was terribly hungry and Umar said that he had left his house for the same reason. The Prophet came up to them and asked, "What has brought the two of you out at this hour?" They told him and he said, "By Him in Whose hands is my soul, only hunger has caused me to come out also. But come with me."

They went to the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. His wife opened the door and said, "Welcome to the Prophet and whoever is with him."

"Where is Abu Ayyub?" asked the Prophet. Abu Ayyub, who was working in a nearby palm grove, heard the Prophet's voice and came hurriedly.

"Welcome to the Prophet and whoever is with him," he said and went on "O Prophet of God, this is not the time that you usually come." (Abu Ayyub used to keep some food for the Prophet every day. When the Prophet did not come for it by a certain time, Abu Ayyub would give it to his family.) "You are right," the Prophet agreed.

Abu Ayyub went out and cut a cluster of dates in which there were ripe and halfripe dates. "I did not want you to eat this," said the Prophet. "Could you not have brought only the ripe dates?" "O Rasulullah, please eat from both the ripe dates (rutb) and the half ripe (busr). I shall slaughter an animal for you also. " "If you are going to, then do not kill one that gives milk," cautioned the Prophet. Abu Ayyub killed a young goat, cooked half and grilled the other half. He also asked his wife to bake, because she baked better he said.

When the food was ready, it was placed before the Prophet and his two companions. The Prophet took a piece of meat and placed it in a loaf and said, "Abu Ayyub, take this to Fatima. She has not tasted the like of this for days.

When they had eaten and were satisfied, the Prophet said reflectively: "Bread and meat and busr and rutb!" Tears began to flow from his eyes as he continued:

"This is a bountiful blessing about which you will be asked on the Day of judgment. If such comes your way, put your hands to it and say, Bismillah (In the name of God) and when you have finished say, Al hamdu lillah alladhee huwa ashbana wa anama alayna (Praise be to God Who has given us enough and Who has bestowed his bounty on us). This is best."

These are glimpses of Abu Ayyub's life during peace time. He also had a distinguished military career. Much of his time was spent as a warrior until it was said of him, "He did not stay away from any battle the Muslims fought from the time of the Prophet to the time of Muawiyah unless he was engaged at the same time in another."

The last campaign he took part in was the one prepared by Muawiyah and led by his son Yazid against Constantinople. Abu Ayyub at that time was a very old man, almost eighty years old. But that did not

prevent him from joining the army and crossing the seas as a ghazi in the path of God. After only a short time engaged in the battle, Abu Ayyub fell ill and had to withdraw from fighting. Yazid came to him and asked:

"Do you need anything, Abu Ayyub?" "Convey my salaams to the Muslim armies and say to them: "Abu Ayyub urges you to penetrate deeply into the territory of the enemy as far as you can go, that you should carry him with you and that you should bury him under your feet at the walls of Constantinople." Then he breathed his last.

The Muslim army fulfilled the desire of the companion of the Messenger of God. They pushed back the enemy's forces in attack after attack until they reached the walls of Constantinople. There they buried him.

(The Muslims beseiged the city for four years but eventually had to withdraw after suffering heavy losses.)

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