

Umar ibn al-Khattab's (radhiAllahu anhu) Embracing Islam

Umar ibn al-Khattab (radhiAllahu anhu) of whom all the Muslims are justly proud of, at the beginning, was one of the biggest enemies of Islam and hardest against the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and well-known in persecuting the Muslims before he embraced Islam.

One day, the Quraysh in a meeting called for somebody to volunteer himself for the assassination of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam). Umar (radhiAllahu anhu) offered himself for this job, at which everybody exclaimed: "Surely, you can do it, Umar!" With sword hanging from his neck, he set out straight away on this evil mission. On his way he met Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas.

Sa'd inquired:

"Where are you going O Umar?"

Umar: "I am headed to finish off Muhammad."

Sa'd: "But do not you see that Banu Hashim, Banu Zuhrah and Banu Abd Munaf are going to take revenge if you hurt Muhammad?"

Umar (upset at the warning): "It seems that you also have renounced the religion of your forefathers. Let me settle with you first."

So saying, Umar drew out his sword. Sa'd announcing his Islam, also took out his sword. They were about to start a duel when Sa'd said:

"You had better first set your own house in order. Your sister and brother-in-law both have accepted Islam."

Hearing this, Umar became enraged in anger and turned towards his sister's house. The door of the house was bolted from inside and both husband and wife were receiving lessons in the Qur'an from Khabbab (radhiAllahu anhu).

Umar knocked at the door and shouted for his sister to open it. Khabbab (radhiAllahu anhu) hearing the voice of Umar, hid himself in some inner room,

forgetting to take the manuscript pages of the Holy Qur'an with him. When the sister opened the door, Umar hit her on the head, saying: "O, enemy of your self! You too have renounced your religion?! "

Her head began to bleed. He then went inside and inquired, "What were you doing? And who was the stranger I heard from outside?" His brother-in-law replied, "We were talking to each other." Umar said to him, "Have you also forsaken the creed of your forefathers and gone over to the new religion?"

The brother in law replied, "But what if the new religion be the better and the true one?" Umar went into rage and fell on him, pulling his hair and beating him most severely. When the sister intervened, he beat her so violently on her face that it started to bleed very much. She was, after all, Umar's sister; she burst out:

"O Umar! We are beaten only because we have become Muslims. We are determined to die as Muslims. You are free to do whatever you like."

When Umar had cooled down and felt a bit ashamed over his sister's bleeding, his eyes fell on the pages of the Qur'an left behind by Khabbab (radhiAllahu anhu). He said, "Alright show me what these are?"

"No," said the sister. "You are unclean and no unclean person can touch the Qur`an."

He insisted, but the sister was not prepared to allow him to touch the pages unless he washed his body. Umar at last gave in. He washed his body and then began to read the pages. It was Surah Taha. He started from the beginning of the Surah, and he was a completely changed man he came to the verse:

"Indeed I am Allah. There is none worthy of worship other than Me. So serve Me and establish Salah in My remembrance."

He said: "Alright, take me to Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam)."
On hearing this, Khabbab (radhiAllahu anhu) came out from inside and said: "O Umar! Good news for you. Yesterday, the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) made du`a to Allah, 'O, Allah strengthen Islam with either Umar or Abu lahl, with whoever you wish. It seems that his prayer has been answered in your favour."

Umar then went to the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and embraced Islam on Friday morning. Umar's Islam was a terrible blow to the disbelievers, but still the Muslims were few in number and all of Arabia was against them. The disbelievers intensified their efforts for the complete annihilation of Muslims and the extinction of Islam.

With Umar (radhiAllahu anhu) on their side, the Muslims now started saying their Salah at the Ka`bah. Abdullah bin Mas'ud (radhiAllahu anhu) says:

"Umar's Islam was a big triumph, his emigration to Madinah a tremendous reinforcement, and his becoming the khalifah was a great blessing for the Muslims."

Lesson #1: We learn from this story that Allah Ta`ala can guide to Islam whoever He wills. Even the greatest enemy of Islam can become the greatest Muslim.

Lesson #2: We learn of the difficulties the early Muslims went through in practicing Islam.

Abu Dhar Ghifari's (radhiAllahu anhu) Conversion to Islam:

Abu Dhar Ghifari (radhiAllahu anhu) is very famous among the Sahabah for his piety and knowledge. Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) used to say: "Abu Dhar is the possessor of such knowledge that other people are incapable of acquiring."

When he first got news of the Prophet's (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) mission, he told his brother to go to Makkah and make investigations regarding this person who claimed to be a Prophet.

His brother returned after investigating, and informed him that he found Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) to be a man of good habits and excellent conduct, and that his wonderful revelations were neither poetry nor sooth-sayings. This report did not satisfy him, and he decided to set out for Makkah and find out the facts for himself.

On reaching Makkah, he went straight to the Haram. He did not know the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and he did not consider it safe (under the circumstances prevailing at that time) to ask anyone about him. When it became

dark, Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) noticed him and seeing that he is a stranger, could not ignore him, as hospitality and care for the travelers, the poor and the strangers, were the Sahaba's second nature. He, therefore, took him to his place. He did not ask him about the purpose of his visit to Makkah, nor did Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) himself disclose it.

Next day, he again went to the Haram and stayed there till nightfall without being able to learn who the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) was. In fact everybody knew that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and his companions were being persecuted in Makkah, and Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) might have had doubts about the result of his quest for the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam). Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) again took him home for the night, but again did not have any talk with him about the purpose of his visit to the city.

On the third night, however, after Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) looked after him just as he did the two previous nights, so then he asked him:

"Brother, what brings you to this town?"

Before replying, Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) had an idea that Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) would speak the truth, and then he enquired from him about Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam). Ali (radhiAllahu anhu) replied:

"He is indeed the Prophet of Allah. You can come with me tomorrow and I shall take you to him. But you have to be very careful, that the people don't find out about your association with me, and you get into trouble. When on our way, I fear some trouble, I shall go off to the side pretending some necessity or fixing my shoes, and you will proceed ahead without stopping so that the people may not connect us."

The next day, he followed Ali (radhiAllahu anhu), who took him before the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam). In the very first meeting, he embraced Islam. The Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam), fearing that the Quraysh might harm him, enjoined upon him not to make an open declaration of his Islam, and told him to go back to his clan and return when Muslims had gained the upper hand.

Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) replied: "O, Rasulullah! By Allah, I must go and recite the Kalimah in the midst of these disbelievers."

True to his word, he went straight to the Haram and right in the midst of the crowd and at the top of his voice, recited Shahadah:

"I bear witness that there is no god save Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) is the Prophet of Allah."

People fell upon him from all sides, and would have beaten him to death if Abbas (the Prophet's uncle, who had not till then embraced Islam) had not shielded him and saved him from death. Abbas said to the mob:

"Do you know who he is? He belongs to the Ghifar clan, who live on the way of our caravans to Syria. If he is killed, they will take revenge against us and we shall not be able to trade with that country." This scared them and they left him alone.

The next day Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) repeated his confession of Imaan and would have surely been beaten to death by the crowd if Abbas had not intervened once again and saved him for the second time.

This action of Abu Dhar is not disobedience of the Prophet's command. The action of Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) was due to his extraordinary zeal for proclaiming Kalimah among the disbelievers. The prohibition by the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) was due to the soft corner in his heart for Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) lest he be put to hardships that might prove too much for him.

Actually, since the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) himself was undergoing all sorts of hardships in spreading the message of Islam, Abu Dhar (radhiAllahu anhu) also thought it fit to follow his example rather than to run away to avoid danger.

Lesson 1: It was this spirit of courageousness of the Sahabah that took them to the success in this life and in the hereafter.

Lesson 2: When a person once recited the Kalimah and entered the fold of Islam, no power on earth could turn him back and no oppression or tyranny could stop him from calling others to Islam.