

## ABDULLAH IBN MAS'UD

When he was still a youth, not yet past the age of puberty, he used to roam the mountain trails of Makkah far away from people, tending the flocks of a Quraysh chieftain, Uqbah ibn Muayt. People called him "Ibn Umm Abd"--the son of the mother of a slave. His real name was Abdullah and his father's name was Mas'ud.

The youth had heard the news of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who had appeared among his people but he did not attach any importance to it both because of his age and because he was usually far away from Makkan society. It was his custom to leave with the flock of Uqbah early in the morning and not return until nightfall.

One day while tending the flocks, Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) saw two men, middle-aged and of dignified bearing, coming towards him from a distance. They were obviously very tired. They were also so thirsty that their lips and throat were quite dry. They came up to him, greeted him and said, "Young man, milk one of these sheep for us that we may quench our thirst and recover our strength."

"I cannot," replied the young man. "The sheep are not mine. I am only responsible for looking after them."

The two men did not argue with him. In fact, although they were so thirsty, they were extremely pleased at the honest reply. The pleasure showed on their faces . . .

The two men in fact were the blessed Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself and his companion, Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). They had gone out on that day to the mountains of Makkah to escape the violent persecution of the Quraysh.

The young man in turn was impressed with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companion and soon became quite attached to them.

It was not long before Abdullah ibn Mas'ud became a Muslim and offered to be in the service of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) agreed and from that day the fortunate Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) gave up tending sheep in exchange for looking after the needs of the blessed Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) remained closely attached to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He would attend to his needs both inside and outside the house. He would accompany him on

journeys and expeditions. He would wake him when he slept. He would shield him when he washed. He would carry his staff and his siwak (toothbrush) and attend to his other personal needs.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) received a unique training in the household of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He was under the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he adopted his manner and followed his every trait until it was said of him, "He was the closest to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in character."

Abdullah was taught in the 'school' of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He was the best reciter of the Quran among the companions and he understood it better than them all. He was therefore the most knowledgeable on the Shariah. Nothing can illustrate this better than the story of the man who came to Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) as he was standing on the plain of Arafat and said:

"I have come, O Amir al-Mumineen, from Kufah where I left a man filling copies of the Quran from memory." Umar became very angry and paced up and down beside his camel, fuming. "Who is he?" he asked. "Abdullah ibn Mas'ud," replied the man. Umar's anger subsided and he regained his composure. "Woe to you," he said to the man. "By Allah, I don't know of any person left who is more qualified in this matter than he is. Let me tell you about this." Umar continued: "One night the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was having a conversation with Abu Bakr about the situation of Muslims. I was with them. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) left, we left with him also and as we passed through the masjid, there was a man standing in Prayer whom we did not recognize. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stood and listened to him, then turned to us and said, 'Whoever wants to read the Quran as fresh as when it was revealed, then let him read according to the recitation of Ibn Umm Abd.'

After the Prayer, as Abdullah sat making supplications, the Prophet, peace be on him, said, "Ask and it will be given to you. Ask and it will be given to you." Umar continued: "I said to myself, I shall go to Abdullah ibn Mas'ud straight away and tell him the good news of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)'s ensuring acceptance of his supplications. I went and did so but found that Abu Bakr had gone before me and conveyed the good news to him. By Allah, I have never yet beaten Abu Bakr in the doing of any good."

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) attained such a knowledge of the Quran that he would say, "By Him besides Whom there is no god, no verse of the book of Allah has been revealed without my knowing where it was revealed and the circumstances of its revelation. By Allah, if I know there was anyone who knew more of the Book of Allah, I will do whatever is in my power to be with him."

Abdullah was not exaggerating in what he said about himself. Once Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) met a caravan on one of his journeys as caliph. It was pitch dark and the caravan could not be seen properly. Umar ordered someone to hail the caravan. It happened that Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was in it.

"From where do you come?" asked Umar.

"From a deep valley," came the reply. (The expression used fajj amiq deep valley--is a Quranic one).

"And where are you going?" asked Umar.

"To the ancient house," came the reply. (The expression used al-bayt al-atiq ancient house, is a Quranic one.)

"There is a learned person (alim) among them," said Umar and he commanded someone to ask the person:

"Which part of the Quran is the greatest?"

"Allah, there is no god except Him, the Living, the Self-subsisting. Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep," replied the person answering, quoting the Ayat al-Kursi (the verse of the Throne).

"Which part of the Quran is the most clear on justice?"

"Allah commands what is just and fair, and the feeding of relatives..." came the answer.

"What is the most comprehensive statement of the Quran?"

"Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it."

"Which part of the Quran gives rise to the greatest hope?"

"Say, O my servants who have wasted their resources, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. He is the Forgiving, the Compassionate."

Thereupon Umar asked:

"Is Abdullah ibn Mas'ud among you?"

"Yes, by Allah," the men in the caravan replied.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) was not only a reciter of the Quran, a learned man or a fervent worshipper. He was in addition a strong and courageous fighter, one who became deadly serious when the occasion demanded it.

The companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were together one day in Makkah. They were still few in number, weak and oppressed. They said, "The Quraysh have not yet heard the Quran being recited openly and loudly. Who is the man who could recite it for them?"

"I shall recite it from them," volunteered Abdullah ibn Mas'ud . "We are afraid for you," they said. "We only want someone who has a clan who would protect him from their evil. "

"Let me," Abdullah ibn Mas'ud insisted, "Allah shall protect me and keep me away from their evil." He then went out to the masjid until he reached Maqam-e-Ibrahim (a few meters from the Kabah). It was dawn and the Quraysh were sitting around the Kabah. Abdullah stopped at the Maqam and began to recite:

"Bismillah irRahman irRahim. Ar-Rahman. Allamal Quran. Khalaqal insan. Allamahul bayan... (In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful. The Most Merciful (Allah). He has taught the Quran. He has created man and taught him the clear truth...)" - Quran: Surah Rahman 55:1-4

He went on reciting. The Quraysh looked at him intently and some of them asked: "What is Ibn Umm Abd saying?"

"Woe to him! He is reciting some of what Muhammad brought!" they realized.

They went up to him and began beating his face as he continued reciting. When he went back to his companions the blood was flowing from his face.

"This is what we feared for you," they said. "By Allah," replied Abdullah, "the enemies of Allah are not more comfortable than I at this moment. If you wish, I shall go out tomorrow and do the same." "You have done enough," they said. "You have made them hear what they dislike."

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) lived to the time of Khalifah Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him. When he was sick and on his death-bed, Uthman came to visit him and said:

"What is your ailment?"

"My sins."

"And what do you desire?"

"The mercy of my Lord."

"Shall I not give you your stipend which you have refused to take for years now?"

"I have no need of it."

"Let it be for your daughters after you."

"Do you fear poverty for my children? I have commanded them to read Surah al-Waqiah every night for I have heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying, "Whoever reads Al-Waqiah every night shall not be afflicted by poverty ever."

That night, Abdullah passed away to the company of his Lord, his tongue moist with the remembrance of Allah and with the recitation of the verses of His Book.

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