

Uthman Ibn Madh'un

A 'Monk' Whose Hermitage was Life

If you attempt to arrange the Prophet's Companions in the order of their embracing Islam, Uthmaan Ibn Madhun will be number fourteen. Not only was he the first Muhajir to die in Al-Madiinah, but also the first Muslim to be buried in Al-Baqi'a. This glorious Companion whose life story you are about to hear was a great "monk". By 'monk' here I mean a worshiper throughout life, not a monk sequestered in his hermitage, for life with all its commotion, turmoil, burdens, and virtues was his "hermitage". Life to him meant perseverance in the way of truth and unremitting self-denial good and righteousness.

When we go back in time, when the fresh early rays of Islam were emanating from the Prophet's saws heart and from his words said in secret and seclusion, 'Uthmaan Ibn Madh'un was there. He was one of the few who rushed to the way of Allah and supported the Prophet saws. When the Prophet saws ordered the few oppressed believers to emigrate to Abyssinia, he wanted to save them from the Quraish's oppression, while he chose to be left behind to face it alone. 'Uthmaan, who was at the head of the first group of fugitives, was accompanied by his son, As-Saa'ib. They set their faces towards a far-away land fleeing the plots of Abu Jahl, Allah's enemy, and the Quraish's atrocities.

The emigration of 'Uthmaan Ibn Madh'uun - and likewise for the rest of the emigrants to Abyssinia in the first and second emigrations - only made him hold more firmly to his Islam. Definitely, the two emigrations to Abyssinia represented a unique and glorious phenomenon in the cause of Islam, for those who believed in Muhammad saws and followed the light that had been sent down to him had had enough of paganism, error, and ignorance. Their common sense shunned the idolatry of statues made of rocks and clay. When these fugitives emigrated to Abyssinia, they found an already prevalent and highly disciplined religion with an established clerical hierarchy of bishops and priests. Notwithstanding their attitude towards this religion, it was definitely remote from both the familiar paganism practiced back home and the usual idolatrous rites they had left behind. Undoubtedly, the clergy in Abyssinia exerted much effort to lure those emigrants to apostatize and embrace Christianity.

In spite of all this, those emigrants stood steadfast in their profound loyalty to Islam and to the Prophet Muhammad saws. They anxiously yearned for the day when they would return to their beloved country so as to worship Allah and support the great Prophet saws in the Masjid in peacetime and in the battlefield when the power of disbelief forced them to take up arms. Thus, those emigrants who lived in Abyssinia felt secure and peaceful. 'Uthmaan Ibn Madh'uun was one of them, yet his expatriation did not make him forget his cousin Umaiya Ibn Khalaf's plots and the abuse he dealt him and other Muslims. Hence, he used to amuse himself by rehearsing threats to him, saying, "I hope that all the arrows you aim will miss their target

and strike back at you. You fought against generous and noble people and tortured them to death. You will soon be punished, and the common people you used to despise will get back at you."

While the emigrants were, despite their exile, wrapped up in their worship of Allah and the study of the Qur'aan, news spread that the Quraish had submitted themselves to Islam and prostrated themselves to Allah, the One, the Irresistable.

Hurriedly, driven by their nostalgic feelings, the emigrants packed up their belongings and hastened to Makkah. However, no sooner had they reached Makkah's outskirts than they realized that the news about the Quraish's submission to Islam was only the bait to lure them to return. Suddenly, they realized that their excessive credulity had led them right into this trap, yet there was nothing they could do, for Makkah was in sight and there was no escape whatsoever. Makkah's unbelievers were overjoyed to hear that their long-awaited prey was caught in the trap they had laid.

At that time, the right of protection - to be under the assistance, support, refuge, and protection of his patron - was a sacred and honored Arab tradition. Consequently, if a weak man had a claim on a man of high standing, he would instantly enjoy the privileges of the right of protection and would be under an invincible protection and safety. Naturally, not all of those who returned to Makkah had claims on a high-ranking man. Therefore, few enjoyed the protection and safety guaranteed by this right. Among those who did was 'Uthmaan Ibn Madh'uun, who had a claim on Al Waliid Ibn Al-Mughiirah. Hence, he entered Makkah safely and peacefully and attended its councils without being humiliated or harmed.

Yet, every time Ibn Madh'uun - the man who had been refined by the Qur'aan and whom the Prophet saws had taught and disciplined - looked around, he saw his weak, poor Muslim brothers who had no claim on the right of protection being atrociously abused and unjustly haunted, while he sat safe and sound in his sanctuary away from the least provocation. His free spirit rebelled and his noble compassion got the better of him. Hence, he decided to throw aside Al-Waliid's patronage and take off his shoulders this burdensome sanctuary that deprived him of the bliss of enduring abuse in the way of Allah and of following his Muslim brothers who were the believing vanguard and the glad tidings of the world that would afterwards overflow with faith, monotheism, and light. Let us now call an eyewitness to narrate what occurred.

When 'Uthmaan Ibn Madr'uun saw the affliction that had befallen the Prophet's saws Companions while he was free and safe under Al-Waliid Ibn Al-Mughiirah's protection, he said to himself, "By Allah, I realize now that I have a fatal flaw in my character, for here I am sound under the protection of a disbeliever while my brothers and companions are being abused and tortured by disbelievers." Instantly, he hastened to Al-Waliid

Ibn Al- Mughiiarah and spoke. Aby Abd Shams, you have been a dutiful friend, you did your utmost to honor the ties of kinship. But now I must forsake my claim on you." Al-Waliid asked him, "Why, nephew? Did any of my people lay a finger on you?" He answered, "No, but I'm fully satisfied with Allah's protection and sanctuary and I do not want to resort to anyone but Him. So please come with me to the Masjid and withdraw your protection and support in public." They both hastened to the Masjid. Then Al-Waliid cried out, "Uthmaan has asked me to withdraw my protection and support from him." 'Uthmaan said, "He was indeed a loyal, dutiful, and generous patron, but I do not like to resort to the protection and help of anyone but Allah."

As "Uthmaan was leaving, Lubaid Ibn Rabifah was sitting in one of the Quraish's meetings reciting poetry, so he decided to join them and sat down and heard Lubaid recite, "Everything but Allah is falsehood." 'Uthmaan nodded and said, "You spoke the truth." Lubaid continued, "Every blessing is transient." "Uthmaan objected saying, "You are a liar, for the blessings of Paradise are eternal." Lubaid said, "O you Quraish, by Allah, I have not heard before that anyone dared to call a man who was attending your meeting names." A man of Quraish explained, "Do not pay attention to what he says, for he is a fool who has turned apostate." "Uthmaan objected to the man's insult and both quarrelled until the man lost his temper and punched 'Uthmaan's eye ruthlessly.

Nearby was Al-Waliid Ibn Al-Mughiiarah, who saw what had happened and said, " By Allah, nephew, you could have spared yourself the pain if you had stayed under my invulnerable protection." 'Uthmaan answered, "On the contrary, my healthy eye yearns for the pain of my abused eye. I am under the protection of Allah, Who is far better and more capable than you, Abu 'Abd Shams." Al-Waliid urged him saying, "Come on nephew, be sensible and return to my sanctuary and protection." Ibn Madlfaun said firmly, "No." After he left, the pain in his eye was severe yet his spirit was revived, strengthened, and reassured. On his way home he recited, "I don't care if a deluded disbeliever hurt my eye, for it was in the way of Allah. For the Most Merciful will reward me on the Day of Reckoning in compensation for it. My people, if Allah attempts to please someone, then he will be undoubtedly a happy man. Even if you say that I'm a misguided fool, my life will always be consecrated to the Prophet Muhammad's saws religion. I will always do my utmost to please Allah, for our religion is the only truth despite abuse and oppression.

Thus he set an example that was highly becoming of him. In fact, life witnessed the remarkable scene of an excellent man whose graceful, immortal words will resound: "By Allah, my healthy eye yearns to be hurt in the way of Allah. I am under the protection and care of Someone far better and more capable than you." Obviously the scenario of "Uthmaan's abuse at the hands of the Quraish after he had renounced Al-Waliid's protection was premeditated on his part. He provoked it and was overjoyed by it, for this abuse was to him

like the fire that matures, purifies, and ennobles his faith. At last, he followed the foot steps of his believing brothers who did not accept intimidation.

Afterwards, "Uthmaan decided to emigrate to Al-Madiinah where he would not be haunted or harassed by Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, Umaiya, 'Utba, or any of the other ruthless disbelievers who abused and tormented the Muslims. He traveled to Al-Madiinah with those great Companions who survived the hardships, terror, and horror of the trials with admirable steadfastness and stoutness. They did not emigrate to Al-Madiinah to rest. On the contrary, Al-Madiinah was the springboard that enabled Muslims to strive in the way of Allah all over the world, clinging to Allah's flag and spreading His words, signs, and guidance.

When "Uthmaan had settled in the illuminated Madiinah, his remarkable, great qualities were unveiled. He ultimately emerged as an ascetic, devout, and repentant worshiper. To sum up, he was the glorious and intelligent "monk" who was not sequestered in his hermitage but rather in life. He spent his life striving in the way of Allah. Indeed, he was the worshiper by night and the fighter by day. In fact, he was the worshiper and the fighter of both night and day.

Although all the Prophet's saws Companions at that time were inclined to asceticism and devoutness, yet Ibn Madh'uun had a certain strategy in that respect, for he was so remarkably absorbed in his asceticism and devoutness that he turned his life, day and night, into a perpetual blessed prayer and a sweet long glorification. No sooner had he sipped the sweetness of the engrossment in worship than he hastened to abandon all the enticing luxury and splendor of life. Therefore, he wore nothing but coarse clothes and ate nothing but coarse food.

One day, he walked into the Masjid in which the Prophet saws and his Companions were sitting, and he had on a faded, worn-out garment that was patched with a piece of fur. As soon as the Prophet saws saw him, he sympathized with him, and the Companions' eyes were filled with tears, yet the Prophet saws said, "Would you like it if you were rich enough to have as many garments as you like and as much food as you like? Would you like your upholstery to be as expensive as the clothes used in covering the Ka'bah." The Companions answered, "We would indeed! We would like to live in luxury surrounded by the splendors of life." The Prophet saws commented, "You will be wealthy, but you are today far better in your piety and devoutness than you will when you are wealthy." Naturally, when Ibn Madh'uun heard the Prophet's saws words, he clung more and more to his austere and coarse life. He went so far as to renounce sexual intercourse with his wife, yet when the Prophet saws heard about this exaggerated attitude, he summoned him and said, "Your wife has the right to have sexual intercourse with you."

The Prophet saws loved him dearly. When his pure spirit was embarking on its journey towards Heaven, the Prophet saws was next to him, paying his last farewell to the first Muhaajir to die in Al-Madiinah and the first to be raised to Paradise. He leaned to kiss his forehead and his amiable eyes flowed with tears that wet 'Uthmaan's face, which looked remarkably graceful. The Prophet saws paid his last farewell to his beloved Companion by saying, "Allah bestow His mercy on you, Abu As-Saa'ib. You are now leaving life that was not able to seduce or mislead you."

The revered Prophet saws did not forget his Companion after his death; on the contrary, he saws often mentioned and praised him. For instance, his saws very last words to his daughter Ruqaiyah on her deathbed were, "Go on, follow in the pious and devout 'Uthmaan Ibn Madh'uun's footsteps up to Paradise."

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