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# Bilal the Abyssinian

***In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***

A long time ago a young boy lived in Ethiopia. Then fate brought him to Mecca from Ethiopia. This young boy was called Bilal. Bilal was a thin, black-faced, tall boy. He was not handsome like the other people of Ethiopia. After being brought to Mecca a rich and stony-hearted man, who was an enemy of Islam chose him as slave. From the beginning, at a time when Islam had not yet spread from Mecca, Bilal became Muslim of his own free choice. He did not accept the false gods and idols that the people made with various tools and different materials, and hatred of them always appeared in his heart.

As he had accepted Allah through thoughtful consideration, he knew Him to be One, yet these idols were merely the handwork of man and Allah can in no way be made to resemble man. He believed in the Oneness of Allah. He always insisted on his belief that Allah is one and has no associate. People praised his courage and bravery for he was a Muslim yet at the same time the slave of an idol-worshipper who was an enemy of Islam and who was constantly trying by all possible means, to prevent the spread of Islam.

This ignorant idol-worshiper was called Umayyah ibn Khalaf; he was from the nobles of Quraysh.

The bravery and moral heroism of Bilal became proverbial to the people of that time as well as to the Muslims of this age. Umayyah had understood what had happened and realized that Bilal had put his faith in the Messenger of Islam. It is from this moment that he began abusing and torturing Bilal in every way.

In order to make him turn away from his belief and trust, Umayyah tortured him in the most terrible way. For days on end, in the heat of midday, beneath the sun's burning rays, so hot that even walking was impossible he laid the defiant and brave Bilal, stripped naked, on the burning stones of Mecca and put big rocks on his body.

Again and again he insisted that Bilal reject Islam, otherwise he would be left on the scorching sand until he dies. Many times during the torture Bilal heard the names of the idols 'Lat' and 'Manat' from Umayyah

who ordered Bilal to pray to these two famous idols and to reject the new din of Islam.

But Bilal remained defiant, never showing the slightest sign of any weakening of his iman and he accompanied his answers to the words of the cruel idol-worshippers with a painful smile and several times called out 'ahad', 'ahad'!! "He is the only God of the sky and the earth and the sun and the sea. We believe only in Him and we do not believe in your magic idols at all".

After several days, since Umayyah realized how defiant and invincible Bilal was and how determined he was not to reject his din, he tried even crueler methods and tortured him in a more terrible and agonizing way than before.

One day Umayyah threw a smelly and dirty cow-skin over him and imprisoned him under it for many minutes, until Bilal was on the point of suffocating!

But the brave Bilal in spite of all these tortures did not reject his din and by his unshakeable belief he made the idol-worshippers hear his cry of tawhid: 'ahad', 'ahad'. Although all the Messenger's close friends had the same resistance and devotion to their din, the majority of the Meccan people were surprised at Bilal's boldness.

Similarly, a certain man of wisdom who had become a Christian was also surprised at this resistance, for compared to his own power of resistance; he saw a great distance between Bilal and himself.

One day he (the Christian) exclaimed angrily to Umayyah: "The resistance of this Abyssinian black man attracts me; his devotion and his Iman for the din of tawhid unparalleled." His praise of Bilal was so great that he said to Umayyah: "This man Bilal is so firm in his faith that if he were to die shahid in this belief, I myself would make his tomb a shrine and go to visit it out of respect for his grave".

This is how Bilal's resistance became renowned. Other followers of the Prophet were not safe from torture and abuse. Some of them were made to wear armour and were put in the burning sunshine until the armour became scorching-hot and their bodies began to burn. And sometimes they were placed in deep wells whose entrance was blocked until they had almost drowned.

It was during this time too, that they fastened a rope around Bilal's neck and made him run over mountainous country full of rocks and boulders, so that this determined Muslim might reject his din and honour the idols. To this black Muslim these difficult days seemed to last for years.

This Muslim, who believed in Allah and the final din, the last Prophet and the last revealed book had been so seriously injured by the torture that they talked about taking him from Mecca to Medina, but it was at this moment that news reached them from the slave of Abu Bakr which changed Bilal's situation. Abu Bakr had bought Bilal and had set him free; but Abu Bakr expected something in return for this service to Bilal.

When Bilal was released he again joined the company of the holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Suddenly a battle

took place between the Muslims and the kuffar (polytheists) which was called the battle of Badr. It was happened that Umayyah and his son were made captive by the Muslims in this battle. There were some people among the Muslims who did not want them to be killed. Bilal was informed that his former cruel master and his son had been captured.

When Bilal saw them the memory of the torture returned and without stopping to reflect shouted: "O my Muslim brothers! Umayyah is from the kuffar and is a leader of the idols worshippers. He is one of those who is establishing shirk. He should not be alive, he is an enemy of Islam. The people were so affected by his words that they gave Umayyah and his son to him to be killed and this he did.

By having him killed he thus destroyed one of the barriers in the way of the spread of Islam. Bilal had always wished to be able to live in Mecca freely. Many times he had said: "Is it possible a day will come when I will be able to live in Mecca among the perfumes of the fine flowers? Is it possible that I will be able to drink from the water of Majannah in Mecca."

The love for the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in the heart of this black Abyssinian was endless. One day while the Prophet was sitting among his companions, Bilal suddenly entered. The Prophet with beautiful eloquence said : "If we should want to take one particular person as the shining example of good behaviour and adab then you would be the clear and obvious example.

Gradually he became famous amongst the Muslims. One of the angels called Jibril (Gabriel) revealed and taught the adhan to the Prophet. He called Bilal and taught the adhan to him and ordered him to call the adhan for salat in his loud, attractive voice and so for the first time this black Abyssinian, who was no longer a slave, called the adhan as the first mu'adhdhin.

In the din of Islam the voice of the adhan calls the Muslims to prayer. The holy Prophet told the Muslims: “Bilal is a punctual man, do your salat with him and break your fast with his adhan”.

After the victory of Mecca the Muslims entered and began to break down the idols and take them out of the Ka‘bah. The Prophet ordered Bilal to go upon the roof of the Ka‘bah and call the adhan. This was the first time that the calling of the adhan was heard at the House of Allah. The sound of the adhan spread around Mecca and both children and men trembled as they heard this sound.

As Bilal pronounced the 'sh' like 's' when he called the adhan he said 'as-had' instead of `ashhad' but the Prophet always used to say that the 's' of Bilal in the eyes of Allah is 'sh'.

In the battle of Khaybar Bilal caused one of the daughters of an enemy to pass by the side of the corpses of her people; the girl was very much disturbed. For the first time the Prophet became very angry with Bilal and spoke sharply to him: "Is there no mercy in you? You cause the captive to pass by the side of the corpses of her people!"

Finally the light of Islam, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) closed his eyes for the last time on earth; the people then

became two groups. The first group accepted the caliphate of Abu Bakr and the other declared it was illegal. Bilal's devotion to the Prophet was such that he did not call the adhan from then on. Abu Bakr expected Bilal to be his mu'adhdhin as he had been the Prophet's. Since he did not accept, ‘Umar met Bilal and told him : "You should not stop calling the adhan for Abu Bakr because it was he who released you." Bilal answered him : "If he has released me for Allah's sake he will be rewarded by Allah, but if he has released me to make me his slave I am not prepared to give him this satisfaction. How could I obey a caliph whom the Prophet has not chosen? How could I be satisfied with another caliph?"

And thus ‘Umar became angry and ordered him to leave Medina. From then on the followers of Abu Bakr put pressure on him but he told Abu Bakr : "I will not call the adhan for anybody after the Prophet of Allah."

The pressure did not end, until one day of Jum‘ah (Friday) when Abu Bakr was sitting up on the minbar Bilal suddenly shouted: "O Abu Bakr, have you released me for the sake of Allah or for yourself?" Abu Bakr answered : "For Allah". Bilal said : "So in that case allow me to leave Mecca for jihad!"

Pleased with what had happened he then left Medina for Syria, saying aloud to himself: "It is Allah, not Abu Bakr who has saved me from the kuffar. If Allah had not saved me, these wild animals would have torn me to pieces".

And thus it happened as Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) has said: "When the mu'adhdhin was changed, a part of the adhan was omitted (Hayya ‘ala khayri 'l ‘amal — come to the best of actions)."

Some time after the death of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.), the dear daughter of the Prophet asked Bilal to call the adhan once more in memory of her father. Bail accepted and when he began to call the adhan from the roof of the building the people trembled and wept bitterly at this familiar sound. The adhan had not yet ended when someone brought news to him to stop calling adhan. He did not call the rest of the adhan, because the daughter of the Prophet had fainted.

The pressure of his opponents forced him to go to Syria and there he stayed as a guardian of Daru 'l – Islam . One night he dreamt he saw the Prophet who told him: "You do us wrong; it is several years that you have forgotten to visit our family."

When Bilal woke up, he decided to set out and travel to Medina. When he reached Medina he went quickly to visit the tomb of the Prophet. He was crying beside the Prophet's grave when he saw the children of Ali (a.s.) whom he embraced and kissed.

Although he had decided not to call the Whim again he once more began the adhan in memory of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

The people heard him and their bodies trembled. All the people remembered the Prophet when the words "I witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" were being called. All the men and the

women came out of their houses and wept bitterly.

During the illegal caliphate of ‘Umar, Bilal lived in Syria. At that time a man called Khalid was the commander of the Islamic army in Syria. For a long time Damascus was surrounded by the Islamic army. When some bad reports of Khalid reached ‘Umar, the caliph wrote a letter to Khalid's deputy — ‘Ubaydah in which he informed him of Khalid's dismissal as commander and chose `Ubaydah in his place. But `Ubaydah was afraid of reading this letter to him!

As no news reached the caliph he became worried and wrote another letter which he ordered `Ubaydah to arrest Khalid and to fasten his hands and feet with his own turban and then to try him. But `Ubaydah was frightened this time too. As Bilal had found out about the affair he bravely decided to read the letter out loud to the people. After reading the letter to them, he fastened with his turban the hands and feet of that powerful man (who was the son of a renowned philosopher) and tried him in a military court.

All the people remembered him for his bravery: an Abyssinian freed-slave had questioned the greatest commander of the army even as an old man, he still did the most difficult work and he still guarded the frontiers of Daru 'l-Islam.

Finally Bilal, the mu'adhdhin of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) died in the twentieth year after hijrah in Syria and was buried in a place called Babu's-Saghir in Damascus. And thus one of the greatest men in the history of Islam passed away and began the path to the garden.

May Allah bless him.

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