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Ja'far Tayyār, the Youth of Eloquence

Ja'far, the son of Abī Tālib was one the Noble Prophet's (S) loyal Companions and faithful Helpers. Ja'far ibn Abī Tālib (‘a) was also a highly esteemed brother of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (‘a). He was ten years older than Imām ‘Alī (‘a). Ja'far Tayyār was one of the earliest people to respond affirmatively to the divine call of the Noble Prophet (S) and convert to Islam. It was for this reason that the Noble Prophet stated, “O Ja'far! You are similar to me with respect to natural disposition and moral qualities.”^{[1](#)}

When the first group of the Muslim emigrants [*muhājirīn*] went to Ethiopia [Habashah] in the month of Rajab, in the fifth year of the prophetic mission, their leader was ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn. But the leader of the second group of emigrants that went to Ethiopia was Ja'far Tayyār, a youth of twenty five. His young wife called “Asmā’ bint ‘Umayy”, too, emigrated with him.

Notwithstanding that there were a lot of highly respected people among the emigrants and other worthy, capable youths among them, no one got more attention and favors than J'afar from the Noble Prophet (S). When the emigrants arrived in Habashah (present Ethiopia), Ja'far was elected to be the spokesman for the emigrants. He performed his duties, as a spokesman, with excellence. We will now recount what has been recorded in history concerning this:

After the polytheists of Mecca became aware of the emigration of the Muslims from Mecca to Ethiopia, they sent a mission under the leadership of ‘Amru ibn ‘ās, an idol-worshipping youth, who was very eloquent in speech to the court of Negus, the King of Ethiopia, with lots of presents. They requested Negus, the King of Ethiopia, to return the Muslims back to Mecca so that they may face their punishment.

Before meeting the King at his court, the idol-worshippers from Mecca distributed a lot of presents and gifts to the courtiers in order to attract their attention and buy their support. The courtiers promised to cooperate with the polytheists of Mecca in the best possible manner, and arranged a meeting of the polytheists and the King in his court.

When the representatives of the infidels of the Quraysh met the King at his court, they fell on their knees

and addressed the King of Ethiopia, “O King! A group of ignorant youths has emigrated from Mecca to your country. They have renounced the beliefs and religion of their forefathers and do not recognize the right of Christianity either; on the contrary, they have invented a new religion which neither you nor we have ever heard about.

Their fathers, uncles, families and households have sent us as representatives so that we may persuade you to entrust these Muslims to us. When you have entrusted these Muslims to us, we will return them to their country because their near ones are duty bound to watch over them and control their activities. The Muslims themselves know very well what kind of disgrace and discredit they have caused their families.”

The King got very offended and annoyed by the words of ‘Amru ibn ‘As and angrily said, “I swear by Allah that I will not be moved by your words and will not surrender the Muslims to you; on the contrary, I will call the Muslims so that they may explain for themselves why they sought asylum in my country and preferred my protection to the protection of other kings. I will ask the Muslims themselves to tell me the reality of the matter. I will not surrender and hand them over to you if what they say is logical and contrary to your words. On the contrary, they will find an increase in my favors and attention!” It was in this way that Negus, the King of Ethiopia, summoned the Muslims so that they may inform him more about their beliefs and religion.

The Muslims held a meeting and consulted one another about what they ought to do. They decided to explain the reality of Islam and the laws and orders of the Noble Prophet (S) even though the result would not be in their favor. With this intention, they entered the court of Negus, the King of Ethiopia.

The meeting room was well decorated. The high priests of Ethiopia sat around the King with bibles open in front of them. After the emigrants had occupied the place that had been reserved for them, the King faced them and asked, “What religion is this that you follow and adhere to; a religion which is neither that of your fellow tribesmen nor that of mine, nor that of any other people on earth?”

Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib (‘a), who was a very eloquent youth, stood up to represent the emigrants. He said, “O King! We were once an ignorant and idol-worshipping people; we used to eat the flesh of dead animals, to commit ugly sins and shameful deeds, to withhold our help from our near ones and behave badly with our neighbors, and the strong among us used to oppress the weak and downtrodden.

Indeed, we continued to live like this until Allah raised a prophet from among ourselves; a person whose parentage and genealogy we know, a trustworthy man, whose chastity is confirmed and acknowledged by all of us. This Noble Prophet (S) invited us to the worship of One God.

He ordered us to stop worshiping stone idols and that which our ancestors used to worship, and ordered us to tell the truth, be trustworthy, observe the bonds of relationship, be kind and good to our neighbors. He prevented us from performing unlawful [*haram*] acts, committing obscene acts, making illogical remarks or unreasonable demands, bullying, devouring the property of the orphans or adding it as an addition to our own property and falsely accusing women of faith.

He also ordered us to worship One God and not to associate anyone or anything with Him, to enjoin and perform the prayers, to give *zakāt* (Islamic tax for the poor and the needy), and to fast.

We confirmed and acknowledged his prophetic mission and accepted what was revealed to him from Allah in the form of revelation. Therefore, we the Muslims worship One God and do not recognize anyone or anything to be His equal. We consider as unlawful [*harām*] whatever He has ordered to be [*harām*] and consider as lawful [*halāl*] whatever He has ordered to be *halāl*.

But our tribes opposed Allah's Prophet (S) and tortured us brutally for following his divine guidance. When we faced harsh treatment, severity, compulsion, coercion, and oppression, and realized that they were becoming a hindrance to our practicing our religious duties, we migrated to your country. We preferred you to all the other kings of the world and sought asylum in your justice. We hope that in the vicinity of your justice and fairness, no one will be permitted to commit any sort of injustice."

After this brilliant discourse, Ja'far did not say anything anymore. Negus, the King of Ethiopia, asked, "Do you know anything or have you memorized anything concerning that which was inspired and revealed to the former prophets?"

Ja'far answered, "Yes." Negus said, "Recite it." Ja'far, who knew that the King and his associates were devout Christians and were loyal to their religion, and that they believed in 'Īsā ibn Maryam (Jesus the Christ), recited the opening verses of *Sūrat Maryam* of the Glorious Qur'an in an extremely touching manner. When he started reciting the verses which recount the birth of Jesus Christ, (and recited the story of Jesus' birth according to the account and description given in the glorious Qur'an, Negus, the King of Ethiopia, could not control the tears which ran down his cheeks. The King's associates, who were all bishops, episcopates and high priests, also cried so much that all the bibles in front of them became wet with tears.

Then, Negus, the just King of Ethiopia, said, "There is no doubt that these words and that which was revealed to Jesus Christ come from the same source. Do not worry and do not lose your peace or tranquility, I swear by Allah that I will not surrender you to these two people at all. Then, he addressed the representatives of the Quraysh and said, 'Return to where you have come from; under no circumstances will I surrender the Muslims to you'."

Then, he told his associates, "Return all the presents and gifts that these two people have distributed among you because we do not need their gifts at all. Allah did not receive bribes to offer me the sultanate; therefore, I too will not receive any bribes in Allah's way." It was in this way that the representatives of the Quraysh faced humiliation and returned, defeated, to Mecca. They returned the gifts (bribes) that they had brought from the Quraysh.[2](#)

Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib (‘a) and the other Muslims stayed in Habashah (Ethiopia) up to 7 AH and returned to Medina after twelve years of residing in Africa. When they arrived in Medina, the Noble Prophet (S) had just returned victoriously from the Battle of Khaybar.

When he heard that Ja'far had returned from Ethiopia, Allah's Prophet (S) went to see him and welcome him back. When he met Ja'far, the Noble Prophet (S) embraced him and kissed him on the forehead. The Noble Prophet (S) was doing this while tears of joy were flowing down his cheeks. Then he said, "I do not know for what I should be happier; the return of Ja'far or the conquest of Khaybar."³

The end of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib

One year after returning to Medina, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib was appointed as commander of an army that was dispatched for Jordan. Ja'far Tayyar was entrusted with an army of three thousand soldiers and was sent to fight the Romans.

Allah's Prophet (S) escorted the soldiers and bade them farewell before returning to Medina. While bidding them farewell, he said, "In the event that Ja'far gets martyred, the next commander should be Zayd ibn Harithah, and after him the next commander should be 'Abd Allah ibn Rawhah. In case he too should get martyred, the Muslims should choose whomever they wish to be their commander."

The Muslim soldiers encountered the Romans at a place called "Mu'tah" in Jordan. A tiny army of three thousand Muslim soldiers was confronted by a huge army of one hundred thousand Roman soldiers. Ja'far Tayyar displayed a lot of courage and devotion in this war until he finally attained martyrdom. All the commanders of the Muslim army attained martyrdom one after another until Khalid ibn Walid freed the Muslims from the siege (or blockade) of their infidel enemies and they returned to Medina.

When news was brought to the Noble Prophet (S) that Ja'far had been martyred, first he cried and then said, "We ought to cry for the likes of Ja'far, Allah has replaced his two hands, that were cut during the war, with two wings so that he may fly with the angels in heaven."

That is why he has been called Ja'far Tayyar⁴, meaning 'Ja'far who flies'. Ja'far attained martyrdom at the age of thirty three. He was buried in Jordan in the same place where he had attained his martyrdom.⁵

Ja'far was one of those people who, even before the advent of Islam, enjoyed a good reputation among the people. During the ascent of Islam, he became one of the most outstanding faces in the Muslim World because of the purity of his natural disposition and abundant mental alertness.

Imam al-Sadiq (a) stated, "Allah revealed to His Prophet (S) four qualities of Ja'far that He had accepted." The Noble Prophet (S) asked Ja'far what those four qualities were. Ja'far answered, "O Prophet of Allah! If Allah had not revealed my qualities, I would not have told you. The four qualities are: I have never consumed alcohol, because I have always known that taking alcohol would reduce my intellect; I have never lied, because lying reduces the manliness and humanity of man. I have never committed adultery or fornication, owing to the fact that I always knew that if I committed adultery or fornication with another woman, someone else will commit adultery or fornication with my wife. I have

never worshipped an idol, in view of the fact that I knew that the benefit and harm of idol-worshipping cannot be trusted.”⁶

¹. Safīnah al-Bihār, vol. 1, p. 158.

². Ibn Hishām, Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah, vol. 1, p. 223; Tārīkh-e Paymbar-e Islām, p. 129; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, vol. 1, p. 203; Ibn Athar, Al-Kāmil, vol. 2, p. 51; Amt’ al-Asm’, vol. 1, p. 20; Usd al-Ghābah, vol. 3, p. 376; Tārīkh-e Tabarī, vol. 2, p. 69; Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 18, p. 422; A’lām al-Warā, p. 53; Tārīkh-e Ya’qūbī, vol. 2, p. 385.

³. Al-Istī‘āb, vol. 1, p. 212; Khisāl, p. 107.

⁴. Tayyār is an Arabic word that means flying. [trans.]

⁵. Zarkulī, Al-A’lām, vol. 2, p. 125; Al-Isbah, vol. 1, p. 237; Sifat al-Safwah, vol. 1, p. 205; Maqātil al-Talibiyyīn, p. 3; Hilyah al-Awliyā’, vol. 1, p. 114; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, vol. 4, p. 22; Mu’jam al-Buldān, the word Mu’tah; A’lām al-Warā, p. 64; Ibn Hishām, Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah, vol. 4, p. 22; Sīrah al-Nabī, vol. 3, p. 434; Amt’ al-Asm’, vol. 1, p. 246.

⁶. Sadq, Al-Amālī, p. 74.

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