



Stories from the Hijaz

THE MAKKAH CHRONICLES



Barakah, 'Mother after my mother'



Barakah was the first person to hold the Prophet (SAW) when he was born. It is widely held that this was at the site of the present-day library, outside the Haram.

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ISLAM is a religion that emphasises the equality of all, with race not providing any advantage to any.

The Prophet (SAW), during his Farewell Sermon on Arafah stipulated, 'A white has no superiority over a black nor does a black have any superiority over a white except by piety and good action.'

As Muslims, we follow in the footsteps of a black lady when we perform our Sae between Safa and Marwa. We walk the same path that Hajar (RA), the wife of Nabi Ibrahim (AS) in desperation slaved five thousand years ago, when we complete our obligatory fifth pillar of Islam, the Hajj.

We have another example of a lady who was introduced into the life of Nabi Muhammad (SAW) as a slave, and who he referred to as 'my mother after my own mother had gone. She is the rest of my family'.

She was there when Nabi Muhammad (SAW) was born and she was there when he breathed his final breath. This lady was Barakah (RA), also known as Umm Ayman.

As a young slave, she was bought by Abdullah (RA), who was known for his gentle and kind nature, and who would later become the father of our Prophet (SAW). Initially, she worked as a household aide but after Abdullah married, she took care of his wife, Amina (RA), as well.

When Abdullah left on business to Syria, Barakah slept at the foot of the pregnant Amina's bed, and when he passed away during the journey close to Madinah (then called Yathrib), she comforted and looked after the young widow. Barakah was the first person to hold Muhammad (SAW) after he was born.

When he was six-years-old, Mother Amina decided to take Muhammad (SAW) to Madinah to visit the grave of Abdullah.

Barakah accompanied them. On the way back, Amina became very ill and passed away at Al-Abwa, a village midway between Makkah and Madinah.

'Be a mother to him, Barakah. And don't ever leave him,' was Amina's request to Barakah regarding her son as she lay dying. Barakah did not fail in her responsibility. When she arrived in Makkah, Abdul Muttalib, the elderly grandfather of Muhammad (SAW), reflected on the personal tragedies that the Prophet (SAW) had to endure.

He recognised some special qualities in his young grandson. He also mentioned to his own sons that he expected Muhammad (SAW) to have a future filled with prominence. He requested Barakah to look after the Prophet (SAW) and to be kind and caring towards him. She needed no urg-

ing; she loved the child in her care like a mother loves her only child.

As a young man, Muhammad (SAW) was always kind and courteous towards her. He loved her and wanted to return her kindness. When he married Khadijah (RA), at the age of twenty-five, He set her free from her enslavement and encouraged her to marry Ubayd ibn Zayd from whom she bore a son named Ayman, hence her name Umm Ayman. Ubayd passed away soon thereafter.

When she was in about her 50s, the Prophet (SAW), when speaking to his Companions said: 'Should one of you desire to marry a woman from the people of Paradise, let him marry Umm Ayman.'

Zaid ibn Harithah, a slave whom the Prophet had also earlier set free and adopted as a son, stepped forward and agreed to marry her. She bore Zaid a son,

Usamah, whom the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have loved as his own son.

Umm Ayman was one of the first people to accept Islam. Her reason was that she knew the Prophet (SAW) extremely well and knew of his honesty and sincerity. Her fundamental logic said to her that Muhammad (SAW) could never speak a lie so, when he spoke about the one and only Allah, he surely had to be announcing the truth as he was incapable of fabricating lies.

Without questioning him, she accepted that he was truly Allah's Messenger. She endured much suffering at the hands of the Quraish who persecuted the Muslims relentlessly in Makkah, and finally undertook the Hijrah to Madinah, barefooted, and during a sandstorm. Her feet were swollen and she was covered in dust when she

reached Madinah, where the Prophet (SAW) received her and said: 'O Umm Ayman! O my mother! Indeed, for you is a place in Paradise!'

She intricately linked her well-being to that of Islam. When Nabi Muhammad (SAW) once asked about her wellbeing, she replied: 'I am well, O Messenger of Allah so long as Islam is.' She accompanied the Prophet (SAW) on some of his expeditions and battles.

At Uhud, when the Quraishi army attacked the Muslims, she was with a small group of women who tended the wounded. When some of the Muslims began fleeing the battlefield when things were not going their way, she rebuked them, urging them to go back and fight.

At the battle of Hunayn, she again joined the army, with her two sons fighting alongside the Prophet (SAW). Her elder son, Ayman, was martyred during that battle.

After the Prophet (SAW) passed away, Abu Bakr and Umar visited her, just like the Prophet (SAW) used to do. When they asked how she was doing, she burst into tears. They tried consoling her and said that Muhammad (SAW) was with Allah and being with our Creator was better than any position or life on this earth.

She told them that she was fully aware of that, and it was not for the loss of the Prophet (SAW) that she wept. She told them that she was crying because 'revelation from on high had ceased'. They recognised her deep insight into humanity and realised that revelation was paramount to the functioning of the first Muslim community. It ensured that Allah was conveying truth and wisdom to humankind.

With the Prophet (SAW) gone and revelation ceased, humankind was left to fend for themselves even with the Quran and Sunnah that was still with them.

Umm Ayman died a few months after the Prophet (SAW), when she was in her mid-seventies.



Umm Ayman, also known as Barakah, accompanied the Prophet (SAW) on a number of expeditions, including to the Battle of Uhud, outside Madinah.

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