Life of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab

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Dear brothers and sisters: The companions of Prophet Muhammad were the best followers; some of them ruled people with justice and wisdom which is evident for their work and actions. Among those companions are Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Uthman, and Ali.

Today I will deal with the life of the second Caliph, Abu Hafs 'Umar, because from the stories of Prophets and righteous individuals we learn lessons and gain wisdom as the Qur'an mentions: ‘Surely, in their stories, there are lessons and wisdom.’ [12:] From his life, we learn lessons, admonition, and wisdom.

The first image: Umar was the second caliph after Abu Bakr. He was born thirteen years after the Elephant incident. He was twenty-seven years old when the Prophet proclaimed his mission. He accepted Islam in the sixth year of prophecy when he was 32. It is also narrated that Umar was 27 when he accepted Islam. It was very early on, after forty other men and eleven women. He declared his Islamic faith openly in Makkah and the Muslims rejoiced in him. Umar was twelve years younger than the Prophet. He was one of the nobility of the Quraysh, he had the role of mediator in the Jahiliyyah; whenever war broke out among them or between Quraysh and others, they would send him as a mediator. He also acted as a judge among them when there were disputes.

Dear brothers and sisters: Umar married many wives as this custom was common at that time. Among his wives was Umm Kulthum, daughter of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib. It was narrated that he had 13 children. Among his children were Abdullah Ibn Umar, one of the most important narrators of the Prophet’ traditions and Hafsah, wife of Prophet Muhammad; Fatimah, 'Asim, and Abdur-Rahman.

His Titles: He was nicknamed Abu Hafs. He was given the title of Al-Faruq [The one who distinguishes between good and bad], and was best known for his justice with Muslims and non-Muslim subjects alike. Ibn Sa'd narrated that Dhakwan said: I said to ‘A’ishah, ‘Who named ‘Umar ‘al-Faruq’?’ She said, ‘The Prophet [pbuh]. Also, Umar was the first Caliph to be called Amir al-Mu'minin [Commander of the Faithful],

Description of Umar: Umar was very tall, white, bold, he had a good face and a loud voice [may Allah be pleased with him]

Dear brothers and sisters: It is narrated that, before Umar accepted Islam, on the way to murder Muhammad, he met a polytheist who told him to set his own house in order first, as his sister and her husband had converted to Islam. Upon arriving at her house, Umar found his sister and brother-in-law Sa'id Ibn Zayd [Umar's cousin], reciting the verses of the Qur'an. He started beating his brother-in-law severely.

When his sister came to rescue her husband, he also beat her until she started bleeding. Seeing his sister now, he calmed down and asked her to give him what she was reciting. She gave him the paper on which was written the verses from chapter Ta-Ha. He was so struck by the beauty of the verses that he accepted Islam that day. He then went to Muhammad [pbuh] with the same sword he intended to kill him with and accepted Islam in front of him and his companions.
Also, Ahmad narrated that 'Umar said: I went out to confront the Messenger of Allah [pbuh], and found that he had preceded me to the mosque [of Makkah]. I stood behind him and he began by reciting Surat al-Haqqah. I was astonished by the composition of the Qur'an, so I said, ‘By Allah, this is a poet as Quraysh say.’ Then he recited, ‘It is truly the saying of a noble messenger, and it is not the saying of a poet, how little you believe…’ [69: 40] to the end of the ayah, and Islam came about in my heart.

The second image is his achievement: Umar was Caliph for nearly ten and a half years. This period stands out as the golden age of Islam. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was the first Muslim ruler to establish a Public Treasury. The first Muslim ruler to levy a customs duty called 'ushr; the first Muslim ruler to organize a census; the first Muslim ruler to mint coins; the first Muslim ruler to organize a system of canals for irrigation; and the first Muslim ruler to formally organize provinces, cities, and districts.

He established the system of guest-houses and rest-houses on major routes to and from major cities. He established schools throughout the land and allocated salaries for teachers. He was the first to place the law of inheritance on a firm basis. He was the first to establish trusts, and the first ruler in history to separate the judiciary from the executive.

During Umar’s reign, the Islamic empire grew at an unprecedented rate, taking Mesopotamia and parts of Persia from the Sassanids, and taking Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Armenia from the Byzantines, conquest of Jerusalem.

The third image: the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] praised Umar’s knowledge, faith [deen], and status. The Prophet [pbuh] bore witness to the superiority of Umar ibn Al-Khattab in his faith, saying: ‘While I was sleeping, I saw the people being presented to me. Each of them was wearing a shirt. Some reached to their breast and some reached farther than that. Then Umar was shown to me with his shirt reaching all the way to the ground.’ They asked: ‘How do you interpret it, Allah's Messenger?’ He said: ‘Faith’ [Al-Bukhari]

About his knowledge, the Prophet said, ‘While sleeping, I drank until I saw springs coming from my fingernails. Then, I gave Umar some to drink.’ They said: ‘How do you interpret it, Allah's Messenger?’ He said: ‘Knowledge.’

Umar was a person of great individual strength and fortitude. He was one of the two 'Umars' which the Prophet [pbuh] asked Allah to bless Islam with before he had become a Muslim.

About his status, the Prophet [pbuh] said: ‘While I was sleeping I saw myself in paradise. Then there was a woman making wudud by the side of a palace. I said: ‘Whose is this palace?’ They said: ‘It is Umar’s.’ I remembered the jealousy of Umar and I turned to leave. Then, Umar cried and said: 'Could I be jealous over you, Messenger of Allah?!' [al-Bukhari]

The fourth image: Abu Bakr appointed Umar as his successor prior to his death in 634. Abu Bakr decided to make Umar, his successor. Umar was still well known for his extraordinary will power, intelligence, political astuteness, impartiality, justice and care for poor and underprivileged people.

Umar was a caring and just leader: during his caliphate, he was going on his usual rounds towards Harrah [a suburb of Madinah] with his servant Aslam, when he saw a distant fire in the desert. He said, ‘There seems to be
a camp. Perhaps, it is a caravan that could not enter the town due to night fall. Let's go and look after them and
arrange for their protection during the night.'

When he reached them, he found a woman and some children. The children were crying. The woman had a pan
of water over the fire. Umar greeted her with salaam and, with her permission, went near her. [The woman didn't
recognize that it was Umar]. Umar asked, 'Why are these children crying?' The Woman said, 'Because they are
hungry.' Umar said, 'What is in the pan?' The Woman replied, 'Only water to soothe the children, so that they
may go to sleep in the belief that food is being prepared for them. Ah! Allah will judge between Umar and me, on
the Day of Judgment, for neglecting me in my distress.'

Umar said [weeping], 'How can Umar know of your distress?' The Woman said, 'When he is our Amir, he must
keep himself informed about us.' ‘Umar returned to the town and straight away went to the Baitul Mal [House
of Charity] to fill a sack with flour, dates, fat, and clothes, and also drew some money. When the sack was ready,
he said to Aslam, 'Now put this sack on my back, Aslam.' Aslam said, 'No please, Amir-ul-Momineen! I shall
carry this sack.'

Aslam most reluctantly placed the bag on Umar's back, who carried it with a swift pace right to the woman's tent.
Aslam followed at his heels. He put a little flour and some dates and fat in the pan and began to stir. He blew
[with his mouth] into the fire to kindle it. Aslam said, 'I saw the smoke passing through his thick beard.'

After some time, the food was ready. He himself served it to the family. When they had eaten until they were full,
he gave them the little that was left for their next meal. The children were very happy after their meal and began
to play about merrily. The woman felt very grateful and remarked, 'May Allah reward you for your kindness! In
fact you deserve to take the place of the Khalifah instead of Umar.'

Umar consoled her and said, 'When you come to see the Khalifah, you will find me there.' He sat for a while at a
place close by and kept on watching the children. He then returned to Madinah. On his way back, he said to
Aslam, 'Do you know why I sat there, Aslam? I had seen them weeping in distress. I enjoyed watching them
laughing and being happy for some time.'

The fifth image: His Justice covered everybody. All citizens, including the Caliph himself, were equal before the
law. A man from the Copts came to Umar ibn al-Khattab in Al-Madinah, and said, “O Commander of the
Faithful! I seek refuge in you from oppression.” Umar replied, “You have sought refuge where it is to be sought.”
The Egyptian said, “I was racing the son of ‘Amr ibn al-’Aas, and defeated him. Then he began to beat me with a
whip saying: I am the Son of Nobles!”

So Umar wrote to ‘Amr commanding him to appear before him with his son. So they appeared before him. Umar
inquired, “Where is the Egyptian? He is to take the whip and beat him!” Then the Egyptian began to beat the son
of ‘Amr with the whip as Umar said to him, “Beat the Son of Nobles!”

Anas said, “So he beat him. I swear by Allah, as he was beating him we pitied his wailing. He did not desist until
we stopped him.” Then Umar said to the Egyptian, “Now beat the whip upon ‘Amr’s bald head!” He replied, “O
Commander of the Faithful! For it was his son who beat me, and I have evened the score with him.” Upon this
Umar said to ‘Amr, “Since when do you enslave the people when their mothers bore them as free men?” He said,
“O Commander of the Faithful! I was unaware of this, and he did not come to me (for justice).”

His justice is explained in his covenant to the Christian of Jerusalem. This is the protection which the servant of
God, 'Umar, the Ruler of the Believers has granted to the people of Eiliya [Jerusalem]. The protection is for their
lives and properties, their churches and crosses, their sick and healthy and for all their coreligionists. Their churches shall not be used for habitation, nor shall they be demolished, nor shall any injury be done to them or to their compounds, or to their crosses, nor shall their properties be injured in any way. There shall be no compulsion for these people in the matter of religion, nor shall any of them suffer any injury on account of religion...

His strength: When migration to Medina started, the same thing happened again. Most of the Muslims left Mecca silently and secretly. But Umar would not do so. He put on his arms. Then he went to the Kaaba and said his prayer. The chiefs of Mecca looked at him in silence. After the prayer, he shouted out to them, 'I am leaving for Medina. If anyone wants to stop me let him meet me across the valley. His mother shall certainly have to weep for him in sorrow.'

Despite this challenge, no Meccan would dare to stop Umar. These things earned for Umar the title of Farooq. Farooq is the one who makes a difference. Umar's acceptance of Islam had made a big difference for Islam and Muslims.

The sixth image: Umar also had the unique distinction of having his views confirmed by the revelation in the Holy Qur’an: He said three things which were confirmed by subsequent revelations:
I concurred with my Lord in three matters: I said to the Prophet: ‘O Messenger of Allah! Why do we not pray behind Ibrahim’s Station?’ Whereupon was revealed the verse: ‘... Take as your place of worship the place where Ibrahim stood [to pray].’ [2:125]; I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah! You should order your wives to cover because both the chaste and the wicked go in to see them,’ whereupon was revealed the verse: ‘... And when you ask of them [the wives of the Prophet] anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain.’ [33:53] Then the Prophet’s wives banded together in their jealousy over him, so I said to them: ‘It may happen that his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him instead wives better than you, [submissive] to Allah), believing, pious, penitent, inclined to fasting, widows and maids.’ [67:5] Whereupon was revealed that verse.

The last image is his death. In 23 A.H., when Umar returned to Medina from Hajj, he went to the mosque to lead a prayer, a Magian named Abu Lulu, who had a grudge against 'Umar on a personal matter, attacked him with a dagger and stabbed him several times. Umar reeled and fell to the ground. When he learned that the assassin was a Magian, he said, ‘Thank God he is not a Muslim.’ ‘Umar died in the first week of Muharram, 24 A.H., and was buried by the side of the Prophet [pbuh].

Dear brothers and sisters: Finally, I ask Allah to guide us all.