**BILAAL IBN RABAAH**
Sneering at Horror!

Whenever Umar lbn Al khattaab mentioned Abu Bakr he would say, "Abu Bakr is our master and the emancipator of our master." That is to say, Bilaal.

Indeed, the man to whom `Umar would give the agnomen "Our Master" must be a great and fortunate man. However, this man - who was very dark in complexion, slender, very tall, thick- haired and with a sparse beard, as described by the narrators - would hardly hear words of praise and commendation directed at him and bestowed bountifully upon him without bending his head, lowering his eyelids and saying with tears flowing down his two cheeks, "Indeed, I am an Abyssinian. Yesterday, I was only a slave!"

So who is this Abyssinian who was yesterday only a slave? He is Bilaal Ibn Rabaah the announcer of the time of Muslim prayer and the troublemaker to the idols. He was one of the miracles of faith and truthfulness, one of Islam's great miracles. For out of every ten Muslims, from the beginning of Islam until today and until Allah wills, we will meet seven, at least, who know Bilaal. That is, there are hundreds of millions of people throughout the centuries and generations who know Bilaal, remember his name, and know his role just as they know the two greatest Caliphs in Islam, Abu Bakr and `Umar! Even if you ask a child who is still in his first years of primary school in Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, or China, in the two Americas, Europe, or Russia, in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, or Sudan, in Tunis, Algeria, or Morocco,in the depth of Africa and in the mountains of Asia, in every place on theearth where Muslims reside, you can ask any Muslim child, "Who is Bilaal,child?" He will answer you, "He was the muezzin of the Messenger (PBUH) andhe was the slave whose master used to torture him with hot burning stones to make him apostatize. But instead he said, "One, One."

Whenever you consider this enduring fame that Islam bestowed upon Bilaal, you should know that before Islam this Bilaal was no more than a slave who tended herds of camels for his master for a handful of dates. Had it not been for Islam, it would have been his fate to remain a slave, wandering among the crowd until death brought an end to his life and caused him to perish

in the profoundest depths of forgetfulness.

However, his faith proved to be true, and the magnificence of the religion which he believed in gave him, during his life time and in history, an elevated place among the great and holy men of Islam. Indeed, many human beings of distinction, prestige, or wealth have not obtained even one-tenth of the immortality which Bilaal the Abyssinian slave gained. Indeed, many historical figures were not conferred even a portion of the fame which has been bestowed upon Bilaal.

Indeed, the black color of his complexion, his modest lineage, and his contemptible position among people as a slave did not deprive him, when he chose to embrace Islam, of occupying the high place which his truthfulness, certainty, purity, and self-sacrifice qualified him for. For him, all this would not have been on the scale of estimation and honor except as an astonishing occurrence when greatness is found where it could not possibly be.

People thought that a slave like Bilaal - who descended from strange roots, who had neither kinfolk nor power, who did not possess any control over his life but was himself a possession of his master who had bought him with his money, who came and went amid the sheep, camels, and other live stock of his master - they thought that such a human creature would neither have power over anything, nor become anything. But he went beyond all expectations and possessed great faith that no one like him could possess! He was the first muezzin of the Messenger and of Islam, a position which was aspired to by all the masters and nobles of the Quraish who embraced Islam and followed the Messenger. Yes, Bilaal lbn Rabaah.

Oh what valor and greatness are expressed by these three words Bilaal Ibn Rabaah!

He was an Abyssinian from the black race. His destiny made him a slave ofsome people of the tribe of Jumah in Makkah, where his mother was one oftheir slave girls. He led the life of a slave whose bleak days were alike and who had no right over his day and no hope for his tomorrow.

The news of Muhammad's (PBUH) call began and reached his ears when people in Makkah began to talk about it and when he began listening to the discussions of his master and his guests, especially Umayah lbn khalaf, one of the elders of the Bani Jumah, of which Bilaal was one of the slaves. How often did he hear Urnayah talking to his friends for some time and to some persons of his tribe. Many times they talked about the Messenger with words that were overflowing with anxiety, rage, and malice!

Bilaal, on the other hand, was receiving between those words of insane furyand rage the attributes of this new religion. He began to feel that they were new qualities for the environment which he lived in.
He was also able to receive during their threatening, thunderous talks their acknowledgement of Muhammad's nobility, truthfulness, and loyalty. Yes indeed, he heard them wondering and amazed at what Muhammad came with. They said to one another, "Muhammad was never a liar, magician, or mad, but we have to describe him this way until we turn away from him those who rush to his religion."

He heard them talking about his honesty and loyalty, about his manliness and nobility, and about his purity and composure of his intelligence. He heard them whispering about the reasons which caused them to challenge and antagonize him: First, their allegiance to the religion of their fathers; Second, their fear over the glory of the Quraish which was bestowed upon them because of their religious status as a center of idol worship and resort in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula; Third, the envy of the tribe of Bani Haashim that anyone from them should claim to be a prophet or messenger.

One day Bilaal Ibn Rabaah recognized the light of Allah and heard His resonance in the depths of his good soul. So he went to the Messenger of Allah and converted to Islam. It did not take long before the news of his embracing Islam was spread. It was a shock to the chiefs of the Bani Jumah,who were very proud and conceited. The devils of the earth sat couched over the breast of Umayah Ibn khalaf, who considered the acceptance of Islam by one of their slaves a blow that overwhelmed them with shame and disgrace.

Their Abyssinian slave converted to Islam and followed Muhammad. Umayah said to himself, "It does not matter. Indeed the sun this day shall not set but with the Islam of this stray slave." However, the sun never did set with the Islam of Bilaal, but it set one day with all the idols of the Quraish and the patrons of paganism among them.

As for Bilaal, he adopted an attitude that would honor not only Islam, even though Islam was more worthy of it, but also all humanity. He resisted the harshest kind of torture like all pious great men. Allah made him an example of the fact that blackness of skin and bondage would not decry the greatness of the soul if it found its faith, adhered to its Creator, and clung to its right.

Bilaal gave a profound lesson to those of his age and every age, for those of his religion and every religion, a lesson which embraced the idea that freedom and supremacy of conscience could not be bartered either for gold or punishment, even if it filled the earth. He was stripped naked and laid on hot coals to make him renounce his religion, but he refused.

The Messenger (PBUH) and Islam made this weak Abyssinian slave a teacher to all humanity in the art of respecting conscience and defending its freedom and supremacy. They used to take him out in the midday heat when the desert turned to a fatal hell. Then they would throw him naked on its scorching rocks and bring a burning hot rock, which took several men to lift from its place, and throw it onto his body and chest. This savage torture was repeated every day until the hearts of some of his executioners took pity on him. Finally,they agreed to set him free on condition that he would speak well of their gods, even with only one word that would allow them to keep their pride so that the Quraish would not say they had been defeated and humiliated by there sistence of their persevering slave.

But even this one word, which he could eject from outside his heart and with it buy his life and soul without losing his faith or abandoning his conviction, Bilaal refused to say. Yes, he refused to say it and began to repeat his lasting chant Instead: "One... One!" His torturers shouted at him, imploring him, "Mention the name of Al-Laat and Al-'Uzzaa." But he answered,"One . . . One" They said to him, "Say as we say." But he answered them with remarkable mockery and caustic irony, "Indeed my tongue is not good at that."

So Bilaal remained in the melting heat and under the weight of the heavy rock, and by sunset they raised him up and put a rope around his neck. Then they ordered their boys to take him around the mountains and streets of Makkah. And Bilaal's tongue did not mention anything other than his holy chant,"One... One."

When the night overtook them, they began bargaining with him, "Tomorrow, speak well of our gods, say, `My lord is Al-Laat and Al `Uzzaa,' and we'll leave you alone. We are tired of torturing you as if we are the tortured ones." But he shook his head and said, "One... One." So, Umayah Ibn khalaf kicked him and exploded with exasperating fury, and shouted, "What bad luck has thrown you upon us, O slave of evil? By Al-Laat and Al-'Uzzaa, I'll make you an example for slaves and masters." But Bilaal answered with the holy greatness and certainty of a believer, "One... One."

And he who was assigned to play the role of a sympathizer returned total king and bargaining. He said "Take it easy, Umayah. By Al-Laat, he will not be tortured again. Indeed Bilaal is one of us, his mother is our slave girl He will not be pleased to talk about and ridicule us because of hisIslam." But Bilaal gazed at their lying cunning faces, and his mouth slackened like the light of dawn. He said with calmness that shook them violently,"One... One."

It was the next day and midday approached. Bilaal was taken to the sun-baked ground. He was patient, brave, firm, and expecting the reward in the Hereafter.

Abu Bakr As-siddiiq went to them while they were torturing him and shouted at them, "Are you killing a man because he says, `Allah is my Lord?"' Then he shouted at Umayah lbn khalaf, "Take more than his price and set him free." It was as if Umayah were drowning and had caught a life boat. It was to his liking and he was very much pleased when he heard Abu Bakr offering the price of his freedom, since they had despaired of subjugating Bilaal. And as they were merchants, they realized that selling him was more profitable to them than his death.

They sold him to Abu-Bakr, and then he emancipated him immediately, and Bilaal took his place among free men. When As- siddilq put his arm round Bilaal, rushing with him to freedom, Umayah said to him, "Take him, for by Al-Laat and Al-' Uzzaa if you had refused to buy him except for one ounce of gold, I would have sold him to you." Abu Bakr realized the bitterness of despair and disappointment hidden in these words. It was appropriate not to answer, but because they violated the dignity of this man who had become his brother and his equal, he answered Umayah saying, "By Allah, if you had refused to sell him except for a hundred ounces, I would have paid it." He departed with his companion to the Messenger of Allah, giving him news of his liberation,and there was a great celebration.

After the Hijrah of the Messenger (PBUH) and the Muslims to Al-Madiinah and their settling there, the Messenger instituted the Adhaan. So who would become the muezzin five times a day? Who would call across distant lands, "Allah is the Greatest" and "There is no god but Allah"?

It was Bilaal, who had shouted thirteen years before while the torture was destroying him, "Allah is One... One." He was chosen by the Messenger that day to be the first muezzin in Islam. With his melodious soul-stirring voice, he filled the hearts with faith and the ears with awe when he called:

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Come to Prayer

Come to Prayer

Come to Success

Come to Success

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

There is no god but Allah

Fighting broke out between the Muslims and the army of the Quraish who came to invade Al- Madiinah. The war raged fiercely and terribly while Bilaal was there attacking and moving about in the first battle. Islam was plunged into the Battle of Badr, whose motto the Messenger (PBUH) ordered to be, "One...One."

In this battle, the Quraish sacrificed their youth and all their noble men to their destruction. Umayah Ibn khalaf, who had been Bilaal's master and who used to torture him with deadly brutality, was about to retreat from fighting. But his friend Uqbah Ibn Abu Mu`iit went to him when he heard the news of his withdrawal, carrying a censer in his right hand. When he arrived he was sitting among his people. He threw the censer between his hands and said to him, "O Abu `Ally, use this. You are one of the women."
But Umayah shouted at him saying, "May Allah make you and what you came with ugly!" And he did not find a way out, so he went out to fight.

What other secrets does destiny conceal and unfold? `Uqbah Ibn Abu Mu'iit had been the greatest supporter of Umayah in the torture of Bilaal and other weak Muslims. And on that day, he himself was the one who urged him to go to the Battle of Badr where he would die, just as it would be the place where Uqbah would die! Umayah had been one of the shirkers from war. Had it not been for what Uqbah did to him, he would not have gone out fighting.

But Allah executes His command. So let Umayah go out, because there was an old account between him and one of the slaves of Allah. It was time to settle it. The Judge never dies. As you owe, you shall be owed to.

Indeed destiny would be very much pleased to mock the tyrants. Uqbah,whose provocations Umayah used to listen to and follow his desire to torture the innocent believers, was the same person who would lead Umayah to his death. By the hand of whom? By the hand of Bilaal himself and Bilaal alone!
The same hands that Umayah used to chain and whose owner he beat and tortured. Those very hands were on that day, in the Battle of Badr, on a rendezvous that destiny had set the best time for, with the torture of the Quraish who had humiliated the believers unjustly and aggressively. That is what really happened.

When the fighting began between the two sides, and the side of the Muslims shouted the motto, "One . . . One," the heart of Umayah was startled, and a warning came to him. The word which his slave used to repeat yesterday under torture and horror became today the motto of a whole religion and of a whole new nation.

"One . . . One" Is it so? With this quickness? And with this rapid growth?

The swords clashed in the battle and the fighting became severe. As the battle neared its end, Umayah lbn Khalaf noticed `Abd Ar Rahman Ibn `Awf, the Companion of the Messenger of Allah. He sought refuge with him and asked to be his captive, hoping to save his life. `Abd Ar-Rahman accepted his supplication and granted him refuge. Then he took him and walked with him amidst the battle to the place where captives were held.

On the way Bilaal noticed him and shouted, "The head of kuft (disbelief), Umayah lbn Khalaf!
May I not be saved if he is saved!" he lifted up his sword to cut off the head which was all the time full of pride and arrogance. But `Abd Ar-Rahman Ibn `Awf shouted at him, "O Bilaal, he is my captive!" A captive while the war was still raging? A captive while his sword was still dripping blood because of what he had been doing just moments before to the bodies of the Muslims? No! In Bilaal's opinion, this was irony and abuse of the mind, and Umayah had scoffed and abused the mind enough. He scoffed until there was no irony remaining for such a day, such a dilemma, and such a fate!

Bilaal realized that he would not be able alone to storm the sanctuary of his brother in faith, `Abd Ar-rahman Ibn `Awf. So he shouted at the top of his voice to the Muslims, "O helpers of Allah! The head of Kufr, Umayah Ibn khalaf! May I not be saved if he is saved!" A band of Muslims approached with swords dripping blood. They surrounded Umayah and his son, who was fighting with the Quraish. `Abd Ar-Rabman Ibn `Awf could not do anything. He could not even protect his armor which the crowd removed. Bilaal gazed long at the body of Umayah, who fell beneath the smashing swords. Then he hastened away from him shouting, "One... One."

I do not think it is our right to examine the virtue of leniency in Bilaal on this occasion. If the meeting between Bilaal and Umayah had taken place in other circumstances, we would have been allowed to ask Bilaal for leniency, and a man like him in faith and piety would not have with held it. But the meeting which took place between them was in a war, where each party came to destroy its enemy.

The swords were blazing, the killed were failing. Then Bilaal saw Umayah, who had not left even a small place on his body free of the traces of his torture. Where and how did he see him? He saw him in the arena of battle and fighting, mowing down with his sword all of the heads of Muslims he could. If he had reached the head of Bilaal then, he would have cut it off. In such circumstances as the two men met, it is not fair to ask Bilaal: Why did you not forgive him gently?

The days went by and Makkah was conquered. The Messenger (PBUH) entered it, thankful and saying, "Allah is the Greatest," at the head of 10,000 Muslims. He headed for the Ka`bah immediately, this holy place which the Quraish had crowded with idols amounting to the number of days of the year.

"The truth has come and falsehood has vanished."

Ever since that day, there has been no Uzzaa, no Laat and no Hubal. Man will not bow to a rock or idol after today. People will worship no one with all his conscience but Allah, Who has no likeness, the One, Most Great,Most High. The Messenger entered the Ka`bah accompanied by Bilaal. He had hardly entered it when he faced a carved idol representing lbraahiim (Abraham)(PBUH) prophesying with sticks.

The Messenger (PBUH) was angry and said, "May Allah kill them. Our ancestor never did prophesy with sticks. lbraahiim was not a Jew or Christian, but he was a true Muslim and was never a polytheist."
Then he ordered Bilaal to ascend to the top of the mosque and call to Prayer, and Bilaal called the Adhaan. How magnificent `was the time, place,and occasion!

Life came to a stand still in Makkah, and thousands of Muslims stood like motionless air, repeating in submissiveness and whispering the words of the Adhaan after Bilaal while the polytheists were in their homes hardly believing what was happening.

Is this Muhammad (PBUH) and his poor followers who were expelled yesterday from their homes?

Is this really he, with 10,000 of his believers? Is this really he whom we chased away, fought and killed his most beloved kin and relations? Is this really he who was speaking to us a few minutes ago while our necks were athis mercy, saying, "Go, you are free!"?

But three nobles of the Quraish were sitting in the open space in front of the Kabah, as if they were touched by the scene of Bilaal treading their idols with his feet and sending above its heaped wreckage his voice with the Adhaan, spreading to all the horizons of Makah, like a passing spring. These three were Abu Sufyaan lbn Harb, who had embraced Islam only hours ago, and`Attaab Ibn Usaid and Alhaarith Ibn Hishaam, who had not yet embraced Islam.

`Attaab, with his eyes on Bilaal crying out the Adhaan, said, "Allah has honored Usaid in that he did not hear this, or else he would have heard what would infuriate him." Al-haarith said, "By Allah, if I were sure that Muhammad (PBUH) is telling the truth, I would follow him." Abu Sufyaan,the old fox, commented on their speech saying, "I am not saying a word,for if I do, these pebbles will inform about me."

When the Prophet left the Ka'bah he saw them, read their faces instantly, and said with his eyes shining with the light of Allah and the joy of victory, "I know what you've said," and he told them what they had said.

Al-Haarith and Attaab shouted, `We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah. By Allah, no one heard us, so we can't say somebody informed you!"

And they welcomed Bilaal with new hearts, which enclosed the echo of the words which they had heard in the Messenger's speech just after he entered Makkah. "O people of the Quraish, Allah has removed from you the arrogance of pre-Islamic paganism, and its boasting about fore fathers. People are descended from Adam, and Adam was from dust."

Bilaal lived with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), witnessing all the battles with him, calling to Prayer and observing the rites of this great religion that took him out of darkness to light and from servitude to freedom. The stature of Islam along with the stature of Muslims was elevated. Every day Bilaal was getting closer to the heart of the Messenger of Allah, who used to describe him as "one of the inhabitants of Paradise."

But Bilaal remained just as he was, noble and humble, always considering himself "the Abyssinian who only yesterday was a slave." One day he was proposing to two girls for himself and his brother, so he said to their father, "I am Bilaal and this is my brother, two slaves from Abyssinia. We were astray and Allah guided us. We were two slaves and Allah emancipated us. If you agree on us marrying your daughters, all praise is to Allah; if you refuse,then Allah is the Greatest."

The Messenger passed away to Allah, well pleased and well pleasing, and Abu Bakr As-siddiiq took the command of the Muslims after him. Bilaal went to the caliph (successor) of the Messenger of Allah and said to him, "O Caliph of the Messenger of Allah, I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)say, "The best deed of a believer is jihaad in the cause of Allah."

Abu Bakr said to him, "So what do you want, Bilaal?" He said,"I want to defend in the cause of Allah until I die." Abu Bakr said, "And who will call the Adhaan for us?" Bilaal said, with his eyes overflowing with tears,"I will not call the Adhaan for anyone after the Messenger of Allah." AbuBakr said, "Stay and call to Prayer for us, Bilaal." Bilaal said, "If you emancipated me to be for you, I will do what you want, but if you emancipated me for Allah, leave me to Whom I was emancipated for." Abu Bakr said, "I emancipated you for Allah, Bilaal."

The narrators differ. Some of them believe that he traveled and remained fighting and defending. Some others narrate that he accepted Abu Bakr's request to stay with him in Madiinah. When Abu Bakr died and Umar succeeded him,Bilaal asked his permission and went to Syria.

Any how, Bilaal vowed the remaining part of his life to fight in the cause of Islam, determined to meet Allah and His Messenger having done the best deed they love.

His melodious, welcoming, awe-inspiring voice did not call the Adhaan any more, because whenever he uttered in his Adhaan, "I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah," memories would stir him, and his voice would vanish under his sadness while the tears cried out the words.

His last Adhaan was during the days Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, when he visited Syria.
The Muslims entreated him to persuade Bilaal to call one Adhaan for them. The Commander of the Faithful called Bilaal when it was time for prayer pleaded with him to make the Adhaan. Bilaal ascended and did so. The Companions of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) who were with the Commanderof the Faithful while Bilaal was calling the Adhaan wept as they never did before, and Umar the most strongly.

Bilaal died in Syria, fighting in the cause of Allah just as he had wanted. Beneath the dust of Damascus, today there lies the body of one of the greatest men of humankind in standing up for the creed of Islam with conviction.

 nawelbenladghem1@gmail.com or badisou10@gmail.com