**ABD` ALLAH IBN `UMAR**  
The Persistent and Repentant to Allah

When he was at the peak of his long life he said, " I swore the oath of allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH). I never broke my oath, nor have I turned to something else to this day. I never swore allegiance to those in civil strife, nor did I awake a sleeping Muslim."  
  
These words are a summary of the life of that virtuous man who lived past the age of 80. His relationship with Islam and the Prophet began when he was only 13 years old, when he accompanied his father to the battle of Badr,hoping to have a place among the Mujaahiduun, but he was sent back by the Prophet due to his young age. Since that day - and even before that when he accompanied his father on his Hijrah to Al-Madiinah - that young boy who possessed premature manly merits began his relation with the Prophet of Islam(PBUH).  
  
From that day till the day he passed away at the age of 85, we will always find him persistent, repentant, never deviating from his path, not even by a hair breadth, never breaking the oath of allegiance which he had sworn,nor breaking a pledge he had made. The merits of `Abd Allah Ibn `Umar, which dazzle people's vision, are abundant. Among these are his knowledge, modesty,the straightness of his conscience and path, his generosity, piety, persistence in worship, and his sincere adherence to the Prophet's model. By means of all these merits and qualities did Ibn `Umar shape his unique personality, his sincere and truthful life.  
  
He learned a lot of good manners from his father, `Umar Ibn Al khattaab, and together with him, they learned from the Prophet (PBUH) all the good manners and all that can be described as noble virtues.  
  
Like his father, his belief in Allah and His Prophet was perfect; therefore, the way he pursued the Prophet's steps was admirable. He was always looking at what the Prophet was doing in every matter and then humbly imitating his deeds to the finest detail. For example, wherever the Prophet prayed, there also would lbn `Umar pray, and on the same spot. If the Prophet invoked Allah while standing, then lbn 'Umar would invoke Allan while standing. If the Prophet invoked Allah while sitting, so also would lbn `Umar invoke Allah while sitting. On the same particular route where the Prophet once dismounted from his camel and prayed two rak'ahs, so would lbn `Umar do the same while traveling to the same place.  
  
Moreover, he remembered that the Prophet's camel turned twice at a certain spot in Makkah before the Prophet dismounted and before his two rak'ahs of prayer. The camel may have done that spontaneously to prepare itself a suitable halting place, but lbn `Umar would reach that spot, turn his camel in a circle, then allow it to kneel down. After that he would pray two rak'ahs in exactly the same manner he had seen the Prophet (PBUH) do. Such exaggerated imitation once provoked the Mother of the Believers `Aa'ishah (may Allahbe pleased with her) to say, "No one followed the Prophet's steps in his coming and going as lbn `Umar did."  
  
He spent his long, blessed life and his firm loyalty adhering to the Prophet's Sunnah to the extent that a time came when the virtuous Muslims were asking Allan, "O Allah, save lbn `Umar as long as I live so that I can follow him. I don't know anyone still adhering to the early traditions except him."  
  
Similar to that strong and firm adherence to each of the Prophet's steps and practice (Sunnah) was lbn `Umar's respect for the Prophetic traditions (Hadith). He never related a hadith unless he remembered it to the letter. His contemporaries said, "None of the Companions of the Prophet was more cautious not to add or subtract something from a hadith than `Abd Allah lbn `Umar."  
  
In the same way he was very cautious when giving a fatwah (legal formal opinion in Islamic law). One day somebody came to ask him a fatwah . When he put forward his question, lbn `Umar answered, "I have no knowledge concerning what you are asking about." The man went his way. He had hardly left the place when Ibn `Umar rubbed his hands happily saying to himself, "Ibn `Umar has been asked about what he doesn't know, so he said, ` I don't know!'" Hewas very much afraid to perform ijtihaad (independent judgment in a legal question) in his fatwah, although he was living according to the instructions of a great religion, a religion which grants a reward to the one who makes a mistake and two rewards to the one who comes out with a correct righteous fatwah. However, lbn `Umar's piety deprived him of the courage to make any fatwahs.  
  
In the same way he refrained from the post of judge. The position of a judge was one of the highest positions of state and society, guaranteeing the one engaged in it wealth, prestige, and glory. But why should the pious Ibn `Umar need money, prestige, and glory? The Caliph `Uthmaan once sent for him and asked him to hold the postion of judge but he apologized. `Uthmaan asked him, "Do you disobey me?" Ibn `Umar answered, "No, but it came to my knowledge that judges are of three kinds one who judges ignorantly: he is in hell; one who judges according to his desire: he is in hell; one who involves himself in making ijtihaad and is unerring in his judgment. That one will turn empty-handed, no sin committed and no reward to be granted. I ask you by Allah to exempt me." `Uthmaan exempted him after he pledged him never to tell anyone about that, for `Uthmaan knew Ibn `Umar's place in people's hearts and he was afraid that if the pious and virtuous knew his refraining from holding the position of judge, they would follow him and do the same, and then the Caliph would not find a pious person to be judge.  
  
It may seem as if Ibn `Umar's stance was a passive one. However, it was not so. Ibn `Umar did not abstain from accepting the post when there was no one more suitable to hold it than himself. In fact a lot of the Prophet's pious and virtuous Companions were actually occupied with fatwah and judgment.  
  
His restraint and abstention would not paralyze the function of jurisdiction, nor would it cause it to be held by unqualified ones, so Ibn `Umar preferred to devote his time to purifying his soul with more worship and more obedience. Furthermore, in that stage of Islamic history, life became more comfortable and luxurious, money more abundant, positions and authoritative ranks more available. The temptation of money and authoritative ranks began to enter the hearts of the pious and faithful , which made some of the Prophet's Companions - Ibn `Umar among them - to lift the banner of resistance to that temptation by means of making themselves models and examples of worship, piety, and abstention, refraining from high ranks in order to defeat their temptation.  
  
Ibn `Umar made himself a "friend of the night", praying at night, crying, and asking forgiveness during its latter hours before daybreak. He had once, during his youth, seen a dream. The Prophet interpreted it in a way which made the night prayer `Abd Allah's utmost hope and a means of his delight and joy.  
  
Let us listen to him, while he narrates the story of his dream: During the Prophetic era, I saw a dream in which I was riding a piece of brocade which let me fly to any place in Paradise I wished. Then I saw two approaching me, intending to take me to hell, but an angel met them saying, "Don't be afraid," so they left me. My sister Hafsah narrated the dream to the Prophet (PBUH), who said, "What an excellent man `Abd Allah is. If he is praying at night, then let him pray more."  
  
From that day until he met with Allah, he never stopped performing his night prayer, neither while staying in one place nor while traveling. He was frequently praying, reciting the Qur'aan, and praising Allah. Like his father,his tears rolled down abundantly whenever he heard a warning verse in theQur'aan.  
  
Ubaid lbn `Umar said: I was once reading to `Abd Allah lbn `Umar this verse: "How will it be for them when We bring from every nation a witness,and bring you to witness over them all? On that day those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will wish the earth to be split open and swallow them, but they will never conceal GOD any of their saying " (4:41-42) Ibn`Umar began to cry till his beard was wet from his tears. One day he was sitting among his brothers reading "Woe to those who give insufficient measure,who when others measure for them they make full measure, but when they measure out, or weigh out for others, they give less than due. Do such not think that they shall be raised up on a Mighty Day? The Day when all mankind shall stand before the Lord of the Worlds" (83:1-6). Then he repeated again and again "The Day when all mankind shall stand before the Lord of the Worlds"while his tears were rolling down like heavy rain falls from the sky until he fell down because of his tremendous sorrow and crying.  
  
His generosity, asceticism and piety all worked together in complete harmony to shape the most magnificent merits of that great man. He gave out abundantly because he was generous. He granted the fine halaal things because he was pious, never caring if his generosity left him poor because he was ascetic.  
  
lbn `Umar (May Allah be pleased with him) was one of those who had high incomes. He was a successful, honest merchant for a greater part of his life, and his income from the treasury (Bait Al-Maal) was abundant. However, he never saved that money for himself, but always spent it copiously on the poor,the needy, and beggars.  
  
Ayub Ibn Waa'il Ar-Rassiby tells us about one of his generous acts: One day lbn `Umar was granted 4,000 dirhams and a piece of velvet. The next day Ayub Ibn Waa'il saw him in the market buying his camel some fodder on credit. lbn Waa'il went to his house asking his close relatives, "Wasn't Abu `Abd Ar-Rahman (i.e. `Abd Allah Ibn `Umar granted 4,000 dirhams and a piece of velvet yesterday?" They said, "Yes." He then told them that he had seen him in the market buying fodder for his camel and could not find money for it. They told him, "He didn't go to sleep before distributing all of it, then he carried the velvet on his back and went out. When he returned it wasn't with him. We asked him about it, and he said, `I gave it to a poor person.  
  
lbn Waa'il went out shaking his head until he entered the market. There he climbed to a higher ground and shouted to the people, "O merchants, what do you do with your life? Here is Ibn `Umar who's been granted 4,000 dirhams, so he distributes them, then the next morning he buys fodder for his camel on credit?!"  
  
The one to whom Muhammad (PBUH) was tutor and `Umar his father must be a great man, deserving all that is great.  
  
Ibn `Umar's generosity, asceticism, and piety, these three qualities demonstrate how sincere his imitation of the Prophetic model was and how sincere his worship.  
  
He imitated the Prophet (PBUH) to the extent that he stood with his camel, where the Prophet had once stood saying, "A camel foot may stand over a camel foot." His respect, good behavior, and admiration towards his father reached also to a far extent. `Umar's personality forced his foes, his relatives, and, above all, his sons to pay him respect. I say, the one who belongs to that Prophet and that kind of father should never be a slave of money. Large amounts of money came to him but soon passed, just crossing his house atthat moment.  
  
His generosity was never a means of arrogance. He always dedicated himself to the poor and needy, rarely eating his meal alone: orphans and poor people were always present. He often blamed some of his sons when they invited the rich, and not the poor ones, to their banquets, there upon saying, "You leave the hungry behind and invite the sated ones." The poor knew his tenderness, felt his kindness and sympathy, so they sat down across his path for him to take them to his house. When he saw them he was like a sweet scented flower surrounded by a drove of bees to suck its nectar.  
  
Money in his hands was a slave, not a master, a means for necessities and not luxury. Money was not his alone. The poor had a right to it, a mutually corresponding right, with no privilege kept to himself. His self-denial helped him to reach such great generosity that he never stored, endeavored, or had a vivid interest toward the worldly life. On the contrary, he never wished to possess more than a gown to cover his body and just enough food to keep him alive.  
  
Once a friend coming from khurasan presented him with a fine, delicate, handsome, embellished and decorated gown, saying to him, "I've brought you this gown from khurasan. I would be pleased to see you take off this rough gown and wear this nice one." lbn `Umar said, "Show it to me then. " He touched it asking, "Is it silk?" His friend said, "No, it's cotton." `Abd Allah looked at it for a while then pushed it away with his right hand saying, "No, I'm afraid to tempt myself. I'm afraid it would turn me into an arrogant, proud man. Allah dislikes the arrogant, proud ones."  
  
On another day, a friend presented him with a container filled with something. Ibn `Umar asked him, "What's that?" He said, "Excellent medicine, whichI brought you from Iraq!" lbn `Umar said, `What does it cure?" He said,"It digests food." Ibn `Umar smiled and said to his friend, "Digests food?I haven't satisfied my appetite for 40 years."  
  
He who has not satisfied his appetite for 40 years has not curbed his appetite due to need or poverty, but rather due to self- denial and piety,and a trial to imitate the Prophet and his father.  
  
He was afraid to hear on the Day of Judgment:"You have wasted all your good deeds for the enjoyment in the life of this world" (46:20). He realized that he was in this life just as a visitor or a passer-by. He described himself saying, "I haven't put a stone upon another (i.e. I haven't built anything) nor planted a palm tree since the Prophet's death."  
  
Maimuun Ibn Muhraan once said, "I entered Ibn `Umar's house and tried to evaluate all that was inside such as the bed, the blanket, the mat andso on. Indeed, everything. I didn't find it worth even 100 dirhams."  
  
That was not due to selfishness; he was very generous. But it was dueto his asceticism, his disdain of luxury, and his adherence to his attitude of sincerity and piety.  
  
Ibn `Umar lived long enough to witness the Umayyid period, when money became abundant, and land and estates spread, and a luxurious life was to be found in most dwellings, let alone most castles.  
  
Despite all that, he stayed like a firm-rooted mountain, persistent and great, not slipping away from his paths and not abandoning his piety and asceticism. If life with its pleasure and prosperity - which he always escaped from - was mentioned, he said, "I've agreed with my companions upon a matter.I'm afraid if I change my stance I won't meet them again." Then he let the others know that he did not turn his back to the worldly life owing to inability, so he lifted his hands to the sky saying, "O Allah, You know that if it weren't for fear of You, we would have emulated our clan in the Quraish in this life."  
  
Indeed, if it were not for his God-fearing self, he would have rivaled people in this life, and he would have been triumphant. He did not have to rival people. Life was striving towards him and chasing him with its tempting pleasure.  
  
Is there any position more tempting than the caliph's? It was offered to Ibn `Umar several times, but he refused. He was threatened with death if he refused, but he continued his refusal and his shunning.  
  
Al Hassan (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: When `Uthmaan Ibn`Affaan was killed it was said to `Abd Allah Ibn `Umar, "You are the people's master and the son of the people's master. Go out so that people swear to you the oath of allegiance." He said, "By Allah, if I could, I would never allow a drop of blood to be shed because of me." They said, You will either go out or we will kill you in your bed." He repeated his first statement.They tried to tempt him by frightening him, but all in vain!  
  
After that, when time passed and civil strife became rampant, Ibn `Umar was always the hope of the people who urged him to accept the caliph's position.They were ready to swear to him the oath of allegiance, but he always and constantly refused.  
  
His refusal may be seen as a reprehensible act. However, he had his logic and argument. After the murder of `Uthmaan (May Allah be pleased with him) the situation got worse and aggravated in a dangerous and alarming way.  
  
Although he was very humble towards the position of the caliph, he was ready to accept its responsibilities and face its dangers, but only on the condition that he be voluntarily and willingly chosen by all Muslims. However, to force one single Muslim to swear the oath of allegiance by sword was what he opposed, and so he refused the post of caliph.  
  
At that time, however, this was impossible. Despite his merits and the public consensus of love and respect for him, the expansion into the different regions, the long distances between them, and the disputes which furiously set fire between the Muslims and divided them into sects fighting each other made it impossible to reach such a consensus set by Ibn `Umar as a condition for his acceptance of the caliphate.  
  
A man once met him and said, "No one is more evil in the whole Muslim community than you!" lbn `Umar said, `Why? By Allah, I've never shed their blood, or divided their community, or sowed dissension." The man replied,"If you had wished it, every single one would have agreed upon you." Ibn`Umar said, "I don't like to see it (the caliphate) being offered to me whileone man says no and another one says yes.  
  
The people still loved him even after events changed and the caliphate went to Mu'aawiyah, then to his son Yaziid, then to Mu'aawiyah II, son of Yaziid, who stepped down renouncing its pleasure after a couple of days in office.  
  
Even on that day, when lbn `Umar was an old man, he was still the people's hope and the hope of the caliphate. Thus Marwaan went to him saying, "Give me your hand to swear to you the oath of allegiance. You're the master of the Arabs, and the son of their master. " Ibn `Umar asked, `What are we going to do with the people of the east?" Marwaan said, "Beat them until they swear the oath." lbn `Umar replied, "I don't like to be 70 years old anda man gets killed because of me."  
  
Marwaan went away singing: I can see civil strife boiling in its pots and the kingdom after Abi Laila (i.e. Mu'aawiyah Ibn Yaziid) will end inthe hands of the victorious.  
  
This refusal to use force and the sword is what made lbn `Umar hold a position of neutrality and isolation during the armed civil strife between the parties of `Ally and Mu'aawiyah, reciting these solemn words:

*To the one who says, !Come to prayer," I will respond.  
  
And to the one who says, "Come to success," I will respond.  
But to the one who says, "Come to kill your Muslim brother"  
to take his money," I will say, "No."*

But while remaining neutral and isolated he never turned to hypocrisy. How often did he confront Mu'aawiyah - while the latter was at the summit of his authority - with challenges which confused and hurt him till he threatened to kill him! and he was the one who said, "if there is only a tiny hair between me and the people it won't be torn."  
  
One day Al-Hajaaj stood preaching and said, "lbn Az-Zubair has distorted the Book of Allah!" Here upon Ibn Umar shouted in his face, "You are lying! You are lying! You are lying!" Al-Hajaaj was at a loss, struck by surprise.  
  
Everything and everyone was terrified even by the mention of his name. He promised lbn `Umar the worst punishment, but Ibn `Umar waved his hand in A'-Hajaaj's face and replied, while people were dazzled, "If you do what you just promised, there is no wonder about it, for you are a foolish imposed ruler."  
  
However, despite his strength and bravery, he remained cautious until his last days, never playing a role in the armed civil strife and refusing to lean towards either of the parties.  
  
Abu Al-'Aaliyah Al Barraa' related: I was once walking behind Ibn `Umar without his realizing it. I heard him saying to himself, "They are holding their swords, raising them high, killing each other, and saying, `O Ibn `Umar, give us a hand!'?"  
  
He was filled with sorrow and pain seeing Muslims blood shed by their own hands. As mentioned at the very beginning, he never awoke a sleeping Muslim. If he could have stopped the fight and saved the blood he would have done that, but the events were too powerful; therefore he kept to his house.  
  
His heart was with `Ally (may Allah be pleased with him), and not only his heart but it seems his firm belief, based on a narration of what he said in his last days: "I never felt sorry about something that I missed except that I didn't fight on the side of `Ally against the unjust party."  
  
However, when he refused to fight with Imam Ally, on whose side truth was, it was not because he sought a safe position, but rather because he refused the whole matter of the dispute and civil strife and refrained from a fight not one in which Muslims fight disbelievers, but one between Muslims who cut each other into pieces.  
  
He clarified this when Naafi' asked him, "O Abu `Abd Rahman, you are the son of `Umar and the Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) and you are who you are. What hinders you from that matter?" He meant fighting on Ally's side.He replied, "What hinders me is that Allah has forbidden us to shed the blood of a Muslim. Allah the Mighty and Powerful said: "and continue fighting them until there is no more persecutions and GOD's Religion prevails "(2:193)and we did that. We fought the disbelievers until Allah's religion prevailed, but now, what is it we are fighting for? I fought when the idols were all over the Sacred House, from the corner to the door, until Allah cleared the land of the Arabs from it (idolatry). Should I now fight those who say,There is no god but Allah?" That was his logic, argument, and conviction.  
  
Thus he did not refrain from fighting, nor abstain from taking part in battle to escape fighting, nor did he passively refuse to determine the outcome of the civil war within the Ummah of the faithful rather he refused to hold a sword in the face of a Muslim brother.  
  
`Abd Allah lbn `Umar lived long and witnessed the days in which life "opened its gates to the Muslims." Money became more abundant, high positions more available, while ambition and desires spread. But his magnificent psychological capacities changed the rules of his time. He changed the era of ambition, money, and civil strife into an era of asceticism, humility, piety, and peace. He turned persistently to Allah and lived according to his worship, firm belief, and humbleness. Nothing whatsoever could affect his virtuous nature shaped and modeled by Islam during his early years.  
  
The nature of life changed within the beginning of the Umayyid period. This change was inevitable. It was a period of expansion in every aspect of life, in the ambition of the state as well as the ambitions of individuals.  
  
In the midst of the excitement of temptation and the agitation of an era lured by the idea of expansion with its pleasure and booty, stood Ibn `Umar with his merits, occupying himself with his excellent spiritual progress. He gained from his great excellent life all that he desired, so that his contemporaries described him by saying, "Ibn Umar died while being like Umar in his merit."  
  
Moreover, dazzled by the glitter of his merits, his contemporaries liked to compare him with his father `Umar saying, "`Umar lived in a time when similar ones could be found, and Ibn `Umar lived in a time when there was no one similar to him." It is an exaggeration which may be forgiveable because Ibn `Umar deserved it. But as for `Umar, no one can be compared to him. It is absolutely out of the question that a similar one is to be found in any period of time.  
  
In the year A.H. 73, the sun sank and the ship of eternity hoisted its sail towards the next life carrying the body of the last representative of the first days of the Revelation in Makkah and Al Madiinah: `Abd Allan Ibn `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab.