

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Testament and Assessment of Umar

The Coarse Food That Umar Ate

It is related that once 'Utbah bin Abifarqad came to see Umar at his house. 'Utbah was an eminent Companion. When he was announced Umar was taking his meals. 'Utbah was asked to come in. Umar wanted 'Utbah to share his food with him. 'Utbah started eating, but the bread was so coarse that he could not swallow it.

Umar watched 'Utbah and then said:

"'Utbah, what is the matter?"

'Utbah sighed and said:

"O Commander of the Faithful why are you imposing such austerities on your self? Why dont you use finer flour for your bread? You can certainly afford it."

Umar said:

"Fie on you 'Utbab, you are seducing me to the devil's way."

'Utbah said:

"So many Muslims eat fine bread. Do you think they are the followers of the devil?"

Umar said:

"'Utbah tell me, can every Muslim afford fine bread ?"

'Utbah said:

"Of course every Muslim cannot afford such bread, but many can."

Umar said:

"When I am the Commander of the Faithful and supposed to watch over the interests of all Muslims, how will I be true to my office when I eat fine bread, while most of the Muslims have to remain content with coarse bread? Verily, I will not eat bread of fine flour unless I am sure that all the Muslims are assured of such bread."

To this 'Utbah had no reply and Umar put him another question:

"'Utbah are you aware of the food of the Holy Prophet?"

'Utbah said that the Holy Prophet ate coarse bread.

Why was that asked Umar.

'Utbah said that he might better answer the question himself.

Umar said:

"The Holy Prophet held the keys of the treasures of the world. He could have enjoyed untold wealth and availed of any pleasure but he purposely refrained to do so. He did not wish to exhaust all such pleasures in this world. He wanted them to be kept in reserve for the next world."

Then Umar elaborated "Look 'Utbah, we are the followers of the Holy Prophet. It is incumbent on us to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet. As the Holy Prophet did not wish to exhaust all the pleasures in this world, so as his followers it should be our endeavour to live a life of austerity and cut down our pleasures in this world, so that we may be loaded with pleasant things in the world to come."

Having spoken these words and shuddering as to what might happen to him on the Day of Judgment, Umar began to weep. That made 'Utbah weep as well.

When 'Utbah left, he was fully resolved that hence forward he would eat coarse food, and avoid luxurious living. And thanks to the example set by Umar, 'Utbah kept his resolve.

It is related that one day Hafsa (the daughter of Umar) and 'Abdullah his son expostulated with Umar, and tried to prevail upon him to eat good food. They argued that if he were to eat good food that would give him the strength to maintain the truth.

Umar said:

"I understand your counsel. My difficulty is that I have left my two companions, the Holy Prophet and Abu Bakr upon a road, and if I depart from their road, I shall not find them at the journey's end. Under the circumstances I am under an obligation not to eat richer or better food than what my two esteemed companions ate."

It is related that once Umar felt the desire to eat fish. Fish was not available in Madina. Yarfa the slave of Umar went to the ponds outside Madina and there purchased some fish. The fish was cooked and presented to Umar at his meals. Turning to Yarfa, Umar said:

"Why this dish of fish?" Yarfa said that as he had expressed the wish to eat fish, he had procured it. Umar said, "Fie on you Yarfa. Do you think I should succumb to sensual desires? Take away this dish. By Allah I will not eat it."

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Source : Alim.org-Umar bin al-Khattab History