

BILAAAL IBN RA'ABAH

The first Muaddhin

(Adapted from a radio programme in which the interviewee was Zainol A. Khan)

Interviewer

Dear listeners,

Assalaamu U Alaikum

Welcome once again to our regular weekly programme. We begin with a hamd, a song in praise of Almighty Allaah.

Over the fourteen centuries since the advent of Islam, Bilaal bin Ra'abah has been remembered not only for the sufferings he endured as a result of his acceptance of Islam, but also as being its first *Muaddhin*. The story of his life has been told and re-told over the centuries and will continue to be related for all times, for he stands as a pillar among those who have devoted themselves to the cause of Islam. With me in the studio this afternoon is Haji Zainol Khan, who will remind us, by way of responses to questions which I will pose to him, of some of the more important aspects of Hazrat Bilaal's life.

Haji Sahib, Assalaam U Alaikum and welcome once again to our programme.

Response

Wa Alaikum us Salaam wa Rahmatullaahi wa Barakaatuhu

Interviewer

Haji Sahib, Could you please begin by giving our listeners some background information on Hazrat Bilaal (may Allaah be pleased with him) ?

Response

Alhamdu lillaahi Rabbil aalameen wassalaatu wa salaamu ala Rasuuluhi Kareem

Hazrat Bilaal (may Allaah be pleased with him) was a Makkan slave in the service of Ummaya bin Khalaf, a prominent member of the Makkan community at the time the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) received the first revelation of the Holy Qur-aan.. Bilaal's father was a Makkan by the name of Ra'abah, while his mother was an Abyssinian slave whose name was Hamama

Bilaal was tall, very dark in complexion, slightly built, had thick hair and wore a slight beard. He was also very trust-worthy as was evidenced by the fact that his master use to send him with the caravans to Syria to transact business on his behalf

In addition he had a beautiful voice. He would entrance the audience with his songs when his master had guests, or when the slaves got together at night, or when the travellers in the caravan camped and gathered around the camp-fire and told tales and sang.

Interviewer

How did Bilaal become a Muslim?

Response

You will recall that Hazrat Abu Bakr As- Siddique (R.A.) was the third person to accept Islam. Shortly after his acceptance of the new faith Hazrat Abu Bakr got up from his bed in the early hours one morning. and walked stealthily through the city lanes until he reached the home of Ummaya bin Khalaf. He went to the slave quarters and sought the mat on which his friend Bilaal was sleeping. He placed one hand over Bilaal's mouth and shook him with the other. Bilaal was of course surprised to see Hazrat Abu Bakr but could not speak because the latter kept his mouth covered.

Hazrat Abu Bakr asked Bilaal softly: Do you remember once when we went to Syria with the caravan you saw me walking towards a monastery and you went with me?

Bilal answered: Yes.

Hazrat Abu Bakr continued: Do you remember that I told the monk in the monastery of a dream I had and asked him the meaning of it?

Again Bilal answered: Yes.

Then Hazrat Abu Bakr asked: Do you remember that the monk told me that if my dream was true a prophet would arise in our land, and that I would become his right hand man, and then his successor?

For the third time Bilal answered in the affirmative.:

Hazrat Abu Bakr continued: Well. The Prophet is now here with us.

Surprised, Bilal then asked: What is his name?

To this Hazrat Abu Bakr replied. Muhammad, son of Abdullah.

Then Bilal asked: What is he teaching?

And Hazrat Abu Bakr replied: He is teaching the Oneness of God and the equality of man.

Upon hearing this Bilal enquired: Have you taken allegiance to him?

And Hazrat Abu .Bakr replied. Yes. I have. Will you?

Bilal said: Yes! I will.

Bilal repeated the words, which is the declaration of faith to become a Muslim, and thus became among the very first persons to accept Islam

Hazrat Abu Bakr then arranged with Bilal to visit the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) the next night after which he slipped quietly out of the slaves' quarters and returned to his own home.

Bilal and Hazrat Abu Bakr visited the Holy Prophet's home the next night where Bilal again took the *Shahada* or affirmation of faith. After that Bilal would slip

out of his quarters regularly in the late night or early hours of the morning and proceed to the Holy Prophet's home, where he would spend some time learning more about the new faith.

Interviewer

Haji Sahib. One of the main reasons Bilaal has been remembered in Islamic history is for his refusal to revert to his pagan beliefs in spite of extreme physical punishment and torture by his master. Could you relate to our audience some details relating thereto?

Response

Yes. Of course. One night, while returning from the Holy Prophet's home, he went to the Ka'aba to see what effect the idols would have on him. He looked at the idols and started to laugh, wondering how he could have worshipped such inanimate objects. After a short while, he addressed some of the smaller idols and waited to see if they would answer him. When they did not, he spoke to the chief idol, Hubal. Still there was no response, as was expected. He then slapped Hubal's face to see Hubal's reaction. Again, there was no response. Disgusted at Hubal's lack of response Bilaal finally spat on Hubal's face and left the precincts of the Kaaba.

Unfortunately for Bilaal, one of his master's friends happened to be passing by at the time and witnessed the incident. He was of course aghast at the way the gods of the Makkans had been treated and reported the matter immediately to Ummaya, Bilaal's master. Ummaya then tried to persuade Bilaal to revert to his pagan beliefs by speaking to him at first then by inflicting physical punishment, But Bilaal refused to be intimidated and would only say "One God" while he was being punished.

The physical punishment inflicted on Bilaal by his master kept increasing in intensity but still Bilaal refused to renounce his new faith. Bilaal's master, out of frustration and in the hope that an extreme punishment would cause Bilaal to recant, had him clothed one morning in a suit of metal armour. He then chained him and laid him in the hot desert sun with a stone on his chest. As the sun kept rising Bilaal kept suffering more and more from the terrible heat. In addition, he was taunted and stoned by some of the polytheists. But all he would say, as he did in the past, was "One God. One God."

Late in the day Hazrat Abu Bakr happened to be passing the place where Bilaal was put to lie down and saw his good friend and fellow Muslim being tortured. Hazrat Abu Bakr then approached Bilaal's master and successfully negotiated his purchase at an exorbitant price. Upon being purchased by Hazrat Abu Bakr, Bilaal told him: "If you have purchased me for yourself, then I will be your slave forever. However, if you have purchased me for the sake of Allaah, then free me."

Hazrat Abu Bakr then gave Bilaal his freedom, as he had bought and freed so many slaves before.

Interviewer

Haji Sahib, Bilaal, I believe, has been most remembered over the centuries as being the first *muaddhin* and for his beautiful rendition of the *aadhaan* (call to prayer) Could you please enlighten us about the origin of the *aadhaan* and the circumstances under which it was first rendered?

Response

You will recall that one of the first acts of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (S. A.W.) when he migrated to Madinah was to construct a masjid so that the Muslims could read the five daily compulsory congregational prayers together. Initially they had no difficulty in gathering in the masjid on time to perform the prayers as their number was small and they lived in close proximity to one another. As the Muslim population increased rapidly and also spread further from the masjid however more and more of them were found arriving either too early or late for the prayers.

Accordingly the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) discussed various methods of announcing the start of the prayer with some of the companions. Many suggestions were made, for example: putting up a flag, lighting a fire, blowing a horn and ringing a bell. All these were rejected however on the grounds that they were the practice of other religions.

When no appropriate decision could be reached on what form the announcement should be made the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) reluctantly agreed to the use of a pair of clappers and ordered that a set be made.

Before the clappers could be used however one of the companions, 'Abdullah bin Zaid, told the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) that he had a dream in which he saw a man in green garments carrying a pair of clappers in his hands. Continuing, 'Abdullah bin

Zaid said he asked the man to sell the clappers to him and the man asked him the purpose for which he wanted them. ‘Abdullah said he told the man the reason and the man advised him that a better way to achieve the purpose was to announce the following:

Allaahu Akbar (meanng:Allaah is the Greatest) four times

Ashadu anlaa illaaha ilallaah (meaning: I bear witness that there is none worthy of being worshipped but Allaah) twice

Ashadu anna Muhammadar Rasuulullaah (meaning: I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allaah) twice

Hayya ‘alas -salaah (meaing: Come to prayer twice)

Hayya ‘alal-falaah (meaning: Come to success twice)

Allaahu Akbar (meaning Allaah is the Greatest) twice)

Laa ilaaha illallaah (meaning: There is no deity but Allaah) twice

After ‘Abdullah finished relating his dream to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.), the latter said it was a true vision.

When the time came for the next prayer the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) instructed ‘Abdullah bin Zaid to tell Bilaal, who was not only a God-fearing person but, as indicated before, had a beautiful voice, to announce that it was time for the prayer by repeating the words he said he had heard in his dreams. Abdullah accordingly went and told Bilaal of the Holy Prophet’s decision.

On receiving the instructions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) Bilaal went to the top of a high house near the masjid (the roofs of buildings in that country are generally flat because there is very little rain) and loudly repeated the words as mentioned previously On hearing the announcement from his home Hazrat ‘Umar (R.A.) went to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) and told him he had had a vision in which a man had informed him of the exact words as recited by Bilaal to call the prayer. Upon hearing this the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) sent praise to Almighty Allaah.

Thus Hazrat Bilaal became the `first *muadhin* in Islam He continued to call the *aadhaan* until the Holy Prophet’s death. When the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) passed away and it was time to call the *adhaan* for the *Fajr* (or morning) prayer Bilaal broke down in tears while he was repeating the Holy Prophet’s name. His love for the Holy Prophet was so great that he could not call his name without breaking into tears. He struggled to control his feelings and was able to complete the *aadhaan* only after regaining his composure to some extent. Immediately thereafter he announced he would discontinue the practise of calling the *aadhaan*.

Bilal lived for ten years after the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) passed away. He only called the *aadhaan* on two occasions after that. The first was at the desecrated site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which had been located after the fall of that city to the Muslim army. The second was when, in response to a yearning to visit the city of his beloved Prophet, and offer salutations at his grave, he visited Madinah. While visiting the Holy Prophet's grave he was implored upon by the Prophet's two grandsons, Hassan and Hussain, to call the *aadhaan*. Bilal had known Hassan and Hussain since they were children and had a great deal of love and respect for them. He thus consented to call the *aadhaan* to satisfy them and did so for the *Fajr salaah* the next morning

On both of these occasions many of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) who heard the *aadhaan* recognised Bilal's voice and burst into tears as memories of the Holy Prophet were brought back,

Interviewer

Haji Sahib. Could you tell us about some of Bilal's activities in the field of Islam?

Response

Hazrat Bilal was a very conscientious Muslim and was closely attached to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) . He was one of the early migrants to Madinah and missed the company of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) so much that every day he would look in the direction of Makkah to see if his beloved Prophet had also migrated and was due to enter the city of his adoption. .

He fought in all the wars in which the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) fought and was with the Muslim army when it conquered Jerusalem after the death of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). He was the first Treasurer of the *Bait-ul-Mal* when it was established in Madinah.

He was one of the three persons who accompanied the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) when the latter entered the Ka'aba after his triumphant entry into Makkah ten years after he had been forced to leave. On that occasion he saw the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) smash the idols in the Ka'aba with a stick and then heard the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) recite the words: "And say: Truth has now arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is by its nature bound to perish." which had just been revealed to him (Ch 17 V 81):

Interviewer

Was Bilaal ever married and, if so, could you give us some brief details?

Response

Yes. Bilaal was married and the circumstances leading thereto are interesting.

After his brother married a Yemenese lady he decided to seek a bride from the tribe of Hind in Yemen. He went to the elders of the tribe and introduced himself, giving his background including the fact that he knew the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). The leaders of the tribe informed him that they would have to seek the Holy Prophet's advice before giving their decision. Bilaal then returned to his home in Madinah.

Some days later representatives of the lady's family arrived in Madinah and went to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). They told the Holy Prophet of Bilaal's desire to marry a lady from their tribe and sought his opinion as to the suitability of Bilaal as a husband. The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) smiled on hearing their request and asked them who were they to ask about Bilaal. He then told them that Bilaal was a man of Paradise. The delegation from the tribe was very happy to hear the Holy Prophet's reply and agreed to the marriage proposal. The marriage took place shortly after.

Bilaal and his wife lived very happily and in fact he died in his wife's arms.

Interviewer

Could you give us the circumstances relating to Bilaal's death?

Response

Yes. Bilaal died in Damascus in the twentieth year of the *Hijrah*. He became seriously ill that year and collapsed in the arms of his wife one day. When this happened she screamed and loudly exclaimed: "*O! How great is my disastrous*

grief.” He opened his eyes for a moment and said “No. How great is my pleasure. I am about to meet my Prophet and his beloved companions.” Then he passed away.

Interviewer

Haji Sahib, we have to end our programme now but before we do so do you have any final comments, please?

Response

Hazrat Bilaal has been assured of a place in paradise in light of the fact that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) said: *“On the Day of Judgment I will be carried on Al-Buraaq (that is, the steed which carried the Prophet (S. A. W.) on the night of the Mir-aaj to Jerusalem), Fatiimah (that is, the Prophet’s daughter) will be carried on my own she- camel - al-Qaswa’, and Bilaal will be carried on a she-camel from Paradise.”*

Notwithstanding this, we offer supplication for him to be among the favoured ones in the Hereafter

The End