

The Slave Zayd Ibin Harithah

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On the day of his marriage, The Holy Prophet Mohammad Al-Mustafa(pbuh&hf) had set free Barakah, the faithful slave he had inherited from his father; and on the same day the Lady Khadeejah(as) made him a gift of one of her own slaves, a youth of fifteen named Zayd.

As to Barakah, they married her to a man of Yathrib to whom she bore a son, after whom she came to be known as Umm Ayman, the mother of Ayman.

As to Zayd, he and some other youths had recently been bought at the great fair of 'Ukaz' by Khadeejah's nephew Hakim, the son of her brother Hizam. So when the next time his aunt visited him Hakim had sent for his newly acquired slaves and invited her to choose one of them for herself. It was Zayd that she had chosen.

Zayd was proud of his ancestry. His father Hirithah was of the great northern tribe of Kalb whose territory lay on the plains between Syria and Iraq. His mother was a woman of the no less illustrious neighbouring tribe of Tayy, one of whose chieftains at that time was the poet knight Hatim, famous throughout Arabia for his chivalry and his fabulous generosity.

Several years had now passed since Zayd had been taken by his mother to visit her family, and the village where they were staying had been raided by some horsemen of the Bani Qayn, who had carried the boy off and sold him into slavery.

Harithah, his father, had searched for him in vain. Nor had Zayd seen any travellers from Kalb who could take a message from him to his parents.

But The Holy Kabah drew many pilgrims from all parts of Arabia, and one day during the holy season, several months after he had become Mohammad's slave, he saw some men and women of his own tribe and clan in the streets of Mecca.

If he had seen them the previous year, his feelings would have been very different. He had yearned for such an encounter. Yet now that it had at last come it placed him in a quandary. He could not deliberately leave his family in ignorance of his whereabouts.

But what message could he send them? Whatever its gist, he knew, as a son of the desert, that nothing less than a poem would be adequate for such an occasion. He composed some verses which expressed something of his mind, but implied more than they expressed. Then he accosted the Kalbite pilgrims and, having told them who he was, he said,

"Speak unto my family these lines, for well I know that they have sorrowed for me:

'Though I myself be far,

yet take my words unto my people.
At the Holy House I dwell,
amidst the places God hath hallowed.
Set then aside the sorrows ye have grieved,
Weary not camels, scouring the earth for me,
For I, praise be to God,
am in the best Of noble families,
great in all its line."

When the pilgrims returned home with their tidings, Harithah at once set off for Mecca with his brother, Ka'ab and going to Mohammad they demanded him to allow them to ransom Zayd, for as high a price as he might ask. But Mohammad said to them, "Let him choose, and if he choose you. He is yours without ransom. And if he choose me, then I am not the man to set any other above him who chooseth me not."

Then he called Zayd and asked him if he knew the two men.
"This is my father, and this is mine uncle."
said the youth, and Mohammad said to Zayd.
"Me thou knowest. Thou hast seen my companionship unto thee, so choose thou between me and them."

But Zayd's choice was already made and he said at once without any hesitation:
"I would not choose any man in preference to thee. Thou art unto me as my father and my mother."

But Kaab, Zayd uncle exclaimed,
"Out upon thee, O Zayd! Wilt thou choose slavery above freedom, and above thy father and thine uncle and thy family?"

Zayd replied,
"It is even so. For I have seen from this man such things that I could never choose another above him."

All further talk was cut short by Mohammad, who now bade them come with him to the Kabah.

He stood in the Hijr, and said in a clear loud voice:

"All ye who are present. Bear witness that Zayd is my son. I am his heir and he is mine."
The father and the uncle had thus to return with their purpose unachieved. But the tale they had to tell their tribe, of the deep mutual love which had brought about this adoption, was not an inglorious one.

For when they saw that Zayd was free, and established in honour, with what promised to be a

high standing amongst the people of The Sanctuary.

It could benefit his brothers and other kinsmen in years to come, they were reconciled and went their way without bitterness. From that day the new Hashimite was known in Mecca as Zayd .Ibin Mohammad