

UWAIS AL-QARNI: A SIMPLE MAN HONORED BY THE PROPHET

Rating: 5.0

Description: A lesson from the life of Uwais al-Qarni.

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During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, a man named Uwais al-Qarni was living in Yemen. He embraced Islam at the hands of some of Prophet Muhammad's companions. However, he is not considered to be a companion (sahabi^[1]); rather, he is considered to be among the next generation, or those who came after, (the tabi'oon^[2]).



The companions of Prophet Muhammad and those who came after him are known as the best generations. They are the Muslims who learned their Islam at the feet of Prophet Muhammad or his companions. In a well-known tradition, Prophet Muhammad said, "The best of my nation is my generation, then those who follow them, and then those who follow them."^[3]

We know a great deal about the companions; we read their biographies, ponder their devotion and religious zeal, and marvel at their exploits, but with a few exceptions we learn very little about the tabi'een. Their stories are often just as enthralling even though some of them, like Uwais al-Qarni, never met, listened to, or saw Prophet Muhammad.

Uwais al-Qarni proves to us that even if someone is not from the companions of Prophet Muhammad, yet he or she can have immense love for God and His Prophet. Uwais earned the praise of Prophet Muhammad and one of the greatest companions, Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Prophet Muhammad once said there are some people from this nation who are disheveled, lack money, and social status, but if they take an oath by God, God will surely honor that oath. There are many fables and unsubstantiated tales linked to Uwais al-Qarni, however, there are also some authenticated stories that boost our faith and make us want to behave more like this simple man of relatively low social status.

Uwais grew up in Yemen, and when he was very young his father died. He therefore had to take care of his mother. He also had leprosy. Uwais with a devoted heart and sincere supplications asked God to cure him. God healed him and left just a coin-sized

piece of disfigured skin on his shoulder. Every time Uwais looked at this small patch, he was reminded of God's favor to him. Uwais continued to look after his mother, and unfortunately, she went blind, becoming even more dependent on her son.

At the time the Muslims came to Yemen, Uwais was taught a very important lesson. One very dark night Uwais and his mother did not have any lights in the house, and it was difficult for them to do their evening chores. Uwais could not see but his mother, being used to the dark, helped her son to get around the house. Soon after, Uwais met the ambassadors from Prophet Muhammad and listened to them reciting the Quran. The verse that touched his heart was from the chapter The Light.

"...And him for whom God has not appointed light, there will be no light." (Quran 24: 40)

Uwais accepted Islam there and then. Uwais and the Prophet never met because Uwais stayed in Yemen taking care of his mother. Despite this, Prophet Muhammad mentioned Uwais to a group of his companions.

Prophet Muhammad told his companions that there is man who will come to you from Yemen. He comes from Murad and the tribe of Qaran. The Prophet went on to tell them about the leprosy and finished the description of Uwais saying, "and he has a mother, he treats her extremely well, and is obedient to her."^[4] He then said, if Uwais al-Qarni takes an oath by God, God will surely honor that oath. If you meet him, ask him to seek forgiveness for you.^[5]

Umar ibn al-Khattab never forgot this advice, and when he became the leader of the Muslims, every year he would go out to meet those coming from Yemen for the pilgrimage. Umar would ask, "Is Uwais al-Qarni among you?" This continued for ten years. Finally, the people from Yemen said yes and pointed him out to Umar.

Umar went straight to Uwais to determine if he was the man Prophet Muhammad described. He asked, "Are you Uwais al-Qarni?"

He said, "Yes."

Umar continued, "From Murad and the tribe of Qaran?"

He said, "Yes."

Umar then asked, "Were you once afflicted with leprosy and your skin healed except for an area on your shoulder the size of a coin?"

Uwais said, "Yes."

Umar finally asked, "Do you have a mother that you respect, honor, and take care of?"

He said, "Yes."

Umar then explained that Prophet Muhammad advised him to ask Uwais to seek forgiveness from God for him (Umar). Uwais was taken aback; he pointed out to Umar that he was a companion of the Prophet and the leader of the Muslims. You should ask God to forgive me, Uwais insisted. However, Umar was not deterred, and Uwais supplicated that God forgive the sins of Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Umar was pleased and wanted to help Uwais in some way. After the pilgrimage, Uwais was traveling to Kufa in Iraq. Umar offered to write an introduction letter to the governor of Iraq, but Uwais refused his offer preferring to remain anonymous among the believers. He was a simple man with simple needs. He did though have a request for Umar. He asked Umar not to tell people about his unique link to Prophet Muhammad in case they might disrupt his pilgrimage.

There are many traditions and stories about Uwais; many have not been authenticated, but all of them highlight his humbleness and simple living. Reading the story of Uwais prompts us to ask ourselves, how did Uwais attain such a high status that even the companions were told to seek forgiveness from him? He was dutiful to his mother. He also suffered from a chronic condition that severely affected his life, but he was patient. In short, his character was one that every believer should strive to emulate.

Afterword:

Islam encourages kindness to parents especially the mother. Prophet Muhammad once advised a man intending to go on a military expedition to stay home instead and look after his mother. "Paradise lies beneath her feet,"^[6] he said, implying that the gates of Paradise are open for those who cherish and respect their mothers.

Footnotes:

[1] Sahabi (plural: Sahabah) is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him, and died as a Muslim.

[2] Tabi'oon (singular: Tabi'i) are the generation that followed the Sahabah. A tabi'i is one who met at least one sahabi.

[3] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*.

[4] See post script.

[5] The information contained herein comes from *Saheeh Muslim*.

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