

The story of Urwah ibn al-Zubayr

Urwah ibn al-Zubayr came to visit the Khalifah al-Walid ibn Abdul-Malik. With him was his son Muhammad, who was one of the most handsome of men. The young man had dressed up for the occasion in fine clothes, and had his hair in two plaits or braids. When al-Walid saw him, he said, "This is how the young people of Quraysh look!" and by so saying, put the evil eye on him. Before he left, the young man fell ill. When he was in the stable (preparing for the journey) he fell down, and the horses trampled him to death.

Then Urwah got gangrene in his leg, and al-Walid sent doctors to him, who suggested that the leg should be amputated, otherwise the gangrene would spread to the rest of the body and kill him. Urwah agreed, and the doctors began to remove his leg, using a saw. When the saw reached the bone, Urwah fainted, and when he came around, sweat was pouring down his face, and he was repeating, "La ilah ill-Allah, Allahu akbar." When the operation was over, he picked up his leg and kissed it, then said, "I swear by the One Who mounted me on you, I never used to walk to any place of wrong action or to any place where Allah would not like me to be." Then he gave instructions that the leg should be washed, perfumed, wrapped in a cloth and buried in the Muslim graveyard.

When Urwah left al-Walid and returned to Madinah, his family and friends went to meet him at the outskirts of the city and to offer condolences. The only reply he made was to quote from the Quran: "...truly we have suffered much fatigue at our journey" (al-Kahf 18:62). He did not say any more than that. Then he said, "I will not enter Madinah, for people there either rejoice over the afflictions of others, or else feel envy for their blessings." So he went to stay in a place at al-Aqiq. Isa ibn Talhah came to visit him there and said, "May your enemies' fathers perish!" and asked him, "Show me the affliction for which I have come to console you." Urwah uncovered his stump, and Isa said, "By Allah, we were not preparing you to wrestle! Allah has saved most of you: your sanity, your tongue, your eyesight, your two hands, and one of your two legs." Urwah told him, "Nobody has consoled me as you have."

When the doctors came to perform the amputation, they had asked Urwah whether he would drink intoxicants to ease the pain. He said, "Allah is testing me to see the extent of my patience. How could I go against His commands?"