

(.The Battle of Uhud (624 A.D

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Ghazwat al-Sawaiq was only a prelude to the big battle that was to follow. The chagrin and fury of Abu Sufyan and his Quraishite supporters at their defeat at Badr knew no bounds. Their whole energy was aroused and they commenced preparations for another attack on the Muslims. Abu Sufyan rallied behind him the coastal tribes of Banu Kinanah and Banu Tihamah. Their united forces numbered three thousand well equipped soldiers, seven hundred of whom were armed with coats of mail and two hundred were mounted on horseback, besides one thousand camels, all under the command of Abu Sufyan. The army's right wing was under the command of Khalid ibn al-Walid and the left under that of 'Ikrimah son of the ill-famed Abu Jahl. Women played their role to provide the men with moral support. They were led by Abu Sufyan's wife Hind who brought with her fifteen Meccan matrons. They took their place in the rear of the army, beating their drums and chanting poetry to animate the troops, magnifying the greatness of Hubal, the most popular deity in Mecca.

On their way to Medina, having reached Abwa', Hind wanted to dig out the grave containing the remains of Amina bint Wahab, Muhammad's mother, who lay there buried for more than fifty years, but Divine Providence interfered, so she could not carry out her wicked scheme. Finally, the army reached Thul Hulaifa, a village about five Arabian miles to the north-east of Medina, in the green corn fields of Mount Uhud, on Wednesday, Shawwal 4, 3 A.H. (March 23, 625 A.D.).

Muhammad was in Quba when he was informed by his uncle 'Abbas, who was still living in Mecca, of Quraish's expedition, so he hurried back to Medina. He consulted his followers whether to wait for the enemy's attack on the city and to defend it from within, or to meet the enemy outside the city. He was inclined to the former plan because he did not want the city's residents to be exposed to the perils of wars. Many of his close companions were of the same view, but the majority urged him to meet the enemy outside the city, and this view was finally adopted.

But when the Prophet was ready to march out, they changed their mind again and spoke about it to the Prophet, but he nevertheless marched out with only a thousand men headed by Ali. This number included the forces raised by 'Abdullah ibn Ubay who brought with him three hundred of his followers, the munafiqun, hypocrites, including a small number of his Jewish allies, but the Prophet refused to enlist the service of the Jews unless they accepted Islam,

which they, of course, did not.

Thus, he and all his 300 men were turned back, reducing the number of Muhammad's army to seven hundred. Only a hundred of them had coats of mail, and between them they had only two horses. Their zeal was, however, so great that when some boys, who were considered too young to participate in the battle, were asked to go back, they departed very reluctantly and two

of them, Rafi' ibn Khadij and Samrah, managed to remain with the army anyway.

The Prophet reached Uhud in the morning of Saturday, Shawwal 7, 3 A.H. (March 26, 625 A.D.) and took up his position below the mountain. The army was arrayed in fighting formations and fifty archers were posted, under the command of 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr, at a pass between the hills surrounding Mount Uhud to guard the army from any rear attack. They had strict orders from the Prophet never to leave their post, whatever the outcome of the battle might be, till they received further instructions.

The standard was in the hands of Mus'ab ibn 'Omayr. Zubayr was in command of the mailed section and Hamzah in command of the rest. On the side of the Meccans, Talhah held the standard and the various regiments were under the charge of Khalid ibn al-Walid (who commanded the cavalry), 'Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl, Safwan ibn Umayyah and his brother 'Abdullah. According to some references consulted for this book, the Meccan pagans enlisted in their army a number of their black slaves to fight with them.

Talhah, the pagans' standard-bearer, challenged the Muslims to individual combat. The challenge was accepted by Ali ibn Abu Talib who soon cut off one of his legs with a single blow then killed him with another. It took only a few seconds. Talhah's dead body lay on the ground. The standard was taken by his brother 'Uthman who was slashed to death by Hamzah. The third standard-bearer was killed by Ali. This continued till nine (or some historians say ten) standard-bearers were killed one after the other.

These historians include Ibn al-Athir, Ibn Hisham, and al-Tabari. Abu 'Amir, a veteran Meccan hero, stepped forward with his fifty archers and showered the Muslims with arrows. The Muslims responded with as thick and as prompt shower of arrows of their own. Thus did the battle begin with the Quraishites advancing in the form of a crescent. Ali, Hamzah and Abu Dajjanah demonstrated heroic valour.

Wahshi, an Abyssinian slave, had been commissioned by Hind, wife of Abu Sufyan, to kill either Muhammad, Ali, or Hamzah (in order to avenge the death of her father, 'Otbah ibn Rabi'ah, her brother, al-Walid, as well as that of Hanzalah son of Abu Sufyan at Badr at their hands). He was lurking behind a rock when he singled Hamzah out and, seeing him engaged in a duel with Saba ibn 'Abd al-'Uzza, a Meccan hero, threw a spear at him which pierced his 'Abdomen,

killing him instantly.

At that juncture, Ali assigned the command of the various regiments of the army to Abu Dajjanah, Mus'ab ibn 'Omayr, and Sahl ibn Hunayf. They collectively launched an attack against the Meccan army, breaking its center. The Meccans now wavered, and Ali and his heroes gained the enemy's camp. The Meccans were seen turning to their heels, leaving their camp to the Muslims who proceeded to overrun it.

The Meccans were now losing heart till one of their women, 'Omra daughter of 'Alqamah, took up the standard herself. The Meccans again rallied behind her but they were crushed by the Muslims. The Meccans, having paid a heavy toll, fell back in disarray and the Muslims started gathering the booty.

Their eagerness for spoil, however, turned the tide of victory which was almost already at hand. Thinking that the battle was over, most of the archers who were guarding the passage in the hill left their posts lured by the spoils even against the orders of their leader 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr. Khalid ibn al-Walid was fleeing when he saw such an opportunity and, gathering a group of men, he killed the few remaining defenders of the pass. Then he launched a furious attack from the rear. The Muslims were taken so much by surprise that they did not know what to do. In the general melee, their ranks became disorganized. The retreating Meccan forces rallied again and launched a fresh onslaught from the front. The Muslims' standard-bearer, Musa'ab ibn 'Omayr was killed. He bore a great facial resemblance to the Prophet. Up went Ibn Suraqah's cry that Muhammad had been killed.

This threw the Muslims into further confusion and utter dismay with some saying that had Muhammad been a true prophet, he would not have been killed, as is recorded in Tarikh al-Khamis. Others were talking of going to Abu Sufyan and apologizing to him, trying to win his amnesty. Even many of their famous personalities lost heart. "Omar ibn al-Khattab threw his sword away saying that there was no use fighting since the Prophet was no more. He fled towards the mountain and, in his own words, he was jumping from one boulder to another like hill goats.

Anas ibn Nazar, uncle of the renown sahabi Anas ibn Malik, saw how "Omar ibn al-Khattab and Talhah ibn 'Obaydullah were sitting leisurely along with others, so he asked them what they were doing. "We have nothing to do," they replied, "since Muhammad has been slain." "But my friends!," said Anas, "Even if Muhammad were killed, certainly Muhammad's Lord lives and never dies; therefore, do not value your lives only because the Prophet is dead. Rather, you should fight for the cause for which he fought." Then he cried out, "O God! I am excused before You and acquitted in Your sight of what they say!" Drawing his sword, he fought valiantly.

It was in reference to this incident of how some people deserted the Prophet and how others fought beside him to the last that the following verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed there and then: And Muhammad is no more than a Prophet; prophets have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heel will by no means harm Allah in the least, and Allah will reward the grateful. And a soul will not die except with the permission of Allah; the term is (already) fixed, and whoever desires the reward of this world, I shall give him of it, and whoever desires the reward of the hereafter, I shall give him of it, and I will reward the grateful.

And how many a prophet has fought (and) with whom were (present) many worshippers of the Lord? So they did not become weak-hearted on account of what befell them in Allah's way, nor did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves, and Allah loves those who are patient. (Qur'an, 3:144-146)

Abu 'Obaydah, Abu Bakr, and 'Uthman fled away, too. The latter returned to Medina three days later.

Many valiant soldiers, renouncing all discretion, entered the thick of the Meccan ranks determined to fight to the end. This went on till Ka'b ibn Malik (or some say Anas ibn Nazar) saw the Prophet and shouted at the top of his voice that the Prophet was still alive. The spirit of the Muslims revived, but the Prophet now became the chief target of the Meccan forces. 'Abdullah ibn Qam advanced towards the Prophet and struck a sword on his head with such force that two links of his helmet penetrated the Prophet's face.

'Otbah ibn Abu Waqqas threw a stone at the Prophet, further injuring his face and dislodging his two upper teeth. The Prophet now had fallen in a pit where Ali ibn Abu Talib found him and protected him against the continuous furious onslaughts of the Meccans. When the Prophet saw this sacrificing spirit of Ali, he asked him as to why he, too, did not flee like the others. Ali replied: "Should I become a kafir after having accepted Islam?" Anas ibn Nazar continued fighting till he was martyred. And when Ali's sword broke down, the Prophet gave him his own sword, Thul-Fiqar. It was then that a voice was heard from above saying, "There is no sword except Thul-Fiqar. There is no brave man except Ali."

At the same time, arch-angel Gabriel told the Prophet that it was the height of loyalty and bravery which Ali was demonstrating to the Prophet. The Prophet said: "Why not? Ali is from me and I am from Ali." Gabriel said: "And I am from you both."

Later, some Muslims like Sa'd, Zubayr, Talhah, Abu Dajjanah and Ziyad, gathered around the Prophet. Faithful companions, including the brave lady Umm 'Ammarah, prevented others from getting too close to the Prophet. With their bodies did they shield him against the rain of

arrows. Standing in such a great peril, the Prophet cried to God: "O God! Forgive my people, for they know not!" There was no rancor, no bitterness, no ill-will in his heart against his mortal enemies even in such a precarious situation. An overwhelming compassion for the people and a burning desire to lead them to the right path actuated all his deeds and sayings. Then some other Muslims arrived where the Prophet was being defended at fearful odds by the small band of his companions. After some furious fighting, they managed to retreat to the security of the heights of Uhud.

Meanwhile, the word had reached Medina that the Prophet was killed. The Prophet's daughter, Fatima al-Zahra, surrounded by a group of Muslim women, hurried to Uhud. To her great relief, Fatima found her father alive but his forehead and face were covered with his blood. Ali

brought water in his shield and Fatima cleansed and dressed the wounds.

The Meccan forces had turned the tables but they were too exhausted to drive their advantage home either by attacking Medina or by driving the Muslims from the heights of the mountain. They satiated their desire for vengeance by committing ghastly brutalities upon the slain and the injured, cutting off their ears and noses and mutilating their bodies. The brave Hamzah was amongst the slain. His heart was torn out by Hind, wife of Abu Sufyan, who also cut off his ears and nose and took out his heart and liver. She tried to chew the liver but Allah made it so hard that she could not do so... She had to throw it out. The horrible scene was so revolting that the Prophet forbade forever the practice of mutilation. With victory almost within their grasp, the Muslims had suffered a heavy blow. They were shaken in body and in spirit. But the Prophet preached to them fortitude and endurance.

In this battle, seventy Muslims were martyred and an equal number wounded. Ali received sixteen serious sword wounds. On the list of martyrs were: Mus'ab ibn 'Omayr, Sa'd ibn al-Rabi', 'Ammarah ibn Ziyad, and Hanzala son of Abu 'Amir, the first archer to defend Muslim

lines. The Meccans lost 30 (or 22) warriors twelve of whom at the hands of Ali.

For those who laid their lives in the way of Allah, the following glad tidings had been revealed: And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are sustained by their Lord. (Qur'an, 3:169)

Having finished his engagements at Uhud in five or six days, the Prophet returned to Medina where he heard the wailing of the women of Banu 'Abd al-Ash-hal for their dead. He expressed his regret that Hamzah the valiant had none to mourn him in the city. Sa'd ibn Mu'ath felt the same, so he went at once to his women and brought them to the Prophet's house so that they would mourn the death of Hamzah, and the Prophet blessed them for it. Their example was followed by all the women of the Ansar. This is recorded by al-Tabari and Ibn Athir.

Battle's Aftermath

While retreating to Mecca, Abu Sufyan had bribed a traveller going towards Medina to inform the Prophet that the Meccans were again assembling a great force to attack Medina. Hearing the news, Ali said: "Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent Protector is He."

The Prophet went out at once, taking with him only those seventy warriors who were wounded in Uhud, to pursue the Meccan forces. He stayed for three days at a place called Hamra'ul-Asad but did not find any trace of the Meccans, so he returned. The Qur'an mentions this episode in the following ayat: Those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger even after the wound had afflicted them, those among them who do good and guard (themselves against evil) shall have a great reward.

Those to whom the people said: Surely men have gathered against you; therefore, fear them, but this only increased their faith, and they said: Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent Protector is He. So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace; no evil touched them, and they followed the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace. (Qur'an, 3:172-174) The defeat at Uhud did, indeed, create serious problems for the Muslims.

It emboldened the nomadic tribes on the one hand to make forays upon Medina and, on the other hand, encouraged the Jews of Medina to foment further trouble. Yet it was not disastrous for the Muslims. While a defeat at Badr, when the Muslims were yet a handful, would have wiped them out and rang the death knell of the Prophetic mission, a defeat here and there after Islam had gained strength only put the Muslims in the testing crucible so that they might emerge more determined and cured of any complacency and vanity to which they might have otherwise fallen prey.

The Meccans were determined to annihilate the Muslims. This objective they could not achieve. Their infantry had suffered such losses that they could not even drive home the advantage they gained in the last stages of the battle. They had thought they were the masters of all western Arabia, but they could do nothing more than hold their own against the Muslims.

It is not surprising, therefore, that they marched back to Mecca frustrated and discouraged. The Meccans realized that on their own they could not crush the Islamic movement. They now started instigating other tribes to make common cause with them. Most of the tribes were already inimical to Islam. They practiced idolatry while Islam forbade it and enjoined worship of one God. Raiding and plundering were the general means of their livelihood while Islam dictated an orderly society, forbidding oppression, exploitation, and foul play. It enjoined its followers to seek honest means of livelihood. The influence of Quraish extended far and wide and all the tribes came into contact with them at the time of the annual pilgrimage. The Jews

were also constantly instigating the tribes against the Muslims.
The victory of the Muslims over Quraish at Badr had overawed nomadic tribes but their defeat
.at Uhud emboldened them to show their hands and a number of skirmishes followed