

General Invitation

Author: Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani

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[Preface]

Three years had passed since the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet. After inviting his nearest kinsfolk, the Prophet resorted to general invitation. During these three years he had guided some persons by special contacts to accept the Islamic faith, but this time he invited the general public openly to the religion of worshipping Allah, the One and the Unique One. One day he took his place on a high rock and said aloud: 'Ya Sabahah'! ¹

The Holy Prophet's call received attention. Some persons belonging to different families of Quraysh ran up to him. Then he turned to those assembled there, and said: "O people! Will you believe me if I tell you that your enemies have taken positions on the other side of this hill (Safa) and intend attacking your lives and property?" All of them said, "We have never heard anything false from you throughout our lives". Then he said: "O people of Quraysh! Save yourselves from fire. I cannot do anything for you in the presence of Allah. I warn you of painful torture!" Then he added: "My position is like that of a watchman, who observes an enemy at a far-off point and immediately runs to his people for their safety and warns them of the impending danger by saying 'Ya Sabahah' in the particular manner".

These sentences indicate the basis of his invitation and religion. Quraysh were more or less aware of his religion, but these sentences created such a fear in their hearts that one of the leaders of infidelity (Abu Lahab) broke the silence of the people and said: "Woe be to you! Did you call us for this thing?" Then the people dispersed.

The Role of Faith and Fortitude

The secret of everyone's success lies in two things: Firstly, faith in one's aim and secondly steadfastness and effort in the path of its attainment. Faith is the inner stimulant which perforce pushes man to his object and invites him day and night to attain his aim, because he firmly believes that his welfare, supremacy, prosperity and good end are associated with it.

And, in view of the interest which man takes in himself, whenever he develops faith and confidence the strength of his faith automatically directs and persuades him to overcome all difficulties and keeps him away from every doubt, notwithstanding the fact that his prosperity may be dependent upon the attainment of a specific target.

For example, a sick man, who knows that his remedy and welfare lies in taking a bitter medicine, takes it easily, and a diver who believes that there are precious gems beneath the tides of the sea throws himself into the mouth of the tides without any apprehension; and returns to surface, after achieving his purpose.

However, if the ailing person or the diver are doubtful about the achievement of their objects or do not at all believe in the usefulness of their job, they either do not take any steps in that direction or, even if they do, they are faced with hardship and anguish. Hence, it is the very strength of belief and faith which solves all difficulties.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the fact that achievement of one's target is associated with difficulties and obstacles. It is, therefore, necessary for us to combat against those hurdles and to make necessary efforts in that behalf, so that all the obstacles may be removed with our full might. It has been said since olden times that wherever there is a flower (a prized object) there is also a thorn (difficulty) with it. The flower should, therefore, be plucked in such a way that the thorn does not prick one's hands or feet.

The Holy Qur'an has mentioned this subject (that the secret of success lies in faith in one's aim and steadfastness in its attainment) in a short sentence and has said:

"As for those who say: 'Our Lord is Allah,' and take the right path....."(Surah al-Fussilat, 41:30).

(Viz. those who have faith in Allah and believe in a particular aim and then display steadfastness and fortitude, will definitely achieve their object and are helped by the angels).

Steadfastness and Fortitude of The Holy Prophet

As a result of the special contacts of the Prophet before the 'general invitation' and his indefatigable efforts thereafter, a selected and faithful team came into existence against the forces of infidelity and idolatry. The Muslims, who had embraced Islam secretly before the 'general invitation', developed complete acquaintance with those who responded to the Prophet's call thereafter and the bells of danger rang in all the assemblies of infidelity and polytheism.

No doubt it was quite easy for the strong and well-equipped Quraysh to crush a newly-born movement, but the reason for their being afraid was that the members of the movement did not belong to only one family but persons belonging to various families had also embraced Islam. Hence it was not easy for Quraysh to take a decisive action.

After mutual consultations the chiefs of Quraysh decided to remove the very foundation of this faith and the founder of the new religion by different means. They proposed to achieve this purpose by approaching him sometimes with allurements and at other times by extending to him various promises and occasionally by using threats and torture. For ten years Quraysh behaved in this manner and eventually they decided to kill the Holy Prophet. In order to save him, therefore, Allah ordered him to quit Makkah.

During the aforesaid period the chief of the family of Bani Hashim was Abu Talib. He was a man who possessed a noble nature and a magnanimous spirit, and his house was an asylum for the needy and the orphans. Besides being the chief of Makkah and possessing some offices with regard to the Holy Ka'bah he enjoyed a very high position in the Arab society and as he had been the guardian of the Prophet after the demise of Abdul Muttalib, the other chiefs of Quraysh approached him in the form of a group ² and addressed him thus: "O Abu Talib!

Your nephew abuses our gods, speaks ill of our religion, laughs at our thoughts and beliefs and considers our forefathers misguided. Ask him to keep aloof from us or surrender him to us and refrain from supporting him".³

The elder of Quraysh and the head of the family of Bani Hashim replied to them in a tactful manner and in a soft tone, and consequently they abandoned their activities. However, Islam was penetrating and expanding day after day and the spiritual rapture of the religion of the Prophet and the attractive and eloquent words of the Heavenly Book (the Qur'an) were lending support to it.

The Prophet especially presented his religion before the people in the months in which fighting was prohibited, when a large number of pilgrims gathered in Makkah. His eloquent and sweet speeches and his attractive beliefs impressed many persons. In the meantime the Pharoah of Makkah also realized that the Holy Prophet had gained popularity amongst all the tribes and had acquired many followers amongst the settled and unsettled Arab tribes.

They, therefore, decided to approach the Prophet's only supporter (Abu Talib) once again and to make known to him the dangers to which the

liberty of the Makkans and of their religion had become subjected owing to the propagation and expansion of Islam. Hence, they once again approached him jointly, and referring to their former demands spoke to him thus:

"O Abu Talib! You are superior to us in the matter of nobility and age. However, we met you earlier and requested you to restrain your nephew from propagating the new religion, but you did not pay any heed to our words. The position had now become unbearable for us. We cannot tolerate any longer that a person should abuse our gods and should consider us to be foolish and ignorant. It is necessary for you to restrain him from all these activities, failing which we will fight against him as well as against you, who are his supporter, so that the duty of each group should become specific and one of them should be wiped out".

Abu Talib, the distinguished supporter and defender of the Prophet realized through his sagacity and perfect wisdom that it was appropriate to show forbearance to the people whose entire dignity of existence was now open to danger. He, therefore, adopted a peaceful attitude and promised that he would convey the sentiments of the chiefs to his nephew. No doubt this reply was given primarily with the object of quenching the fire of their wrath so that an appropriate way of solving the difficulty could be adopted later. Hence, after the departure of the chiefs he contacted his nephew and conveyed their message to him and incidentally, in order to test his faith in his own object, demanded a reply from him.

However, while replying, the Holy Prophet uttered a sentence which is considered to be one of the outstanding and golden lines of history. Here is the text of his reply: "Dear uncle, I swear by Allah that even if they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand (i.e. even if they provide me with rule over the entire world) I shall not desist from propagating my religion and pursuing my object, and shall continue my efforts until I overcome the difficulties and achieve my final goal or lay down my life for its sake".

Thereafter the Prophet's eyes were filled with tears on account of his love and enthusiasm for his object and he stood up and departed from his uncle's presence. His penetrating and attractive speech made such a wonderful impression on the chief of Makkah that, notwithstanding all the dangers to which he was exposed, he called back his nephew and said to him: "By Allah! I will not give up my support to you and you may very well pursue your object to its end".⁴

Quraysh Approached Abu Talib for The Third Time

The ever-increasing expansion of Islam disturbed Quraysh very much and they were keen to find out a solution to this problem. They assembled once again and were of the view that Abu Talib's support to Muhammad was possibly due to the fact that he had adopted him as his son and if that were so it was possible that they might take the most handsome young man to him and ask him to adopt him as his son.

They, therefore, took with them 'Ammarah bin Walid bin Mughayrah, who was the most handsome of the Makkan young men, and approaching Abu Talib for the third time began complaining and threatening in these words: "O Abu Talib! Walid's son is a young man, who is a poet and is also handsome and intelligent. We are prepared to hand him over to you so that you may adopt him as your son and cease supporting your nephew".

On hearing this Abu Talib was cut to the quick and shouted upon them with a burning face and said: "You are doing a great injustice to me. You wish that I should nurture your son and surrender my dearest child to you so that you may kill him. I swear by Allah that it will not be so".

Mut'am son of Adi then stood up and said: "The offer made by Quraysh is quite fair, but you are not going to accept it". Abu Talib replied: "You have not been just and I am sure that you want to humiliate me and to instigate Quraysh to fight against me. However, you are free to do what you can".

Quraysh Try to Allure The Holy Prophet

Quraysh became sure that it was not at all possible to make Abu Talib agree to their suggestion and, although he did not declare openly to be a follower of Islam, he had a great faith in his nephew and dearly loved him. They, therefore, decided to refrain from entering into any discussion with him.

They, however, thought of another plan and it was that they should allure Muhammad by offering him status, wealth, gifts and beautiful women so that he might abandon his call. They, therefore, went to the house of Abu Talib in the form of a group at a time when his nephew was also sitting with him.

The spokesman of the group opening the talk said: "O Abu Talib! Muhammad has scattered our united ranks and has created dissension amongst us. He has laughed our intellect down and has ridiculed us and our idols. If he has been prompted to do so on account of his poverty and indigence we are prepared to place enormous wealth at his disposal. If he wants status we are ready to accept him as our ruler and will listen to him. And in case he is invalid and needs medical treatment we will bring an expert physician to attend upon him....."

Abu Talib turned his face to the Prophet and said: "The elders of your tribe have come and request that you should refrain from criticizing the idols so that they, too, may leave you alone". The Holy Prophet replied to his uncle thus: "I don't desire anything from them. As against these four offers they should accept one word from me so that, under its auspices they may rule the Arabs and make non-Arabs their camp followers".

At this stage Abu Jahl stood up and said: "We are prepared to hear you ten times". The Prophet replied: "My only word is that you should admit Oneness of the Lord". The unexpected words of the Holy Prophet were like cold water thrown on a hot kettle. They were so much engulfed in amazement coupled with disappointment and despair that they said involuntarily all at once: "Should we forsake 360 gods and worship only one Allah?"

Quraysh left the house while their faces and eyes were burning with anger and they were thinking about the means for achieving their object. In the following verses of the Holy Qur'an this very incident has been related: ⁵

It seems strange to the pagans that a man from their own people should come to them as a Prophet. The unbelievers have said, "he is only a lying magician ". They say, "Has he condemned all other gods but One? This is certainly strange". A group of the pagans walked out of a meeting with the Prophet and told others, "Let us walk away. Be steadfast in the worship of your gods. This man wants to dominate you. We have heard nothing like this in the latest religion. This is only his own false invention. (*Surah Sa'd, 38:4-7*)

An Example of The Tortures and Persecutions by Quraysh

One of the most tragic periods of the life of the Holy Prophet began on the day on which he broke the seal of silence and the elders of Quraysh lost all hope of his accepting their offers in view of his well-known words: "By Allah! Even if you place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand so that I may abandon my call, I will not rest until Allah makes my religion prevail or I lay down my life for its sake".

Till that time Quraysh had, during all their encounters with him, preserved his respect, but when they saw that all their conciliation offers had failed they were compelled to change the course of their thinking and to forestall the expansion of Islam at all costs and to utilize all means for this purpose. Hence the council of Quraysh decided unanimously to practice ridicule, torture and intimidation to restrain the Prophet from pursuing his object.

It is evident that a reformer who is anxious to guide the people of the whole world must observe patience and fortitude in the face of inconveniences, intimidations, dastardly attacks and corporal and mental blows, so that by and by he should be able to overcome difficulties, and this has been the policy of other reformers as well. We give below an account of some of the persecutions and tortures of Quraysh so that the extent of the Holy Prophet's patience and fortitude may become manifest.

Besides the mental and spiritual factor (faith, steadfastness and fortitude) which helped him internally the Prophet also possessed an external factor which ensured safety and support for him, and that was the support of Bani Hashim with Abu Talib at their head, because when Abu Talib came to know that Quraysh had taken a final and irrevocable decision to persecute his nephew, he called all the members of Bani Hashim and asked them to protect Muhammad.

Some of them undertook to support and protect him on account of their faith and others agreed to do so in view of the bond of kinship. Out of them only three (namely Abu Lahab and two others whose names will be mentioned later along with other enemies of the Prophet refrained from endorsing his decision.

However, in spite of this, these defensive measures could not protect him from some unpleasant incidents and as and when the enemies found him alone they did not desist from doing him all sorts of harm. Here is an example of the tortures inflicted by Quraysh:

1. One day Abu Jahl saw the Prophet in Safa and abused and grieved him. The Prophet did not speak to him at all and went away to his house. Abu Jahl also went to join Quraysh who had assembled by the side of the Ka'bah. Hamzah, who was the uncle and foster-brother of the Prophet, also returned on that day from hunting and was carrying his bow on his shoulder.

It was customary with him that after returning to Makkah and before seeing his children and relatives, he went to the Ka'bah and performed 'tawaf' (circumambulation) and then went over to the different groups of Quraysh who gathered round the Ka'bah and exchanged greetings with them.

On that day, after performing these ceremonies, he went to his house. By chance a slave-girl of Abdullah Jad'an, who had witnessed the aforesaid incident, came forward and said "O Abu 'Ammarah, (the patronymic of Hamzah) I wish that you had been here a few minutes earlier and had seen the incident which I have seen! Then you would have learnt how Abu Jahl has abused and persecuted your nephew".

The words of the slave-girl made a strange impression on Hamzah and he decided to avenge his nephew's insult upon Abu Jahl before doing anything else. He, therefore, returned and saw Abu Jahl sitting amongst a group of Quraysh.

Without speaking to anyone he raised his hunting bow and struck it on the head of Abu Jahl and his skull was injured. Then he said to him: "You abuse him (the Prophet) and I have embraced his religion and am treading the same path which he treads. If you possess any strength, come on and fight with me".

A group of persons belonging to the family of Makhzum then stood up to support Abu Jahl. However, as he was a clever and diplomatic person, he avoided every sort of quarrel and defence and said "I misbehaved with Muhammad, and Hamzah is entitled to feel uneasy about it".⁶

This admitted historical fact shows that Hamzah, who later became one of the greatest commanders of Islam was a highly influential and brave personality. He did all he could to protect and defend the Holy Prophet and strengthen the group of Muslims.

As Ibn Athir says,⁷ Quraysh considered the Islam of Hamzah to be one of the greatest factors for the advancement and strength of the Muslims and they, therefore, resorted to other plans which will be mentioned later.

Some Sunni historians like Ibn Kathir Shami insist that:

"The effect of the Islam of Abu Bakr and Umar was no lesser than the effect of the Islam of Hamzah, and the Islam of these two great caliphs became the means of the glory, strength and freedom of the Muslims".⁸

Of course, there is no doubt about the fact that every person contributed to the strength and expansion of Islam, but, in spite of this, it can never be said that the effect of the Islam of these two caliphs was at par with the effect of the Islam of Hamzah. The reason for this conclusion is that Hamzah was the man who, on hearing that an elder of Quraysh had abused the Holy Prophet, went in quest of the culprit without informing anybody of his intention and took a very hard revenge on him.

And none had the courage to oppose him or to fight with him. On the other hand Ibn Hisham, the great biographer of Islam, narrates an incident with regard to Abu Bakr which shows that when he joined the circle of the Muslims he did not possess the requisite strength to defend either himself or the Holy Prophet.⁹

The details of the incident are given below:

One day the Prophet was passing by a group of Quraysh. Suddenly those people encircled him and everyone of them began repeating, by way of ridicule, his words about the idols and the Day of Judgement and said: "Do

you say this?" The Prophet replied to them: "Yes. I am the person who says this".

As Quraysh saw that there was none to defend the Holy Prophet they decided to kill him. A man, therefore, came forward and held the ends of his dress. Abu Bakr happened to be there by the side of the Prophet.

With tears in his eyes he stood up to support the Prophet and said: "Is it proper that you should kill a man who believes in monotheism?" Later (for some reasons) those people desisted from maltreating the Prophet and he went his own way, whereas Abu Bakr proceeded to his own house with an injured head.

Although this incident may be an evidence of the Caliph's sentiments for and interest in the Prophet it is, first of all, a firm evidence of his weakness and fear. It shows that at that time he did not possess either strength or an appreciable social status. And as a practical step by Quraysh against the Prophet might have entailed evil consequences, they left him alone and directed the severity of their action towards his companion and broke his head.

If you place the incident of Hamzah which clearly shows his valour and bravery side by side with this episode you can very well decide as to whose Islam had a greater effect in the early days of Islam on the honour, strength and fear of the unbelievers.

You will soon read about the Islam of Umar. His Islam also, like that of his old friend, did not strengthen the defensive power of the Muslims. But for 'As bin Wai'l it was possible that the blood of the Caliph might have been shed on the day he embraced Islam, because he ('As bin Wai'l) came and addressed the group, who wanted to kill Umar, in these words: "What do you want from a man who has adopted a faith for himself? Do you think that the family of Adi will surrender him easily?"

This sentence shows that it was the fear of his family which made others spare him and defence by the families of those who belonged to them was something natural and usual and there was no difference in this regard between the low and the high.

Yes! The base of defence of the Muslims was the house of Bani Hashim and the heavy burden of the task lay on the shoulders of Abu Talib and his family, for, as regards other persons who joined the Muslims they did not possess the requisite strength even to defend themselves, and the question of their Islam becoming the source of the dignity and exaltation of the Muslims did not, therefore, arise.

Abu Jahl Lies in Ambush for The Holy Prophet

The ever-increasing advancement of Islam had made Quraysh very much uneasy. Every day a report regarding the inclination (to Islam) of one member or another of their tribe reached them. On this account, therefore, their anger was flaming out. One day the Pharaoh of Makkah, Abu Jahl, said in the assembly of Quraysh: "O people of Quraysh! You can see how Muhammad considers our religion to be worthless and abuses the faith of our forefathers and their gods, and declares us to be ignorant. By God I will lie in ambush for him tomorrow and will place a stone by my side; and when Muhammad goes into sajdah (prostration) I will strike that stone on his head. On the following day the Holy Prophet arrived in Masjidul Haram to offer his prayers and stood between 'Rukn-i Yamani' and the 'Black Stone'.

A group of Quraysh who were aware of the intention of Abu Jahl were wondering whether or not he would succeed in his campaign. The Holy Prophet went into sajdah and his old enemy came out of the ambush and approached him.

However, it was not long before he was struck with awe and he returned to Quraysh, trembling, and aghast, with a countenance distracted. All of them ran forward and said "O Aba Hakam! what has happened?" He said with a very weak voice which betrayed his fear and disturbance of mind "There appeared before my eyes a scene which I had never seen before in my life. It was for this reason that I abandoned my plan".

It goes without saying that an unseen force had arisen by the command of Allah and had created a spectacle which protected the Prophet of Islam from harm by the enemies in accordance with the Divine promise: "We shall protect you from the mischief of those who mock".

Numerous instances of torture by Quraysh are recorded in the pages of history. Ibn Athir has allocated a chapter to this subject and has mentioned the names of the foremost enemies of the Prophet in Makkah and the atrocities perpetrated by them.¹⁰ Whatever has been said above is only a specimen. The Prophet found himself faced every day by a new persecution. For example, one day 'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'it saw the Prophet performing 'Tawaf' and abused him. He twisted his turban round his neck and dragged him out of the Masjid. Some persons freed the Prophet from his hands on account of fear of Bani Hashim.¹¹

The torture and persecution to which the Holy Prophet was subjected by his uncle, Abu Lahab and his wife, Umme Jamil was unprecedented. He happened to be a next-door neighbour of theirs. They did not refrain from throwing any sort of dirt on him, and one day they threw the entrails of a sheep on his head. Eventually Hamzah, with a view to take revenge, thrust the same on the head of Abu Lahab.

Persecution of Muslims by Quraysh

In the early days of the prophetic mission the advancement of Islam was the result of a number of factors, one of which, was the steadfastness of the Prophet and his companions and supporters. Examples of the patience and fortitude of the leader of the Muslims have already been stated, whereas the forbearance and perseverance of the Muslims who lived in Makkah (the centre of polytheism and idolatry) deserves attention.

An account of their sacrifices and steadfastness will be given in the chapters relating to events after Hijrah (migration to Madina). For the present we mention the tragic events connected with the lives of some old devotees of the Prophet who lived in the shelterless environments of Makkah.

Bilal, The Ethiopian

The parents of Bilal were amongst those persons who had been brought from Ethiopia to Arabia as captives. He himself (who later became the mu'azzin of the Prophet) was the slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf. Umayyah was one of the sworn enemies of the great leader of the Muslims. As the kinsmen of the Prophet had undertaken his own defence, Umayyah, with a view to take revenge, used to torture openly his slave who had been newly converted to Islam. He made him lie naked on hot sand during the hottest days, placed a big red-hot stone on his chest and addressed him in these words: "I will not release you until you die in this condition or abjure the faith of Muhammad, and worship 'Lat' and 'Uzza'.

In spite of all this torture, however, Bilal replied him with only two words which are a clear proof of his firm faith. He said, 'Ahad! Ahad!' (viz. Allah is One and I will never revert to the religion of polytheism and idolatry). Others wondered at the steadfastness of this black slave who was a captive in the hands of a hard-hearted person. So much so that Waraqah bin Nawfal, the Christian Arab scholar, wept on the condition of Bilal and said to Umayyah: "By Allah! If you kill him in this manner I will make his grave a sacred place to be visited by pilgrims ".¹²

At times Ummayah acted with still greater severity. He put a rope round the neck of Bilal and handed it over to the children so that they might drag him in the streets.¹³

Ummayah and his son were captured in the Battle of Badr, the first battle of Islam. Some Muslims were not in favour of killing Umayyah, but Bilal said: "He is the leader of infidelity and must be killed". On his insistence the father and the son were recompensed for their crimes and were put to death.

Self-Sacrifice of Ammar and His Parents

Ammar and his parents were amongst the early Muslims. They embraced Islam when the Prophet had selected the house of Arqam bin Abil Arqam as the rendezvous for the propagation of Islam. When the idolaters became aware of their having adopted the Divine religion they did not neglect torturing and persecuting them.

Ibn Athir¹⁴ says: "The idolaters compelled these three persons to quit their house in the hottest season and to spend their time in the heat and the scorching wind of the desert. This torture was repeated so many times that

Yasir succumbed to his troubles. One day his widow Sumayyah quarrelled with Abu Jahl on this account. That hard-hearted and cruel person thrust a spear in her heart and killed her also. The Holy Prophet was very much moved on account of the persecution to which they were subjected. One day he saw them being tortured. He turned his face to them with tears in his eyes and said "O family of Yasir! Be patient, for your place is in Paradise".

After the death of Yasir and his wife the idolaters tormented and tortured Ammar as well, as they had tormented Bilal. To save his life he had no alternative left but to abjure Islam, but he repented soon and ran to the Prophet with a palpitating heart.

He related the incident to the Prophet, who enquired of him: "Has any instability taken place in your inner faith?" He replied: "My heart is abounding with faith". The Prophet then said: "Do not entertain the least fear in your mind and keep your faith hidden to save yourself from their mischief".

The following verse was revealed with regard to the faith of Ammar: ¹⁵

(There shall be a grievous punishment for him) who disbelieves in Allah after believing in Him, other than him who is compelled while his heart is firm in his faith. (Surah Nahl, 16:106)

It is said that Abu Jahl decided to take to task the family of Yasir who belonged to the class of the most unprotected persons in Makkah. He, therefore, ordered that fire and scourage might be made ready. Yasir, Sumayyah and Ammar were then dragged to the appointed place and tormented with the point of the sword and with the flames of fire and whipping. This persecution was repeated so many times that Yasir and Sumayyah consequently breathed their last, but they did not forsake the praise of the Prophet till their last moments.

The men of Quraysh who had witnessed this calamitous and tragic scene, notwithstanding the fact that they had unity of interest in defeating Islam, got the wounded and grief stricken Ammar released from the clutches of Abu Jahl so that he might bury his parents.

Abdullah Bin Mas'ud

The Muslims who had embraced Islam secretly were telling among themselves that Quraysh had not heard the Holy Qur'an and it would be quite appropriate if one of them went into Masjid ul-Haram and recited some verses of the Holy Book with a loud voice. Abdullah, son of Mas'ud expressed his willingness to do so. He came into the Masjid when Quraysh had assembled by the side of the Holy Ka'bah and recited the following verses with a loud and melodious voice:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. It is the Merciful who has taught the Qur'an. (Surah al-Rahman, 55:1-2)

The eloquent verses of this surah struck Quraysh with a strange awe. And in order to forestall the effect of the heavenly call which was reaching their ears through a defenceless person they all stood up and beat him so much that blood began to flow from his entire body and he returned to the companions of the Holy Prophet in a pitiable condition. They were, however happy that the invigorating voice had eventually reached the ears of the enemies. ¹⁶

Whatever has been said above was by way of example, for otherwise the number of self-sacrificing devotees of Islam who endured the gravest hardships during the early days of the Prophet's mission, and showed steadfastness in the path of achievement of their aim, is much larger. However, we refrain from mentioning their names and the events of their lives for the sake of brevity.

Ruthless Enemies of The Holy Prophet

Recognition of some enemies of the Prophet is necessary in connection with some Islamic events which took place after migration, and we give below briefly the names and particulars of some of them:

Abu Lahab: He was the neighbour of the Prophet. He did not miss any opportunity of contradicting and torturing him and the Muslims.

Aswad bin Abd Yaghus: He was a clown. As and when he saw the helpless and indigent Muslims he ridiculed them and said: "These poverty-stricken people consider themselves to be the kings of the world and think that they will soon possess the throne and the crown of the Emperor of Iran". However, death did not allow him to see with his own eyes as to how the Muslims had acquired the lands, thrones and crowns of Kaiser and Kisra.

Walid bin Mughayrah: He was an old man of Quraysh who possessed enormous wealth. We shall record his conversation with the Holy Prophet in the following chapter.

Umayyah and Abi sons of Khalaf: One day Abi brought the decayed and worn out bones of some dead persons to the Holy Prophet and asked: "Can your Allah restore these bones to life?" Right came the reply from the source of revelation:

"Say, the Lord who created them first will bring them to life again". These two brothers were killed in the Battle of Badr.

Abul Hakam bin Hisham: The Muslims used to call him Abu Jahl (father of ignorance) on account of his unwarranted enmity and fanaticism against Islam. He, too, was killed in the Battle of Badr.

'As bin Wai'l: He was the father of Amr 'As. He was the person who had given the nickname of 'Abtar' (issueless) to the Holy Prophet.

'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'it:¹⁷ He was one of the most fierce enemies of Islam and never missed an opportunity to do harm to the Holy Prophet and the Muslims.

There was also another group of the enemies of Islam including Abu Sufyan and others. The historians have recorded the particulars in detail and for the sake of brevity we refrain from reproducing them here.

Umar Ibn Khattab Embraces Islam

The acceptance of Islam by everyone of the early Muslims was the effect of one cause or another and at times a very small incident became the means of the conversion of an individual or a group. The stimulant for the adoption of Islam by the second caliph is interesting.

Although from the point of view of the chronological order of the events it would have been appropriate to record this incident after describing the migration of Muslims to Ethiopia, but we have considered it expedient to describe it here, as we have here mentioned some of the companions of the Holy Prophet.

Ibn Hisham ¹⁸ says, "Out of the family of Khattab (father of Umar) only his daughter Fatimah and her husband Sa'id bin Zayd had embraced Islam. As in the early days of Islam Umar's relations with the Muslims were very inimical and he was considered to be one of the most obstinate enemies of

the Prophet, therefore, his sister and her husband always kept their faith concealed from him. In spite of this Khubab bin Art used to come to their house at appointed hours and taught them the Holy Qur'an.

The confused condition of the people of Makkah had made Umar very sentimental, for he saw that dissension and disorder prevailed amongst them and the bright day of Quraysh had been changed into a dark evening.

Umar, therefore, decided to go and cut off the root of dissension by killing the Holy Prophet. To achieve this purpose he was looking for the place where the Prophet could be found. He was informed that he was in a house situated by the side of the bazaar of Safa, and forty persons like Hamzah, Abu Bakr, Ali etc. had undertaken to protect and defend him.

Na'im bin Abdullah who was one of the close friends of Umar says: "I saw Umar carrying his sword. I enquired about the purpose for which he was going. He replied thus: "I am going in search of Muhammad who has created dissension amongst Quraysh. He laughs at their wisdom and intellect, declares their religion to be worthless and belittles their gods. I am going to kill him".

Na'im says: "I said to him: You are deceived. Do you think the descendants of Abd Munaf will spare your life? If you are a peaceable person you should first reform your own house. Your sister Fatimah and her husband have become Muslims and follow the religion of Muhammad".

Na'im's words created a storm of wrath in the mind of Umar. Consequently he abandoned his previous plan and went to the house of his brother-in-law. When he reached near the house he heard the humming of someone who was reciting the Holy Qur'an with an impressive voice. The manner of Umar's arrival in his sister's house was such that she and her husband also became aware that he was about to enter. They, therefore, concealed the teacher of the Holy Qur'an in the back part of the house so that he might remain hidden from Umar's eyes. Fatimah also concealed a leaf on which verses of the Holy Qur'an were written.

Umar said without any salutation or greeting: "What was this humming that I have heard?" They replied "We have heard nothing". Umar said: "I have been informed that you have become Muslims and follow the religion of Muhammad". He uttered this sentence with great fury and attacked his brother-in-law. His sister then stood up to protect her husband. Umar attacked her also and seriously injured her head with the point of his sword. While blood was flowing from her head, the helpless woman said with great fervour of faith: "Yes. We have become Muslims and believe in Allah and His Holy Prophet. Do whatever you like".

The tragic plight of the sister, who was standing by the side of her brother with her face and eyes besmeared with blood and was speaking to him, made Umar tremble and he was sorry for what he had done. He, therefore, insisted that they should show him the relevant leaf so that he might ponder over the words of Muhammad. His sister fearing lest he should tear it up, put him on oath that he would not do so, and he also made a promise and confirmed it on oath that he would return the leaf after having gone through it. Then he took the sheet in his hand. A few verses were written on it. Their translation is given below:

Taha. It was not to distress you that We revealed the Qur'an. It is to admonish those who fear Allah. It is a revelation from Him who has created the earth and the lofty heavens. The Merciful who is firm in power. His is what the heavens and earth contain. He has knowledge of all that is secret and all that is yet more hidden. (Surah Taha, 20:1-6)

These eloquent verses and the clear and firm words impressed Umar very much. The man, who was the most ruthless enemy of the Qur'an and Islam a few minutes earlier, decided to change his mind. He went to the house about which he had already learnt that the Holy Prophet could be found there and knocked at the door.

One of the companions of the Prophet peeped through a hole and saw Umar standing with a sword in hand and waiting for the door to be opened. He returned at once and informed the Prophet about the matter. Hamzah, son of Abdul Muttalib said: "Let him come in. If he has come with good intentions we shall welcome him, but if his intentions are not good we shall kill him".

Umar's attitude towards the Prophet reassured them and his open countenance and expression of sorrow and shame proved his real intentions. Eventually he embraced Islam at the hands of the Prophet in the presence of his companions and thus joined the ranks of the Muslims.¹⁹

Notes

- [1] Instead of ringing a bell of danger the Arabs use these words and generally begin alarming reports with them.
- [2] Ibn Hisham has mentioned the names and particulars of these person in his 'Seerah'.
- [3] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. X page 265.
- [4] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I pp. 265-266.
- [5] Tarikh-i Tabari vol. II pp. 66 67; Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I. pp. 295 296.
- [6] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I p. 313 and Tarikh-i Tabari vol. II p. 72.
- [7] Tarikh-i Kamil vol. II page 59.
- [8] al-Bidayah wan Nihayah vol. III page 26.
- [9] Seerah page 311. Tabari has quoted the entire incident in his history vol. II page 72 except that the head of the Caliph was injured.
- [10] Tarikh-i Kamil vol. II page 47.
- [11] Biharul Anwar vol. XVIII page 204.
- [12] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 318.
- [13] Tabaqat-i Ibn S'ad vol. III page 233.
- [14] Tarikh-i Kamil vol. II page 45.
- [15] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 320.
- [16] Seerah Ibn Hisham vol. I page 314.
- [17] Tarikh-i Kamil vol. II pp. 47-51; Usudul Ghabah; al-Asabah al-Ist'iab etc.
- [18] Seerah Ibn Hisham vol. I page 365.
- [19] Ibn Hisham has given another version of the embracement of Islam by Umar. (vol. I page 368).