

Chapter 24: The Agreement of Aqabah

During the past times 'Wadiul Qura' (the Valley of Qura) was the trade route from Yemen to Syria. After passing by the side of Makkah the trading caravans of Yemen entered this long valley and along with it there were some green and pleasant regions, one of them being the old city of Yathrib, which became known later as 'Madinatur Rasul' (the city of the Prophet).

Two famous tribes known as 'Aws' and 'Khazraj', who were Yemenite Arab migrants (Qehtani) had settled in this region since the well known tribes of the Jews (Bani Qurayzah, Bani Nuzayr and Bani Qaynqa'), who had migrated from the northern areas of the Peninsula, had also settled there. Every year a group of Yathrib Arabs went to Makkah to perform Haj ceremonies, and the Prophet contacted them. These contacts provided the preliminaries for 'migration', and centralized the scattered strength of Islam at that point. Many of these contacts did not prove fruitful.

Notwithstanding this however, the pilgrims from Yathrib, on their return to their homeland, mentioned the appearance of the new Prophet as the most important news and attracted the attention of the people of that area to this great event.

We, therefore, mention here some of these meetings which took place during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth years of the prophetic mission. From a deep study of these events the reasons for the migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Yathrib (Madina) and the centralization of the strength of the Muslims at that place become quite clear:

1. As and when the Prophet learned that an important person from amongst the Arabs had arrived in Makkah he contacted him immediately and presented his religion to him. One day he heard that Suwayd bin Samit had come to Makkah. He met him at once and explained the realities of his sacred religion to him. Suwayd thought that these realities were perhaps the wise sayings of Luqman which he had already with himself.

The Prophet, however, said: "The sayings of Luqman are good, but what Allah has revealed to me is better and sublimer, because it is the torch of guidance which sheds light everywhere. Thereafter the

Prophet read out some verses to him, and he embraced Islam. Then he returned to Madina. He was killed by Khazrajites before the Battle of 'Bu'ath'. He breathed his last while reciting 'Shahadatain' (i.e. acknowledging that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His servant and Prophet).¹

2. A group of persons belonging to the tribe of 'Bani 'Amir' met the Prophet and said: "We shall believe in your prophethood on the condition that you make us your successors (caliphs)". The Prophet replied: "This thing concerns Allah and I do not possess any authority in the matter. They then declined to embrace Islam and returned to their tribe saying that it meant that they should take up the cudgels for it and others should enjoy the profit. On reaching home they mentioned the matter to an old man of their tribe who had not been able to perform Haj on account of infirmity. The enlightened old man blamed them and said: "It is the very luminous star which has risen from the horizon of reality".²

3. Anas bin Rafe' came to Makkah along with a group of persons belonging to the tribe of Abdul Ashhal and Ayas bin Ma'az was also amongst them. Their object was to seek military assistance from Quraysh to fight against the Khazrajites.

The Prophet joined their meeting and explained his religion to them and also recited some verses of the Qur'an for them. Ayas, who was a courageous man, stood up and embraced Islam and said: "This religion is better than the assistance of Quraysh for which you have come here". (He meant that Islam is a surety for all-round prosperity, because it roots out homicide and all factors of destruction and deceit).

Acceptance of Islam by this man without the inclination of the head of the tribe made Anas very angry. To quench his uneasiness he took sand in both of his hands, threw it on the face of Ayas and said: "Keep quiet. We have come here to seek assistance from Quraysh and not to embrace the religion of Islam". The Prophet then got up and later the said group returned to Madina. The Battle of Bu'ath took place between Aws and Khazraj. Ayas, who remained steadfast in his faith till the last moment of his life, was killed in this battle.³

The Battle Of Bu'ath

The Battle of Bu'ath is one of the historical battles which took place between the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Bani Aws were victorious in this battle and they burned the palm grove of the enemy.

Thereafter war and peace took place alternately. Abdullah bin Ubay who was one of the chiefs of Bani Khazraj did not participate in this battle and had, therefore, held in respect by both the tribes.

It appeared that the two parties had got fully exhausted and, therefore, became very much inclined towards peace. Both the tribes insisted that Abdullah should become the ruler after compromise. They even prepared a crown for him so that he might wear at the appropriate time. However, this scheme failed on account of the inclination of a group of Khazrajites towards Islam. And in the meantime the Prophet met six Khazrajites at Makkah and they accepted his invitation.

The Details Of This Event

During Haj season the Prophet met six persons belonging to the tribe of Khazraj and asked them whether they had concluded a pact with the Jews. They replied in the affirmative. Thereupon he said to them: "Please sit down so that I may tell you something". They sat down and heard his words. The Prophet read out some verses of the Qur'an to them. This had a good effect on them and they embraced Islam immediately.

The thing which made them inclined to Islam was that they had heard from the Jews that a Prophet of Arabian descent, who would introduce the religion of the Oneness of Allah and would wipe out idol-worship, would be appointed by the Almighty soon and they, therefore, thought that before the Jews stole a march on them they themselves should assist him and thereby become victorious over their enemies.

The said group of persons turned to the Prophet and said:

"The fire of war constantly kindles between us. We hope that Almighty Allah will quench it by means of your sacred religion. We are now returning to Yathrib and shall present your religion to the people. If all of them accept it there will be no one else who should be more respectable for us than you".

These six persons made continuous efforts to propagate Islam in Yathrib. So much so that there was no house left there where the Prophet was not talked about.⁴

The First Agreement At 'Aqabah

The continuous propagation by those six persons proved fruitful and a group of the residents of Yathrib embraced Islam. In the twelfth year of the prophetic mission another group consisting of twelve persons came from Yathrib and met the Prophet at 'Aqabah and concluded the first Islamic agreement. The most famous out of these persons were As'ad bin Zurarah and 'Ubadah bin Samit.

The text of the agreement, concluded after their embracing Islam, was this: "We have concluded an agreement with the Prophet that we shall be duty-bound to act thus: "We shall not associate anyone with Allah We shall neither steal nor commit adultery. We shall not kill our children. We shall not slander one another and shall not fail to perform good deeds".

The Prophet promised that if they acted according to the agreement their place would be in Paradise, but if they were disobedient it was for Allah to forgive them or torture them. In the terminology of the historians this 'Bay'at' (Oath of allegiance) is called 'Bay'atun Nisa' (Bay'at of the women), because at the time of the conquest of Makkah the Prophet took a similar 'Bay'at' from women.

These twelve persons returned to Yathrib with their hearts abounding with faith and became very active in propagating Islam. They also wrote a letter to the Prophet requesting him to send a missionary for

them so that he might teach them the Holy Qur'an. The Prophet sent Mus'ab bin Umayr for their guidance. Under the guidance of this able missionary the Muslims used to assemble round him in the absence of the Prophet and to perform congregational prayers.⁵

The Second Agreement At 'Aqabah

There was a great tumult amongst the Muslims of Yathrib. They were anxiously waiting for the arrival of Haj season so that, besides performing Haj ceremonies, they should see the Prophet from near and declare their readiness to render every service to Islam and to enlarge the range of the agreement from the point of view of quantity as well as quality.

A Haj caravan of Yathrib consisting of more than five hundred persons left for Makkah. It included seventy three Muslims, out of whom two were women, and the remaining persons were either indifferent or half inclined towards Islam. The said group met the Prophet in Makkah and requested that a time might be appointed for them for the performance of the ceremonies of 'Bay'at'. The Prophet said: "We shall meet at Mina in the night of the 13th of Zil-Haj, when the people are asleep in the Valley of 'Aqabah" (It is a defile near Mina).

The 13th night of Zil-Haj arrived. The Prophet was the first to reach 'Aqabah along with his uncle Abbas. A part of the night passed. The polytheists of Arabia went to sleep. The Muslims got up from their places one after the other and came to 'Aqabah secretly. Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, was the first to speak out thus: "O Khazarajites! You have expressed your support for the religion of Muhammad! You should be aware that he is the most dignified person of his tribe.

All Bani Hashim, whether they believe in his religion or not, are responsible for his defence. However, Muhammad is now inclined towards you and desires to be amongst you. If you are confident that you will abide by your agreement and will protect him from every harm from his enemies, we are prepared to let him go with you. However, if you are not capable of defending him in difficult circumstances you are free to forsake him here and let him spend his life amongst his kinsmen with great dignity and respect".

At this time Bura' bin Ma'rur stood up and said: "By Allah! Had there been anything in our hearts other than that which we have said with our tongues we would have expressed it. We have no other intention than sincere compliance with the agreement and sacrifice in the path of the Prophet". Then the Khazrajites turned towards the Prophet and requested him to say something. The Prophet recited some verses and stirred their inclination towards Islam.

Thereafter he said: "I take this oath from you that you will defend me in the same manner in which you defend your children and the members of your family". Upon this Bura' rose up again and said: "We are the children of campaign and combat and have been trained as warriors. We have inherited these qualities from our ancestors".

In the meantime, when the entire gathering had been filled with excitement, the voice of Khazrajites, which was a sign of their unusual fervour became louder. Abbas, while holding the hand of the Prophet, said: "Spies have been appointed upon us and it is, therefore, necessary that you should speak in a low voice". Bura' bin Ma'rur, Abul Haytham bin Tayhan and As'ad bin Zurarah then rose from their places and put their hands on the hand of the Prophet by way of 'Bay'at'. Thereafter all those present performed 'Bay'at, one after the other.

While taking the oath Abul Haytham said: "O Prophet of Allah! We have concluded pacts with the Jews and now there is no alternative but to ignore them. It would not, therefore, be appropriate that you should leave us one day and return to your own people". The Prophet replied: "If you have made an agreement of peace with someone, I consider it respectable".

Then he added "Select twelve persons from amongst you as your representatives in the same manner in which Prophet Musa bin Imran selected twelve leaders out of Bani Israel, so that, in difficult circumstances, you may reply to their views".

Thereafter twelve representatives of the Ansar (nine from Khazraj and three from Aws) were introduced to the Prophet. Their names and particulars are recorded in history. The performance of 'Bay'at' was finalized in this assembly and the Prophet promised that he would leave Makkah at an appropriate time and go to Yathrib. Then the gathering dispersed.⁶

Conditions Of Muslims After The Agreement Of 'Aqabah

Now the question arises as to why the people of Yathrib who were at a distance from the centre of the propagation of Islam, submitted to the authority of the Prophet more readily than the Makkans (with all their proximity to him) and why a few short meetings between him and the people of Yathrib had a greater impact than his thirteen years propagation in Makkah. It may be said that the following two things were the cause of the advancement of Islam in Yathrib:

1. People of Yathrib were the neighbours of the Jews since long and every now and then a mention was made in their meetings and assemblies about the appointment of an Arabian Prophet to the prophetic mission. So much so that the Jews used to tell the idol-worshippers of Yathrib that the expected Arabian Prophet would promote Judaism and destroy idolworship.

These discourses created a strange readiness in the minds of the people of Yathrib for accepting the faith for which the Jews were waiting, so that when six Khazrajites met the Prophet for the first time they embraced Islam at once and said to one another: "It is the same Prophet whom the Jews are awaiting and it is, therefore, necessary that we should express belief in him earlier than them".

Hence, one of the objections raised by the Holy Qur'an against the Jews is this: "You used to threaten the idol-worshippers with the appointment to prophethood of the Arabian Prophet and gave good tidings of his arrival to the people and quoted his signs from the Taurat. Why do you turn away your face from

him now?" It says:

Now that a Book confirming their own has come to them from Allah, they deny it, although they know it to be the truth and have long prayed for help against the unbelievers. May Allah's curse be upon the infidels! (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 89)

2. Another factor which might have prompted the people of Yathrib to embrace Islam was their mental and physical exhaustion. The harassment caused by disputes spreading over a period of one hundred and twenty years had exhausted their patience. They were well-nigh fed up with their lives and found all doors of hope and salvation closed before them.

Only a study of the Battle of Bu'ath, which was one of the battles fought by the people of Yathrib against one another, provides a clear view of their condition. In this battle Bani Aws, who were defeated initially ran away to Najd. The victorious adversaries (Khazrajites) taunted them. The chief of Bani Aws (Huzayr) felt it very much. He thrust his spear in his thigh, dismounted his horse, called out to his people in a loud voice and said: "I shall not rise from my place until I am killed".

The steadfastness of Huzayr stirred the spirit of dignity, valour and defence among the defeated warriors. They decided to return at any cost and defend their interests. Having lost all hope of life they began a desperate fight. When a self-sacrificing army fights with firm faith it is always victorious. Hence the defeated Bani Aws were again successful. They defeated Bani Khazraj and burned their palm-groves.

Thereafter war and peace continued for long and they had to face hundreds of unpleasant, depressing and tiring events. Both the groups were unhappy about their condition and wanted to find a solution for it and wished for a gleam of hope. It was for this reason that when the six Khazrajites heard the words of the Prophet they felt that they had found what they had lost and said: "Maybe Allah may relieve us of this discord through you".

These were some of the reasons which induced the people of Yathrib to welcome the invitation of Islam with open arms.

The Reaction Of Quraysh To The Agreement At 'Aqabah

Quraysh now assumed an attitude of apathy, and as Islam had not made any appreciable advancement in Makkah, they were under the impression that its decline had started and its edifice would soon crumble down.

Suddenly the news of the second agreement at 'Aqabah fell amongst them like a bomb-shell. The heads of the idolatrous administration came to know that in the darkness of the preceding night seventy three persons belonging to Yathrib had concluded an agreement with the Prophet that they would defend him in the same manner in which they defended their children.

This news created a strange fear in their hearts and they said to themselves: "Now the Muslims have acquired a base in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula and it is possible that they will collect their scattered forces and will begin preaching the religion of the Oneness of Allah and will by this means threaten the central government of idolatry in Makkah with war and danger".

To investigate the matter further the chiefs of Quraysh contacted the Khazrajites in the morning and said: "It has been reported to us that last night you concluded a defence pact with Muhammad and have promised him that you will fight against us". They, however, swore that they did not desire to wage war against them.

The caravan of the pilgrims from Yathrib consisted of about 500 persons. Out of them only seventy three had performed 'Bay'at' in 'Aqabah at midnight whereas others were asleep at that time and knew nothing of the matter.

Hence, those who were not Muslims swore that nothing of the sort had happened and the entire story (of the pact) was a mere fiction. The Khazrajite, Abdullah bin Obay, the preliminaries of whose chiefship of entire Yathrib had already been provided, said: "No such thing has been done and the people of Khazraj tribe don't do anything without consulting me".

Then the chiefs of Quraysh rose up so that they might make further investigations in the matter. The Muslims, who were present in the meeting, realized that their secret had been divulged. They, therefore, decided to make the best use of the available time and said to themselves: "Before the persons concerned are identified it will be better if we return home and get out of Makkah influence".

The haste which was observed in some persons of Yathrib intensified the doubts of Quraysh about the agreement and they concluded that the report received by them was correct. They, therefore, pursued all those persons who belonged to Yathrib. Fortunately, however, they commenced their pursuit when it was too late and the Haj caravan had already crossed the reach of Makkah. They could lay their hands on only one Muslim and he was Sa'd bin 'Ubadah.

According to Ibn Hisham Quraysh captured two persons out of whom one was Sa'd and the other was Manzar bin 'Umar. The second one escaped from their hands. As regards Sa'd, however, they caught him by the hair of his head with great harshness and dragged him on the ground.

A man from amongst Quraysh was very much moved to see Sa'd in this pitiable condition and said to him: "Do you have a pact with someone in Makkah?" Sa'd replied: "Yes. I do have a pact with Mut'am bin Adi, because I protected his trade from larceny and provided him asylum when he crossed through Yathrib".

The Qurayshite who wanted to rescue him from this impasse approached Mut'am and said to him: "A Khazrajite has been captured and is being subjected to severe torture by Quraysh. He now wants your support and is waiting for your help. Mut'am came and saw that it was Sa'd bin 'Ubadah—the same man

under whose protection his trading caravan used to reach its destination safely every year. He secured his release and sent him to Yathrib.

The friends of Sa'd and the Muslims who came to know about his arrest decided to get him released. They were thinking on these lines when Sa'd suddenly appeared from a distance. After joining them he related his woeful story to them.⁷

Spiritual Influence Of Islam

The orientalist are keen to insist that the advancement of Islam took place through sword. In this regard they say things which will be replied to, one by one, when we describe the battles of Islam against the unbelievers. At present, however, we wish to invite the attention of the readers to an incident which took place at Yathrib before 'migration'. It proves clearly that in the beginning the penetration and advancement of Islam took place only by means of its sweetness and the clearness of its rules and regulations, which captivated the hearts of the people. Here are the details of the incident:

Mus'ab bin Umayr was a missionary and a great orator of Islam who had been sent by the Prophet to Yathrib on the request of As'ad bin Zurarah. These two persons decided to invite the chiefs of Yathrib to Islam by means of logical argument.

One day they entered a garden where some Muslims were present and Sa'd bin Ma'az and Usayd bin Huzayr, who were the chiefs of Bani Abdul Ashhal, could also be seen there. Sa'd turned towards Usayd and said: "Unsheathe your sword and go to these two men and tell them to desist from propagating the religion of Islam and not to deceive our simple-minded people with their speeches and narrations. As As'ad bin Zurarah is my cousin (maternal aunt's son) I feel shy of facing him with a naked weapon".

Usayd stood in the way of the two men with an angry face and a naked sword and uttered the above-mentioned words with a harsh voice. The great orator Mus'ab bin Umayr who had learnt the method of propagation from the Prophet addressed Usayd thus: "Is it possible that you should sit with us for a while so that we may have mutual conversation. If what we say is disagreeable to your mind, we shall return the way we have come". Usayd said: "You have said something reasonable".

He, therefore, sat down for a moment and sheathed his sword. Mus'ab recited a few verses of the Qur'an. The luminous realities of the Qur'an and their attraction and sweetness coupled with the forceful logic of Mus'ab overpowered him. He lost all control over himself and asked: "How can one become a Muslim?" They replied: "Confess the Oneness of Allah, wash your body and dress with water and offer prayers".

Usayd, who had come to shed the blood of these two persons, acknowledged with an open mind, the Oneness of Allah and the prophethood of the Prophet. He took bath, washed his dress and then returned to Sa'd, humming the 'Shahadatain' (Acknowledgement of the Oneness of Allah and Prophethood of Muhammad) Sa'd bin Ma'az was waiting for him very anxiously.

Suddenly Usayd appeared with a happy and glowing face. Sa'd bin Ma'az turned to those present and said: "By Allah! Usayd has changed his faith and has not achieved the object for which he went". Usayd came up and explained the matter. Sa'd bin Ma'az got up in extreme anger so as to check the two persons from propagating Islam and shed their blood.

However, the same thing, which had happened to Usayd, happened to him. He too had to surrender before the strong logic and the attractive and sweet words of Mus'ab. Signs of remorse appeared on his face for what he had decided upon, and now he declared his allegiance to Islam. He bathed then and there and purified his clothes.

Thereafter he turned to his people and said to them: "What position do I enjoy amongst you?" They replied: "You are the head and chief of our tribe". Then he said: "I shall not speak with any man or woman of my tribe unless they embrace Islam".

The words of the chief were passed on from mouth to mouth to all the members of the tribe and within a short time and before even seeing the Prophet the entire tribe of Bani Abdul Ashhal embraced Islam and became defenders of this sacred religion.⁸

We find many specimens of such incidents in the inner folds of history. They clearly prove the baselessness of the remarks of the orientalisists about the causes of the advancement of Islam, because in these incidents force or money were not at work and the persons concerned had neither seen the Prophet, nor had they any contact with him. There was no other factor at work in these cases except the rational conduct of a Muslim orator which brought about a wonderful spiritual revolution within the tribe.

Fear Overtakes Quraysh

Support rendered by the people of Yathrib to the Muslims awakened Quraysh once again from their carelessness. They renewed their persecution and torture and got ready once again to check the influence and advancement of Islam.

The companions of the Prophet complained about the pressure and torture by the unbelievers and sought permission to migrate to some other place. The Prophet asked them to give him some time (to take a decision). After a few days he said to them: "The best place for you is Yathrib. You can very easily migrate to that place one by one".

After orders had been given to the Muslims to migrate they left Makkah on one pretext or the other and proceeded to Yathrib. However, at the very early stage of 'migration' Quraysh came to know about the secret of these journeys. They, therefore, prevented all sorts of travelling and decided to bring back all those who were on their way (to Yathrib).

They also decided that in case a person migrated along with his wife and children and his wife was a Qurayshite, they would not permit him to take her with him. In spite of all this they refrained from

shedding blood and continued persecuting and torturing the Muslims. Fortunately, however, their activities did not prove fruitful.⁹

However a large number of Muslims escaped from the grip of Quraysh and joined the people of Yathrib—so much so that except the Prophet and Ali, and the Muslims who had been detained or were sick, no other Muslim was left in Makkah. The coming together of Muslims in Yathrib alarmed Quraysh all the more.

In order, therefore, to destroy Islam all the heads of the tribe assembled in Darun Nadwah and deliberated over the situation. All their proposals were, however, frustrated by the special policies of the Prophet. Eventually he also migrated to Yathrib in the month of Rabiul Awwal in the fourteenth year of his appointment to the prophetic mission.

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1. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 425.
 2. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 426.
 3. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 427.
 4. Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II, page 86.
 5. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 131.
 6. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, pp. 438–444 and Tabaqat Ibn Sa'd, vol. I, pp. 221–223.
 7. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, pp. 448–450.
 8. A'lamul Wara', page 37 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XIX, pp. 10–11.
 9. Tabaqat-i Ibn Sa'd, vol. VII, page 210.

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