

The Battle of Uhud

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*An excerpt from **The Brother of the Prophet Muhammad**
by M. Jawad Chirri, Director of the Islamic Center of America,
Two Volumes, Harlo Press 1988, Revised Edition.*

The Qureshites came out from the Battle of Badr with an astonishing result which they did not expect. They were confident of their capability to annihilate the Muslims easily. For the Qureshites were more numerous and with a bigger reserve and more logistics. Yet, they suddenly found themselves losing seventy of their warriors and leaders, along with seventy captives, in a one-day battle. And above all, the resounding defeat which they received was at the hand of a group whom they used to belittle.

The Qureshites were unwilling to admit a final defeat. They lost a battle, but they believed that they would never lose the war. All they needed was to mobilize forces to which the Muslims would not be able to stand. The burning hatred in the hearts of Qureshites and their desire to wash away the shame of the defeat at Badr and their eagerness to avenge their lost leaders added to their physical superiority a tremendous psychological strength.

The Qureshites mobilized for the battle of avenge three thousand fighters compared to nine hundred and fifty fighters at the Battle of Badr. This army was financed and its logistics were secured through the gross income of the commercial caravan which was allotted to the battle of avenge. Thus, the community of Quraish, one year after the Battle of Badr, marched towards Medina to annihilate the Muslims, their religion, and their Prophet. The Meccan army arrived at the area of Uhud which is five miles away from Medina. There, the expected battle took place.

The Holy Prophet went on deploying his forces, placing them in strategic positions. He placed fifty

marksmen at the slope of the Mount of Uhud, directing them to protect the back of the Muslims against the pagan cavalry (which was led by Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed). He commanded them not to leave their position whether the Muslims defeated the pagans or the pagans defeated the Muslims.

The Elements of the Islamic Defense

In this second battle of destiny for the Muslims, the Islamic defense consisted of the same three important elements which played their roles at the battle of Badr:

1. The ideal leadership of the Messenger and his firmness.
2. The members of the house of the Holy Prophet and their heroism.
3. An Islamic army consisting of seven hundred companions, the hearts of many of them were filled with faith and readiness for sacrifice.

The start of the Battle of Uhud followed the method of the beginning of the Battle of Badr. Talhah Ibn Abu Talhah (from Banu Abdul-Dar clan), the bearer of the banner of the pagans, challenged the Muslims, saying: "Are there any duelers?" The respondent to his call was the same respondent of the Battle of Badr. 'Ali came to him and when they faced each other between the two hosts, 'Ali swiftly dealt him a blow by his sword through which his head was split. The Holy Prophet was pleased. He exclaimed: Allahu Akbar (God Is Great), and so did the Muslims, for the biggest hero of the pagan army had died.

Abu Saad Ibn Abu Talhah (brother of Talhah) carried the banner and challenged the Muslims, saying: "Companions of Muhammad, you allege that your dead go to Paradise and our dead go to Hell. By Allah, you lie. If you were so confident, some of you could have faced me. Let one of you come to fight me."¹

'Ali came to him and Abu Saad was not luckier than his brother Talhah. The men of Abdul-Dar continued replacing the bearers of their banner with their men, and the Muslims continued annihilating them. 'Ali destroyed Artat Ibn Sharhabeel, Shureih Ibn Qaridh and their servant, Sawab.

Historians reported that Al-Hamzah killed Othman Ibn Abu Talhah. Assim Ibn Thabit shot by his arrows Musafi, and Al-Harith, two sons of Talhah, Al-Zubeir killed their brother Kilab, and Talhah Ibn Obeidullah killed their other brother Al-Jallas.

'Ali and the Banner Bearers

However, Ibn Al-Atheer reported that 'Ali, alone, destroyed all the standard bearers at the Battle of Uhud and said that Abu Rafi reported that. And so did Al-Tabari.²

The death of the bearers of the banner heightened the morale of the Muslims and shook the hearts of the pagans. Following the death of the banner bearers, the Muslims undertook a general offensive led by ‘Ali, Al-Hamzah, Abu Dujanh, and others. The Islamic offensive terrified the pagan army, but the Muslims lost during this operation a giant hero Al-Hamzah, Lion of God, and uncle of the Messenger of God. Wahshi, an Abyssinian, transfixed him with his dart while he was fighting. However, the pagans were forced to flee and leave their camps. The Muslims entered the pagan camps and went on collecting what they found of equipment and material without meeting any resistance from the pagans.

Defeat After Victory

This scene watered the mouths of the fifty marksmen whom the Prophet placed at the slope of the Mount of Uhud to protect the back of the Muslims against the pagan cavalry. The majority of these marksmen left their place and joined the collectors of the spoils. They did not heed the word of their leader Abdullah Ibn Jubeir, who reminded them of the instructions of the Messenger which made it mandatory for them not to leave their place. Not more than ten of them heeded his words. Noticing the small number of the marksmen, Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed and his horsemen killed them then started a general offensive.

The fleeing pagans beheld their horsemen fighting and attacking. They came back to the battle while the Muslims were preoccupied collecting the spoils.

The Muslims were astonished and confused. They started to fight but they did not know whom they were fighting. Many Muslims were killed by the Muslims themselves, then they fled turning their backs and refusing to look behind, while the Messenger was calling upon them to come back to the battle. The Holy Qur'an informs us of the situation of the Muslims in this terrifying hour:

God certainly made good His promise unto you when you routed them by His leave, until the moment when your courage failed you and ye disobeyed after He had showed that for which ye long. Among you are some that hanker after this world and some that desire the Hereafter. Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you. But He forgave you.

For God is full of grace to those who believe. Behold ye were climbing up (the high ground) without casting a side glance at anyone, and the Apostle was calling you back. There did God give you one distress after another by way of requital, to teach you not to grieve for what ye miss, or for (the ill) that had befallen you. For God is well aware of all that ye do. [Qur'an 3: 151-52]

Who remained with the Prophet (S)?

The companions fled away, concerned only with their own safety. History recorded seven exceptional Meccans (‘Ali, Abu Bakr, Abdul-Rahman Ibn Ouf, Saad Ibn Abu Waqass, Talhah Ibn Obeidah, Al-Zubeir

Ibn Al-Awam, Abu Obeidah Ibn Al-Jarrah); And Seven exceptional Medinites (Al-Hubab Ibn Al-Munthir, Abu Dujanah, Sahl Ibn Huneif, Assim Ibn Thabit, Saad Ibn Mu'ath, As-ad Ibn Hudheir or Saad Ibn Abadah and Muhammad Ibn Muslimah). These men, according to some historians, remained with the Prophet when the other companions deserted him.³

From what we read in Al-Mustadrak by Al-Hakim, we understand that 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib was the only defender who stayed with the Prophet for the duration of the battle. The other companions who were mentioned to be among those who remained with the Prophet were actually the first ones to come back to the Messenger of God after they left him. Al-Hakim recorded that Ibn Abbas said:

'Ali has four distinctions no one shares with him: He was the first male who prayed with the Messenger of God. He was the bearer of his banner in every battle and he was the one who stayed with him at the Battle on the day of Al-Mihras (the Battle of Uhud, where there is gathered water called Al-Mihras), and he is the one who washed his blessed body and laid him in his tomb.⁴

Al-Hakim reported also that Saad Ibn Abu Waqass said: When people left the Messenger on the day of Uhud, I went aside and said to myself I shall defend myself ... then Al-Miqdad told him: "Saad, this is the Messenger."⁵

Al-Hakim reported also that Al-Zubeir said about the Battle of Uhud, "And they exposed our back to the horse-men, so we were attacked from behind, and a man shouted: Muhammad has been killed. We retreated and the enemies pursued us."⁶

He also reported that Abu Bakr said: When people left the Messenger of God on the day of Uhud I was the first one to come back to the Messenger of God ... then he mentioned in the hadith that Abu Obeidah Ibn Al-Jarrah followed him."⁷

The Prophet (S) Participated

The Messenger stayed at the battlefield with full determination and firmness after the pagans came up to him. He himself fought vigorously. Saad Ibn Abu Waqaas reported that he witnessed a man whose face was covered, and he did not know who he was. The pagans came towards him and Saad thought that they were going to overpower him. But that man took a handful of gravel and threw it at their faces and they retreated . . . Finally Saad discovered that that man was the Prophet. He used his bow and expended all his arrows until his bow could not be used any longer.⁸

When the Prophet was exposed to the enemies by the retreat of his army, Obay Ibn Khalaf tried to attack him. Some of his companions tried to bar Obay from reaching the Prophet, but the Prophet prevented them from doing that. He faced Obay with a blow which did not seem to be effective. But Obay said: "By God, Muhammad has killed me...." He told me in Mecca: "I shall kill you. By God, if he spits on me he kills me." Obay died in "Saraf" while returning to Mecca.

Imam 'Ali's (as) endeavor

Al-Tabari reported that Abu Rafi said: The Messenger of God witnessed a group of pagans coming to him. He said to 'Ali: Charge them. 'Ali charged them and forced them to retreat and killed Amr Ibn Abdullah Al-Jumahi. The Prophet beheld another group coming and told 'Ali to charge them and he did. He scattered them and killed Sheibah Ibn Malik, one of the children of Amir Ibn Lu-ay. Amazed by 'Ali's sacrifice Gabriel said: Messenger of God, what a redeemer 'Ali is!

The Prophet replied: He is from me, and I am from him.

Gabriel said: And I am from both of you.

They heard at that time a voice saying:

There is no youth (full of manhood) but 'Ali, and no sword comparable to Zulfiqar ('Ali's sword).⁹

A regiment arrived from Kinanah in which four of the children of Sufyan Ibn Oweif were present. Khalid, Abu Al-Sha-atha, Abu Al-Hamra, and Ghurab. The Messenger of God said to 'Ali: "Take care of this regiment." 'Ali charged the regiment, and it was about fifty horsemen. He fought them while he was on foot until he scattered them. They gathered again and he charged them again. This was repeated several times until he killed the four children of Sufyan and added to them six more ...¹⁰

Ibn Husham reported that the Messenger fell into one of the pits which were excavated and covered up by Abu Amir, who expected the Muslims to fall in them. The knee of the Messenger was cut. 'Ali held the hand of the Messenger and pulled him up and Talhah Ibn Obeidullah helped him until the Prophet stood up.¹¹

Muslim in his "Sahih" (Authentic) reported that Sahl Ibn Saad said the following:

The face of the Messenger was cut, and one of his teeth was broken, and the protective dress of his head was broken. Fatima, daughter of the Messenger, was washing the blood and 'Ali was pouring water he brought by his shield from Al-Mihras. Beholding that the water increased the flow of blood, she burned a mat, put some of its ashes on the wound and the blood stopped.¹²

The Conclusion

It would not be difficult for the reader to infer the following:

1. The Battle of Uhud was one of the battles on which the future of Islam depended.
2. The death of the bearers of the banners of the pagan army at the beginning of the battle had its important effect in raising the morale of the Muslims and breaking the morale of the pagans who were four times more numerous than the Muslims. The bearers of the banners in the eyes of the warriors in

those days were the leaders of the army. Their death had a great effect on the morale of the army. History recorded that Abu Sufyan said to Banu Abdul Dar:

O Banu Abdul-Dar, we recognize that you have more right than any other Meccan clan to carry the banner (because the Meccan tradition gives the clan of Abdul- Dar the right to carry the banner at war). We were defeated in Badr because of the banner. Hold your banner firmly and protect it or hand it to us.

This infuriated the clan of Abdul-Dar. As they refused to surrender their right of carrying the banners Abu Sufyan said:

Let another banner be added to it.” They said: “Yes, but the additional banner will be carried also by a man from Banu Abdul-Dar, and nothing other than this will be accepted.

The Meccan pagans witnessed at the beginning of the battle their banner fallen ten times, and their hearts fell with the banner ten times. They found, to their astonishment, that they are facing a tremendous power. ‘Ali was the one who destroyed the banner bearers or most of them. This signaled the defeat of the Meccan army in the first round.

3. When the Muslims were defeated in the second round, no one remained with the Prophet except ‘Ali and thirteen others of the companions of the Messenger. These thirteen were the first to come back to the Messenger after their flight. It is clear that ‘Ali’s defense in that decisive hour was much more valuable than the defense of the thirteen companions put together.

The Messenger ... became the target of the pagan's attacks. Whenever a regiment aimed at the Prophet ‘Ali charged the regiment and forced it to retreat.

Thus, we would not be erroneous if we say that ‘Ali in this decisive battle had the exclusive honor of being the main defender of the Messenger and his Message, against the forces which no one other than ‘Ali could face successfully. The Battle of Badr laid the foundation of the Islamic state, but the Battle of Uhud was about to destroy the foundation, had not a small number of heroes headed by ‘Ali been present.

The pagans found that the Battle of Uhud ended in their favor. They defeated the army of the Prophet, and the Muslims lost seventy companions, among them the giant hero: Al-Hamzah, uncle of the Messenger and Lion of God. But the pagan victory was not decisive. Their target was Muhammad and Muhammad was still alive. He was the biggest danger to them Therefore, it was necessary for them to have another decisive battle in which they would realize the goal that they could not realize at the Battle of Uhud.

The Battle of Uhud took place during the third year after the Hijrah. Two years later, the third decisive battle in which the pagans gathered their biggest task force, took place.

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1. Dr. M. Haykal, Life of Muhammad, p 289.
 2. Ibn Al Atheer, Al Kamil, vol 3 p 107.
 3. Al Waqidi, Al Maghazi (Conveyed by Ibn Abu Al Hadeed in his Commentary on Nahjul Balagha, vol. 3 p 388.
 4. Al Hakim, al Mustadrak, vol 3 p 111
 5. Al Hakim, al Mustadrak vol 3 p 26–28
 6. Al Hakim, al Mustadrak, vol 3 p 27–28
 7. Al Hakim, Al–Mustadrak, vol 3 p 78
 8. Ibn Husham, Biography of the Prophet, v 2 p 78
 9. Sayed Muhsin, Al Ameen, in his Aayan Al Shiah, vol 2 p 195; Al Fairoozbadi, Fadail al Khamsah, vol. 2 p 317 (from Tabari); Ibn Al Atheer, In his Biography, vol. 2 p 107
 10. Ibn Abu Al Hadeed, in his Commentary, vol 1 p 372
 11. Ibn Husham, Biography of Prophet, vol. 2 p 80
 12. Muslim, in his Sahih, vol 12 p 148

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