

avail.<sup>517</sup> He went to ‘Ali one last time and said, “O Abu Hasan, I see that I am in a most hapless situation. Can you not advise me?”

“By God, I do not know what will help you in your present circumstances,” ‘Ali began. “Are you not the chief of Banu Kinana?” “Indeed, I am,” Abu Sufyan replied. ‘Ali then advised him the following:

“Why do you not declare publicly that you have granted protection to the Banu Kinana, then return home?”

“Do you suppose this might well do me some good?” Abu Sufyan had no hope, but he had no other choice. He was desperate. ‘Ali was well aware of this, and he replied, “No, but I do not think that there is anything else that you can do.”

The Abu Sufyan who threw down the gauntlet at Uhud, sought to meet in battle once again at Badr, hired an assassin in the hope of killing God’s Messenger, and who gathered all their mobs at Khandaq to mount an attack against the Messenger, had collapsed. He came to mosque once again in one last hope and, making one final effort, called out to the people: “O People, “I guarantee protection between our men. By God, I do not think that there is anyone who will contravene my word in this matter.”

He then came to the Messenger of God one last time. “O Muhammad,” he said. “I have guaranteed protection between our men.”

He still failed to voice his innermost convictions and thinking only of the Quraysh, wanted to be certain of their fate. But there was still the blood of twenty-three people that had not been avenged. For a long time now, there had already been too many chiefs in Mecca. Thus God’s Messenger turned to him and said, “Only you so, O Abu Hanzala!” This was his final word.

The Meccans’ plan had not succeeded. From this point on, Abu Sufyan had nothing left to do but to return to Mecca bent double beneath the burden of what might transpire, and so he mounted his camel and headed for Mecca.<sup>518</sup>

### **The Journey to Hope**

The Meccans who had turned down the demands of God’s Messenger and obtained no result from the diplomatic moves on which they had pinned their hopes, were left with no other option than to wait. Each passing day for them meant added anxiety, for they had no knowledge of developments in Medina and could not foresee what kinds of surprises were in store for them. They supposed that they would be called to account for what they had done, but had no indication as to

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<sup>517</sup> Despite all the doors being shut on him, he did not lose hope. Instead, he went to the Fatima the daughter of God’s Messenger and the wife of ‘Ali and appealed to her to arrange an opportunity for him to meet with her father. This, too, was to prove fruitless. Such was his desperation on the day that he even hoped for help to come from her son Hasan who was then but in his infancy. Ībn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/247; Taberî, *Târih* 2/154; Ībn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/302; Ībn-i Seyyidinnâs, *Uyûnu’l-Eser* 2/214; Süheylî, *Ravdu’l-Unf* 4/148

<sup>518</sup> Difficult days were in store for Abu Sufyan who returned to Mecca to brief the Meccans on developments in Medina. They had were already uneasy because of his delay, presuming that he too had embraced Islam. When he related the situation to them, as it stood, they voiced their displeasure, leaving Abu Sufyan in a bind. Despair was now billowing through the streets of Mecca, and they said to him: "You have consented to something that no one will settle for. You come back with an outcome of avail neither to you nor us. By God, your protection means nothing, and it is easy for them to violate it! As for 'Ali, he has merely toyed with you!" Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 538; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/9; Ībn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/302-304; *Sîre* 3/534; Ībn-i Kayyım, *Zâdu’l-Meâd* 3/347; Câmi’ 190

how and when this would happen. Being unable to get news from Medina, in particular, was very troubling to them. They eventually resolved to dispatch Abu Sufyan and Hakim ibn Hizam in the direction of Medina to gather intelligence. In so doing, they would at the very least warn the Meccans of developments from beforehand. In sending him off, they asked Abu Sufyan repeatedly, “Should you meet Muhammad, obtain protection for us from him.” This, in one sense, came to mean a journey to a new hope at a point where all hope had been lost.

On the way, Budayl ibn Warqa, too, joined them and Abu Sufyan headed off towards Medina once more with a delegation of three. When night fell and they reached Marr al-Zahran, the scene with which they were met indicated a new era for Mecca, as Marr al-Zahran was witness to a joy and merriment by the light of ten thousand fires.

### **The Marr al-Zahran Strategy**

Subsequent to the Quraysh’s attack on the Khuza’a who were allied with God’s Messenger, the killing of twenty-three people, and the Messenger’s envoy being sent back empty-handed, the Messenger of God began preparations for the conquest of Mecca he had dreamed of, and set off from Medina, to which he had come with two people, with ten thousand men. This was of course the outward face of events. In actual fact, God’s Messenger had set off on the journey for the Meccans who had turned him down, while he invited them constantly and strove with all the resources at his disposal to win them over. He was now going to them personally, to be able to hold them by the hand and lead them to Paradise. Even if ten thousand ants marched in the prevailing conditions, this would have been noticed; however, what kind of strategy had he implemented that not even a single soul from Mecca noticed until he came all the way to Marr al-Zahran, that was but a stop away? For he did not want even a single person to be harmed and desired that Mecca’s conquest be realized without bloodshed.

It worked. On the evening of their arrival to Marr al-Zahran, God’s Messenger instructed all his Companions to light a fire each.<sup>519</sup> At the time, each fire meant a tent in which between five to ten people stayed. They would stop over in journeys that continued for many months and five to ten people would take a rest in each of the tents that were pitched. A fire would be lit in front of every tent for the purpose of preparing food, keeping warm on cold nights, or to obtain the necessary amount of light. That is to say, every tent meant at least five people; this number could go up all the way to ten. This was, at the same time, another one of the strategies of God’s Messenger. By doing so, he aimed to show the strength of his Companions to be at least five times greater than what it was, and prevent the Quraysh, who he had thus unsettled, from resorting to the use of arms. In other words, this was an awesome scene that demonstrated how many people God’s Messenger had reached until that day, and how many people he could stir into action with him. Well-versed in this culture and certain that he knew the Meccans very well also, the Messenger of God gave a silent but most forceful message in order to prevent bloodshed, showing his strength tenfold.

Abu Sufyan and his associates were completely devastated before this scene. They multiplied the estimated number of fires by at least five and had begun to suppose that an army of at least fifty-

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<sup>519</sup> The Conquest forces were said to have been ten or twelve thousand strong. Ibn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/249, 263; Ibn-i Sa’d, *Tabakât* 2/102. It is quite likely that while they departed from Medina with a force of ten thousand men, this number reached twelve thousand with those who joined the forces en route to Mecca.

thousand men was standing before them. What is more, their numbers could have even exceeded a hundred thousand. Whilst Mecca was asleep at the wheel, Medina had become mobilized, and the Messenger of God had come all the way to Mecca with an invisible army.

God's Messenger had meanwhile informed his Companions of their exact location and instructed them to bring Abu Sufyan and his friends who had been watching them. The Companions went to the place specified by God's Messenger, apprehended the three Meccans, and brought them back to where the army was encamped. Naturally, their first point of contact was 'Umar who was in charge of those standing guard through the night. "We have captured some Meccans and brought them to you," they said. 'Umar was unaware of the details of the developments. "By God, if you have not brought Abu Sufyan, then tell me not that you have brought a man," he teased.<sup>520</sup> Upon scanning the new arrivals more closely, his manner changed entirely. "O enemy of God," he exclaimed when he saw Abu Sufyan. "Praise be to God Who has enabled us to capture you without any pact or agreement!"<sup>521</sup>

Whilst uttering these words, 'Umar thought of all the blows coming from Mecca's direction for all these years and voiced his reaction to the leader who was its representative. But the matter was not one that could solve on his own, and he hastened to God's Messenger to inform him of this critical development.

At the same time, 'Abbas who had only just joined God's Messenger a few days earlier also learned of the situation, *and had begun to share with Abu Sufyan his delight the arrival of his old friend.*<sup>522523</sup> On top of this, he offered protection to his close friend Abu Sufyan and his companion Hakim ibn Hizam. He wholeheartedly desired their being honored with Islam and strove to do everything within his power to facilitate this. He became anxious, however, at 'Umar's manner of departure and hurried off behind him. He had guessed what would happen as a result and wanted to prevent a potential mistake.

They entered the Messenger's presence in succession. "O Messenger of God," 'Umar began. "Here is Abu Sufyan whom God has delivered without any pact or agreement! Allow me to cut off his head!"

His of many years, 'Abbas realized just how justified he was in rushing after him,<sup>524</sup> he immediately intervened and said, "O Messenger of God, I have given him my protection."

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<sup>520</sup> Halebî, *Sîre* 3/114; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü'l-Hüdâ* 5/215

<sup>521</sup> İbn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/251; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/113; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü'l-Hüdâ* 5/216

<sup>522</sup> 'Abbas who was in Mecca until this date, set off as soon as he learned of the Messenger's departure from Medina and met up with God's Messenger on the way. When God's Messenger saw him, he said, "Just as my Prophethood is the last in the line of Prophethood, your emigration is the last emigration." He then had his uncle's load sent off to Medina. Consequently, for 'Abbas who had until then concealed his Muslim identity from the Meccans, a period of openly and resonantly communicating the message began with the end of his mission in Mecca.

<sup>523</sup> Some narrations provide an account of 'Abbas' encounter with Abu Sufyan and his friends while he traveled towards Mecca on the mule of God's Messenger. 'Abbas is described as conversing with them, and subsequently taking Abu Sufyan with him, with Abu Sufyan riding on the back of the mount, to God's Messenger. İbn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 5/59

<sup>524</sup> Here, we see 'Abbas, who realized that 'Umar was on his way to seeking the Messenger's permission to kill Abu Sufyan, filled with alarm that all his efforts over twenty-one years would be destroyed at one stroke, and in an

‘Umar, who could not even hear ‘Abbas’ granting of protection in the fervent emotion built up over the years, only continued to insist: “O Messenger of God, Let me take off his head!”

When 'Umar continued to remonstrate ‘Abbas turned to him and said, “Gently. 'Umar! Had been one of the Banu ‘Adi ibn Ka'b you would not have said this; but you know that he is one of the Banu 'Abd Manaf.”

‘Umar was of an emphatic temperament, but he was a man who always gave credit where credit was due. Such a man as him could not engage in such partisan-like behavior as to discriminate in favor of his near of kin. “Gently yourself, ‘Abbas!” he immediately retorted. “By God, your accepting Islam the day you did was dearer to me than if al-Khattab, my father, had been the one to do so. As I well know that your accepting Islam was dearer to the Messenger of God than my father's would have been.”<sup>525</sup>

Even if ‘Umar spoke the truth, there was nothing more that he could do, for what fall to him to do where protection had been given was to re-sheathe his sword and stand aside. Here on in, there was no way that anybody could lay a hand on Abu Sufyan. But ‘Abbas did not want to risk the situation nonetheless, so he moved closer to God’s Messenger. Entreatingly taking hold of Abu Sufyan’s head, he exclaimed, “By God, none shall be alone with him on this night without my being present.”

It was clear from his every manner that he wanted to take a closer interest in his long-time friend. ‘Abbas would prepare him for belief as much as he possibly could, and who knows what he would relate to him, that he could not do until now. This was because from this moment on, ‘Abbas had become transformed into a cascading waterfall and was now openly telling the Meccan leaders about Islam.

### **The Birth of Abu Sufyan**

The Call to Prayer had begun as soon as the time for the Morning Prayer had set in, and the Companions were repeating this call. Abu Sufyan, however, had woken to the day for the very first time with the sound of the Call to Prayer. These sounds which came from all directions and the people rushing back and forth to perform the ritual ablution did not escape him. He could make no sense of all this stir at such an early hour of the morning and became rather unsettled. It is quite likely that he feared for his life, in spite of the protection that he was granted. He called out to ‘Abbas, wanting to understand what all the fuss was about. “O Abu Fadl,” he said. “What is the matter with everyone? What are they doing? Or do they mean to kill me?”

It was his friend who would yet again put his mind at ease. “No,” replied ‘Abbas. “They have risen for prayer.”

Relieved, even if to some degree, Abu Sufyan was now most curious. “And how often do they pray?” he asked. “Five times in all, night and day,” ‘Abbas replied.<sup>526</sup>

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eager flurry to win over a person in whom he had invested so much time and effort. He rushed to the Messenger’s tent lest he should lose for all eternity the Abu Sufyan that he had devoted so much of his energy bringing to reason and reconciling. Thus, we see ‘Abbas from this moment on as a staunch believer doing what he could not for 21 years, seizing to the utmost an opportunity he had for the very first time, and conveying the message of Islam fervently and without fear.

<sup>525</sup> Ibn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/251-252; Taberî, *Târîh* 2/157; İbn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/312; İbn-i Seyyidinnâs, *Uyûnu’l-Eser* 2/218; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/113; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü’l-Hüdâ* 5/216

<sup>526</sup> Sâlihî, *Sübûlü’l-Hüdâ* 5/217

After this, they too had slowly begun to make their way next to God's Messenger. There was something else which drew Abu Sufyan's notice at this point. As the Messenger of God performed his ablution, the Companions who were next to him could not bear for even a single drop of his ablution water to fall to the ground and, seeking the spiritual blessings therein, scrambled for each and every drop, to wipe them over their face or skin. Abu Sufyan was witness to a reverence the likes of which he had never seen in the court of any sovereign or king.

The people then lined up in rows for prayer, standing behind God's Messenger, where he pronounced the call indicating that the congregational prayer was about to begin (iqama) and then commenced the prayer with a proclamation of God's greatness (opening takbir). The Companions followed. When he began reciting the Qur'an, everyone suddenly went silent. When God's Messenger knelt, they knelt, all in complete synchrony. For him, everything was so novel, so fresh. In addition to what he had seen thus far, he now witnessed their manner of standing before their Lord, and beheld with admiration the point to which the Meccans of yesterday had come. This state was enough to melt Abu Sufyan's heart, and the sight that caught his eye when they all placed their foreheads on the ground in unison, had completely overpowered him. He seemed to feel the heads placed on the ground being brushed with with spiritual favors coming from beyond the firmaments, and the following sentences fell from his lips:

"By God, in my life I never saw the submissiveness I have seen today, of a people coming from here and there – not even in the case of the Persians who deem themselves noble, or the Greeks who pride themselves in their superiority."

He then turned to 'Abbas and said, "O Abu Fadl, By God, your brother's son is greater than kings!"

Abu Sufyan had slowly begun to open the door, but he was yet not ready to enter. "This is not kingdom, but Prophethood," 'Abbas said, correcting him. This statement also served to demonstrate the difference between the two worlds. In response to 'Abbas' words, Abu Sufyan made do with saying, "Perhaps it is something like that."<sup>527</sup>

By this time, they had entered into the presence of God's Messenger. God's Messenger turned to Abu Sufyan in great compassion and said, "O Abu Sufyan, has not the time come for you to recognize that there is no deity but God?"

These were statements of a fervor that Abu Sufyan not at all expected. The lips from which he expected reproof, anger, and bitterness, poured forth mercy, compassion, and affection. There were so questions that had previously plagued his mind. Their concern was for nothing. Muhammad the Trustworthy was a leader who could forgive when he held power. He did not strike at the first chance he got, and even at a point where they faced loss, he invited them once more to gain, and to absolute gain at that. He breathed a deep breath. He felt as though every word that came from his blessed mouth warmed his heart, and he wanted to let himself go in the embrace of the Prophetic mercy that he had long striven to pursue. He thus began his words by saying, "By my mother and father!" Nothing remained of his former severe stance. He spoke with his head bowed and a

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<sup>527</sup> Ibn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/252; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü'l-Hüdâ* 5/217

genuine sense of surrender. As a person in his right mind and one who knew full well his words, he said:

“How great is your mercy, your compassion, and your forgiveness! Had there been another deity besides God, he would have surely availed me until this time. For both you and I constantly sought help from our deities, but it was always you who was the one to receive it. By God, had not yours but my deities been true instead, would things have ended this way!”

The Messenger of God turned to him once more and said, “Woe upon you, O Abu Sufyan! Has not the time come for you to recognize that I am the Messenger of God?”

He had come to the last part of a long and difficult journey but Abu Sufyan could not bring himself to take the final step and proclaim, “Yes!” In his own way, he still had his doubts. “By my mother and father,” he repeated to God’s Messenger. “How merciful, elevated in compassion, and pardoning you truly are! But, as to that, by God, I still have my doubts.”

‘Abbas, too, who had done nothing but shown Abu Sufyan the way and granted him protection, was out of patience. He did not want his fellow traveler to turn around and go back just because of a little doubt, after he had come so far. In a more serious tone, he called out, “Woe upon you! Believe as I do now, before you are smote on the neck.”

He looked carefully at his crony ‘Abbas, who spoke in a language that he could clearly understand. He was right in what he said, but striking off the past as though in complete disregard was not that easy. But his heart could not remain indifferent to such a heartfelt invitation and he was spent. After standing quietly for a moment, the following words fell from his lips:

“I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and I also bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger.”<sup>528</sup>

With his acceptance of Islam, Abu Sufyan’s companions Hakim ibn Hizam and Budayl ibn Warqa, to whom ‘Abbas has also granted protection, also embraced Islam.<sup>529</sup> These were undoubtedly the first fruits of conquest. They had been freed of the burden of polytheism that they had carried upon their shoulders, and had released themselves to the boundlessness of belief.

Seeing that they had made their position clear, they now spoke much more comfortably. That which they were most curious about now was where and how this journey would come to an end. The Messenger of God related one by one all the spiels at the Ka’ba, the designs and schemes against God and His Messenger, and the murder of twenty-three innocent people in a night raid, in complete disregard and defiance of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, and stated that the time had now come for devoting the Ka’ba, the Sacred House, exclusively to those who are servants to God in the true sense. With heads bowed, they confirmed everything he said. They had indeed saved themselves, but lying before them was a phase the outcome of which was yet unclear. This is why they said, “O Messenger of God, grant protection to the people.”

‘Abbas, too, had already stepped in and suggested to God’s Messenger that as Abu Sufyan was by nature a proud man, it would mean a lot to grant him an honorable position. Abu Bakr

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<sup>528</sup> Ibn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/252; İbn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/312; İbn-i Seyyidinnâs, *Uyûnu’l-Eser* 2/218; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/114; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü’l-Hüdâ* 5/217; İbn-i Kayyim, *Câmi*’ 193

<sup>529</sup> Sâlihî, *Sübûlü’l-Hüdâ* 5/216

supported ‘Abbas in his view. Thereupon, the Messenger of God declared, “Whoever enters the house of Abu Sufyan is safe.”<sup>530</sup>

The treatment that he had expected as a leader had come, but he did not deem this sufficient. He had perhaps recognized that boundless mercy and therefore wished for more. He thus called out, “And how many will my house accommodate?” Naturally, he regarded it as insufficient as he could almost see the Meccans flooding to his house en masse. “Whoever enters the house of Hakim ibn Hizam is safe,” God’s Messenger declared, in so doing also honoring the cousin of his beloved wife Khadija.<sup>531</sup> However, the Meccan envoys were still in expectation. Seeing this, God’s Messenger expanded the sphere of sanctuary as far as possible and said, “Whoever enters the Ka’ba is safe.” There was yet still more expectation, and the Meccan envoys asked, “How many people can the Ka’ba accommodate?” It was as though these people who had until just a few hours ago represented Mecca had gone, and people who had dedicated themselves to winning over the Meccans had come in their place. And so came the final and most comprehensive decree:

“Whoever closes their door is safe.”<sup>532</sup>

This was, in any event, the winning formula – that which would conquer Mecca, and there could not have been a decree that was greater in scope.

Meanwhile, everything that happened in Mecca over the past twenty years flashed before Abu Sufyan’s eyes. What they had aspired to until today, what they had struggled for, and what they were they were now doing! Was what they did in the past right, or the point to which they had come today? He recalled everything that he saw from the moment they had come to Marr al-Zahran until now, and thought that he had no other choice but to accept all this since he faced a force that was impossible to resist. He could not shake off the dilemma he found himself in, and could not put out of his mind the reaction he would face from the people of which he was leader when he returned to Mecca in this state. He could not free himself from the constraints he knew would come on this path where he would become a target for the Meccans, and storms broke within him. Whereas he was the chief of the Meccans and he possessed the power to mobilize the surrounding tribes whenever he wished. At precisely such a moment where he had come face to face with his own self to such an extent, came Satan who began whispering his evil to him; at one point, the thought of going to the surrounding tribes and amassing a large army one last time passed his mind. It could have been possible. He could have pulled through today only to face him tomorrow even mightier, having made such an investment, and could have exacted his revenge for today. But while he was yet entertaining such fancies, a hand touched his shoulder from behind, and said, “Then God would put you to shame and we would be victorious once again.” Startled, he looked back to the owner of that hand and saw that it was none

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<sup>530</sup> Vâkidî, *Megâzî* 552; İbn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/252; Taberî, *Târîh* 3/170; İbn-i Seyyidinnâs, *Uyûnu’l-Eser* 2/218; Ya’kûbî, *Târîh*, 2/39; İbn-i Asâkir, *Târîh* 23/447, 448. The point has also been made that behind this declaration also lay Abu Sufyan’s opening his doors to God’s Messenger years earlier, in the face of the hell-raising spiels of the polytheists against him. For on one of these occasions, Abu Sufyan opened his doors to God’s Messenger when he was suffocated by all the insult and oppression of the Meccans, and prepared a space where he could receive at least some reprieve from their evil. İbn-i Hacer, *İsâbe* 3/413; *Tehzîb* 4/361

<sup>531</sup> İbn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/313; İbn-i Seyyidinnâs, *Uyûnu’l-Eser* 2/220; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/117; Sâlihî, *Sübülü’l-Hüdâ* 5/218

<sup>532</sup> İbn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/314; Sâlihî, *Sübülü’l-Hüdâ* 5/218

other than God's Messenger himself. He was deeply ashamed. Before him stood a person who knew even what he kept hidden in the most innermost recesses of his heart and mind, and in all his sincerity he exclaimed, "I bear witness that you are the Messenger of God!" He then added:

"I turn to God and seek His forgiveness for what I have spoken. Until now, I had some doubts concerning your being a Messenger of God and so kept telling myself, but these thoughts have all vanished. By God, it was none other than the whims of my carnal soul that drove me to entertain such a thought."<sup>533</sup>

Now he too had determined his course and, conceding the error of the steps he had taken thus far, opted for the path of peace and security. The seventy year old Meccan leader who had lead the way in unbelief for twenty-one years was now being reborn. No doubt this rebirth would not be limited to him, and would serve to leaven the birth of the Mecca he represented, in its entirety. For he would go to Mecca as a vanguard and invite its people to peace and amity in a language that was becoming to him as its leader.

### **Sensitivity and Extraordinary Will**

Abu Sufyan's longtime close friend 'Abbas viewed his going with concern.<sup>534</sup> He came to God's Messenger and said, "O Messenger of God, I am not certain that Abu Sufyan will not turn back for good. Can you not keep them with you a while longer so that they may watch the army pass and better grasp the situation?"

Abu Bakr shared his view. God's Messenger sent 'Abbas after Abu Sufyan and his travel companion Hakim ibn Hizam, who had already set off in the direction of Mecca, to call them back. Seeing him approach in haste, Abu Sufyan, suspecting ill-motive, remarked, "What is it, O Banu Hashim! Or is this treachery?"

Realizing his friend's apprehension, 'Abbas was quick to reply. In a manner that would allay all of his fears, and in complete forthrightness he said: "Those who stand behind God's Messenger are not treacherous. I have but an assignment for you. I only ask that you wait here until morning, observe the armies of God march by and behold what God has in store for the idolaters."<sup>535</sup>

It was a reasonable suggestion. With the return of the Meccan envoys, the voice of the Messenger's crier began to resound at Marr al-Zahran: "Let every tribe immediately begin preparations for travel, gathering with their leader beneath their own standard, with their weapons and munitions loaded upon their mounts." All the troops were thus mobilized, in formation for march past.

It did not take long for them to respond. Soon after, every tribe had lined up in rows with their leader and commander, beneath their banners, ready, waiting for the Prophetic command.

The time had now come to show the march of the conquest forces who bedazzled in the dark of night to Abu Sufyan, now in daylight. The show of numbers put on at night was to be confirmed during the day, and Abu Sufyan was to go back to Mecca fully accoutered.

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<sup>533</sup> Ibn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 5/58-61; Ibn-i Hacer, *İsâbe* 3/413, 414; Akk, *Uzamâ* 2/1044

<sup>534</sup> Ibn-i Abdilberr, *İstiâb* 4/1678; İbnü'l-Esîr, *Üsdü'l-Gâbe* 3/189

<sup>535</sup> Vâkıdî, *Megâzî* 552; Taberânî, *Kebîr* 8/8; Sâlihî, *Sübülü'l-Hüdâ* 5/218



The forces then set out in divisions, headed in the direction of the nearer end of the valley where Abu Sufyan waited. It was as though the earth merged with the sky, and was advancing towards Abu Sufyan himself in an awesome harmony. Marr al-Zahran was witness to a celestial march past. The conquest forces marched in the direction of Mecca, twenty divisions led by their commanders, with their standards held aloft.

This was a scene that left Abu Sufyan awe-struck. Marr al-Zahran had all but been readied as a ceremonial ground for Abu Sufyan. For every approaching division, Abu Sufyan asked his close friend ‘Abbas who they were. ‘Abbas informed him concerning their identity and related the dynamics which led to their transformation. They passed by in all their stateliness before Abu Sufyan in groups of two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, five hundred, eight hundred, nine hundred, and a thousand, with their standards rippling above them, with intermittent proclamations of God’s greatness.<sup>536</sup>

‘Abbas, with heart trembling, kept close tabs on Meccan chief Abu Sufyan. As the army marched before them division by division, he strove to dispel the doubts that arose in his mind, spoke confidently of the dynamism of Islam with all his feeling. Abu Sufyan asked question after question, and ‘Abbas related to him the truth in a way he could readily understand and as one who for years shared the same thoughts and sentiments. Abu Sufyan finally asked him questions concerning the Kinana who were then approaching, and ‘Abbas replied that they were the, “Banu Layth, Banu Damra and the Banu Sa’d ibn Bakr.” “Yes!” exclaimed Abu Sufyan. “The people of ill omen! It is because of them that Muhammad now attacks us!” It was time to make the necessary point and ‘Abbas immediately came to task: “God has destined good in this, Muhammad’s offensive.” He then added:

“For it is by virtue of this that today you have attained peace and security, and are now all entering the fold of Islam.”<sup>537</sup>

Just at that point, the Khazraj tribe headed by Sa’d ibn ‘Ubada approached. They numbered one thousand. As a matter of course, Abu Sufyan inquired about them and ‘Abbas responded to him in the same equanimity. The Messenger of God, about whom Abu Sufyan incessantly inquired, was also in the same division. ‘Umar’s resounding voice was immediately recognizable in the army that proceeded majestically. He roused for the troops to march in order and proper formation. The Helpers and Emigrants offered a multicolored display with their distinctive flags. They were fully accoutered. Abu Sufyan could not help but exclaim at one point, “Who can withstand these all these forces!”

Passing by at the very same moment, Sa’d ibn ‘Ubada called out in a deep voice to Meccan leader and new Muslim Abu Sufyan who had caused them so much grief until that day: “Today is the day to make history. Today, the sacredness of the Sanctuary shall be lifted. Today is the day that God will humiliate the Quraysh!”<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> The first division to pass in front of Abu Sufyan was the Banu Sulaym, led by Khalid ibn al-Walid. As they passed, a thousand men repeated in unison the proclamation of God's greatness pronounced by their leader. Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 552; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/116; Sâlihî, *Sûbûlû'l-Hüdâ* 5/219

<sup>537</sup> Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 553

<sup>538</sup> Buhârî, *Megâzî* 48; Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 554; İbn-i Seyyidi'n-Nâs; Uyûnu'l-Eser 2/221; İbn-i Kayyım, *Câmi'* 194

These were words that sent a chill right through Abu Sufyan. He had sweltered in the heat of July<sup>539</sup> to be sure, but Sa'd's words burned him on the inside. They had pierced through his brain and left him utterly dejected. Behind these words was an anger that he had not heard until this point, and that he had not seen in the overall scene that he had witnessed. What is more, the person uttering these words was no ordinary person. He was the leader of one of the two biggest tribes in Medina, the chief of the Khazraj Sa'd ibn 'Ubadā. Abu Sufyan sought a haven of solace that would alleviate his fears and so he declared, "O 'Abbas, how excellent a day for you to protect me!"

Just then, the Messenger of God approached upon his mount, Qaswa'. On his camel sat the embodiment of mercy. *To his right was Abu Bakr and to his left was Usayd ibn Hudayr.* "Look, God's Messenger!" 'Abbas exclaimed with great excitement. "The sovereignty of your brother's son has today grown mighty indeed," Abu Sufyan first said. 'Abbas was again left with correction: "O Abu Sufyan," he said. "This is not sovereignty, but Prophethood!"<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Contrary to what is commonly thought, the conquest of Mecca did not take place in January, but in July. Those who assert that it took place in the first week of January do so without taking into account the intercalation of a month (nasi) by the Arabs, and due to automatic hijri to Gregorian conversion. Whereas the reality is different entirely. To begin with, it is virtually impossible to determine the year in which the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula at the time tampered with the calendar and for which duration. Moreover, accounts of the weather being very hot leading up to Mecca's conquest are well known, as is a narration of God's Messenger, who upon seeing a person who was observing the fast on the journey and trying to keep cool with something like a fan, said: "It is not a part of righteousness to fast while traveling." Buhārī, *Savm* 36 (1946); Müslim, *Sıyâm* 15 (1115); Nesâî, *Sıyâm* 48 (2258). The key determinant in the date Mecca's conquest is Tabuk. As is known, Tabuk took place thirteen months after conquest. Conquest was on the twentieth of Ramadan and God's Messenger advised his Companions not to fast so that they may be vigorous and remain strong, and demonstrated that he himself was not fasting on the day of conquest by drinking some water. Müslim, *Sıyâm* 16 (1120), 15 (1113-1114); Ebû Dâvud, *Savm* 27 (2365); Tirmizî, *Savm* 18 (710); Halebî, *Sîre* 3/112. While on the return from Tabuk, he observed a Ramadan fast in Medina. As indicated in the Qur'an, the hypocrites of the day criticized the departure to Tabuk, using the heat as an excuse (Tevbe 9/81; Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 657). Had this event occurred in January, in the middle of winter, there would not have been such an approach. And if there had been, it would not have been taken into consideration, or would not have been conveyed in the text of the Qur'an. Moreover, Ka'b ibn Malik reports of his remaining behind on the day of Tabuk, and mentions a time when the fruits had begun to ripen and the shade was appealing. Buhârî, *Megâzî* 79 (4418); Müslim, *Tevbe* 9. Abu Khaythama's absence from Tabuk follows similar lines and is based on the same reasons. İbn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/325; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/188. The fruit in Medina was no doubt dates and the season for the ripening of dates is the end of June or the beginning of July. If we are to accept Tabuk as an expedition which took place after mid-June, then the Messenger's return to Medina after close to two months and his observing the fast of Ramadan here, coincides with the month of July. Given that the conquest of Mecca took place one year prior to this date and again in the month of Ramadan – namely the twentieth of Ramadan – then its occurring in July and not January is plausible. Another fact corroborating this concerns Badr. There is no doubt in the sources in relation to Badr's having taken place on the seventeenth of Ramadan. The accounts of Badr in these sources place particular emphasis on the heat (İbn-i Sa'd, *Tabakât* 2/17). When both this is taken into consideration in addition to the above-cited, then it becomes clear that it coincided with the end of August. Taking into account the 10-11 day difference between the Hijri and Gregorian calendars and also given the possibility of a few days' time lag, it is not difficult to presume that the first of the nine days of Ramadan in which God's Messenger fasted (which was at Badr) coincided with the end of August, and that the eight days fast he observed thereafter coincided with the beginning of the months August and June. In other words, God's Messenger observed his nine Ramadan fasts in the hottest months and longest days of the year.

<sup>540</sup> Vâkîdî, *Megâzî* 554; İbn-i Hişâm, *Sîre* 2/252; İbn-i Seyyidi'n-Nâs; Uyûnu'l-Eser 2/219; Taberî, *Târih* 3/170; Ya'kûbî, *Târih* 2/39; İbn-i Asâkir, *Târih* 23/450; Taberânî, *Kebîr* 8/13; İbn-i Esîr, *Kâmil* 2/120; İbn-i Kesîr, *Bidâye* 4/313; Halebî, *Sîre* 3/116

But Abu Sufyan could not get Sa'd ibn 'Ubada's words out of his mind. These had really hit home. He looked at God's Messenger at length – there was not a single sign of violence or aggression. Far from it, he was bent double in humility and grew like an avalanche, he advanced like endless plains. In the tumult and upheaval in his imagination, he tried to reconcile the Sa'd he had just heard, with him, but could not do so. He finally understood that God's Messenger and violence just could not be reconciled. He, too, turned to the haven in which all else sought refuge, and to make certain that there was no mistake, he called out: "O Messenger of God, did you command the killing of your people? Look at what Sa'd ibn 'Ubada is saying!"

God's Messenger was of course not aware of this. It was as though he had read the wrong that had been committed in his perturbation. "What has he said?" he asked. His manner when asking this question revealed a jeweler's sensitivity. Witness to such a stance, Abu Sufyan took a deep breath and repeated verbatim Sa'd's words. "While you," he then said, are the best of people, the most merciful of people, and the best of people to their kin. In God's name I ask that you are benevolent to your people."

The Messenger of God had become uneasy also, for Abu Sufyan was not just one man. The disquiet he felt on that day had the possibility of becoming projected in the Meccans exponentially. And Sa'd's words, in his inability to discern the Messenger's intention and in succumbing to the force of his emotion, were utterances that did not reflect what was to happen after this point. On top of that, it was categorically opposed to the general strategy that was followed inch by inch. In fact, there had never been the notion in the Messenger's world of reciprocating the harm done to him until now. What mattered was the truth's being perceived and understood, and for the people to set out on the path of their deliverance. And what further gestures he was yet to make to even those who wished to deprive him of the right to live. In any event, the pain and anguish of the past was about to give way to the joy of reunion. Sa'd had thus lost out to his emotions and had made an isolated outburst. However, neither his position, nor the context and the timing would allow for this. This is why God's Messenger first called out, "Sa'd has been mistaken, O Abu Sufyan." He wished to express that his fears were groundless, in the clear, velvet tone of voice that set Abu Sufyan's heart at ease. He then said,

"Today is the day of mercy! Today, God shall raise the honor of the Ka'ba! Today, the Ka'ba will be bespread with a covering and adorned. Today will the day where God will honor the Quraysh."

In fact, these words of God's Messenger would have sufficed in relieving both Abu Sufyan and all the Meccans in his person. However, God's Messenger did not stop here, and he took to dismissing Sa'd ibn 'Ubada, whose opinion he frequently sought and who he loved dearly, from his post as commander.<sup>541</sup> Whereas Sa'd was the leader of the Khazraj whose fellow

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<sup>541</sup> Just as God's Messenger did not allow for any tension or unease in his audience, he was never silent in the face of those who sparked such tension and unease. In such situations, he openly set forth the wrong that had been done and, by punishing the perpetrators, crowned his words with his actions. As such, he established a climate of transparency, in which no one would have any reason for concern or anxiety. There is no Companion of God's Messenger who did wrong and were shown favoritism or protected against the others, or whose faults were brushed over. What is more, when once approached with such a proposal, he was angered as could possibly be, and saying, "By the One who has my soul in His hand, if Fatima were to do that..." drew attention to the causes of destruction of a society, and forever spoke in the most direct and unequivocal manner. Buhârî, *Megâzî* 53 (4304); Müslim, *Hudûd* 2

tribesmen viewed as the compassionate father figure who protected them and saw to their welfare. Removing such a leader from his position at such a time was not a matter that was at all easily accepted. At the same time, he was leading his men in the greatest of all conquests. The matter was as delicate as not to allow for changing horses in midstream. Despite the fact that conditions were anything but conducive to putting such a preference into play, God's Messenger addressed the incident head-on and did not leave it unresolved. Even if it was a commander who uttered these words, he stripped him of his title and appointed Sa'd's son Qays in his place.<sup>542</sup>

In this way, he demonstrated to those members of his community who were in positions of leadership that removing an individual or commander from office when necessary was also part of the Prophetic methodology. But this was not a Prophetic practice that could be implemented anywhere and at anytime, and only those walking on the Prophetic path could do so.<sup>543</sup>

### Attitude of the Meccans

Abu Sufyan was reborn at Marr al-Zahran and he now returned to Mecca with a brand new identity. Seeing his arrival from afar, his wife Hind had gone into a rage. She noticed almost at once that her husband, whom they had sent to inspect the surrounds, had returned a changed man. This she read from his manner of walking. She called out to the Meccans, pointing to her husband, "Kill this traitor!" When he came up to her, she seized him by the collar, screaming insults at him while pulling at his beard. "Kill this old coward! What a rotten protector and disgraceful leader of the people," she screamed, kicking her husband, the chief of Meccan, for all the Meccans to see.

An argument between husband and wife getting too far out of hand. Hind possessed a spirited and dominant temperament; she knew how to make herself heard in assemblies and drew the attention of the people with her flair for language and literature. But the times had changed, and the era was now another. Even the sun rose over Mecca in a different way that day. Worried of his wife's evil intent, Abu Sufyan's attitude was that there was no need for foolhardiness and he invited the Meccans to common sense. "O people of the Quraysh," he proclaimed. Indicating his wife Hind with one hand, he scolded the Meccans saying, "Shame on you! Let not this woman deceive you. Here is Muhammad in full march upon us with an army that you cannot possibly resist. And he is right on our doorstep."

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<sup>542</sup> Vâkıdî, *Megâzî* 554; İbn-i Seyyidi'n-Nâs; Uyûnu'l-Eser 2/221; İbn-i Asâkir, *Târih* 23/454; İbn-i Kayyım, *Câmi'* 194; Sâlihî, *Sübûlü'l-Hüdâ*, 5/221-222. It seems to me that this incident has much to teach us, on the point of solving those problems in our day that have become gangrenous and that we have just not managed to resolve.

<sup>543</sup> The message that the Messenger of God gives to his community, with such sensitivity and resolve is axiomatic. By means of the steps that he took at such a time where a tangible action had not yet been undertaken and where emotion had only just been rendered into speech, he says to us who constantly make the same mistakes and who cannot seem to get back on our feet: "If you seek to solve your problems which have become affected by gangrene, then be as transparent as you possibly can!" Do not cover up the mistakes of others, even if they be those closest to you. For that matter, impose even heavier sanctions on their wrongs, however small. When people who are required, by virtue of their position, to display even greater sensitivity and care make such outbursts, subject them to a penalty that everyone can see so that similar wrongs are not repeated by those in similar positions."