

Sad ibn Abi Waqqas

We are now in a small town in a narrow valley. There is no vegetation, no livestock, no gardens, no rivers. Desert after desert separates the town from the rest of the world. During the day the heat of the sun is unbearable and the nights are still and lonely. Tribes flock to it like animals in the open country flock to a water-hole. No government rules. There is no religion to guide people except one which promotes the worship of stone idols. There is no knowledge except priestcraft and a love for elegant poetry. This is Makkah and these are the Arabs.

In this town lies a young man who has not yet seen twenty summers. He is short and well-built and has a very heavy crop of hair. People compare him to a young lion. He comes from a rich and noble family. He is very attached to his parents and is particularly fond of his mother. He spends much of his time making and repairing bows and arrows and practising archery as if preparing himself for some great encounter. People recognize him as a serious and intelligent young man. He finds no satisfaction in the religion and way of life of his people, their corrupt beliefs and disagreeable practices. His name is Sad ibn Abi Waqqas.

One morning at about this time in his life the genial Abu Bakr came up and spoke softly to him. He explained that Muhammad ibn Abdullah the son of his late cousin Aminah bint Wahb had been given Revelations and sent with the religion of guidance and truth. Abu Bakr then took him to Muhammad in one of the valleys of Makkah. It was late afternoon by this time and the Prophet had just prayed Salat al-Asr. Sad was excited and overwhelmed and responded readily to the invitation to truth and the religion of One God. The fact that he was one of the first persons to accept Islam was something that pleased him greatly.

The Prophet, peace be on him, was also greatly pleased when Sad became a Muslim. He saw in him signs of excellence. The fact that he was still in his youth promised great things to come. It was as if this glowing crescent would become a shining full moon before long. Perhaps other young people of Makkah would follow his example, including some of his relations. For Sad ibn Abi Waqqas was in fact a maternal uncle of the Prophet since he belonged to the Bani Zuhrah, the clan of Aminah bint Wahb, the mother of the Prophet, peace be upon him. For this reason he is sometimes referred to as Sad of Zuhrah, to distinguish him from several others whose first name was Sad.

The Prophet is reported to have been pleased with his family relationship to Sad. Once as he was sitting with his companions, he saw Sad approaching and he said to them: "This is my maternal uncle. Let a man see his maternal uncle!"

While the Prophet was delighted with Sad's acceptance of Islam, others including and especially his mother were not. Sad relates: "When my mother heard the news of my Islam, she flew into a rage. She came up to me and said:

"O Sad! What is this religion that you have embraced which has taken you away from the religion of your mother and father...? By God, either you forsake your new religion or I would not eat or drink until I die. Your heart would be broken with grief for me and remorse would consume you on account of the deed which you have done and people would censure you forever more."

'Don't do (such a thing), my mother,' I said, 'for I would not give up my religion for anything.'

However, she went on with her threat... For days she neither ate nor drank. She became emaciated and weak. Hour after hour, I went to her asking whether I should bring her some food or something to drink but she persistently refused, insisting that she would neither eat nor drink until she died or I abandoned my religion. I said to her:

'Yaa Ummaah! In spite of my strong love for you, my love for God and His Messenger is indeed stronger. By God, if you had a thousand souls and one soul after another were to depart, I would not abandon this my religion for anything.' When she saw that I was determined she relented unwillingly and ate and drank."

It was concerning Sad's relationship with his mother and her attempt to force him to recant his faith that the words of the Quran were revealed: "And we enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents. In pain upon pain did his mother bear him and his weaning took two years. So show gratitude to Me and to your parents. To Me is the final destiny.

"But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not. Yet bear them company in this life with justice and consideration and follow the way of those who turn to Me. In the end, the return of you all is to Me and I shall tell you (the truth and meaning of) all that you used to do." (Surah Luqman, 31: 14-15).

In these early days of Islam, the Muslims were careful not to arouse the sensibilities of the Quraysh. They would often go out together in groups to the glens outside Makkah where they could pray together without being seen. But one day a number of idolaters came upon them while they were praying and rudely interrupted them with ridicule. The Muslims felt they could not suffer these indignities passively and they came to blows with the idolaters. Sad ibn Abi Waqqas struck one of the disbelievers with the jawbone of a camel and wounded him. This was the first blood shed in the conflict between Islam and kufr - a conflict that was later to escalate and test the patience and courage of the Muslims.

After the incident, however, the Prophet enjoined his companions to be patient and forbearing for this was the command of God: "And bear with patience what they say and avoid them with noble dignity. And leave Me alone to deal with those who give the lie to the Truth, those who enjoy the blessings of life (without any thought of God) and bear with them for a little while." (The Quran, Surah al Muzzammil, 71: 10).

More than a decade later when permission was given for the Muslims to fight. Sad ibn Abi Waqqas was to play a distinguished role in many of the engagements that took place both during the time of the Prophet and after. He fought at Badr together with his young brother Umayr who had cried to be allowed to accompany the Muslim army for he was only in his early teens. Sad returned to Madinah alone for Umayr was one of the fourteen Muslim martyrs who fell in the battle.

At the Battle of Uhud, Sad was specially chosen as one of the best archers together with Zayd, Saib the son of Uthman ibn Mazun and others. Sad was one of those who fought vigorously in defence of the Prophet after some Muslims had deserted their positions. To urge him on, the Prophet, peace be on him, said: "Iirmi Sad...Fidaaka Abi wa Ummi " Shoot, Sad ...may my mother and father be your ransom."

Of this occasion, Ali ibn Abi Talib said that he had not yet heard the Prophet, peace be on him, promising such a ransom to anyone except Sad. Sad is also known as the first companion to have shot an arrow in defence of Islam. And the Prophet once prayed for him:

"O Lord, direct his shooting and respond to his prayer." Sad was one of the companions of the Prophet who was blessed with great wealth. Just as he was known for his bravery, so he was known for his generosity. During the Farewell Pilgrimage with the Prophet, he fell ill. The Prophet came to visit him and Sad said:

"O Messenger of God. I have wealth and I only have one daughter to inherit from me. Shall I give two thirds of my wealth as sadaqah?" "No," replied the Prophet. "Then, (shall I give) a half?." asked Sad and the Prophet again said 'no'.

"Then, (shall I give) a third?' asked Sad.

"Yes," said the Prophet. "The third is much. Indeed to leave your heirs well-off' is better than that you

should leave them dependent on and to beg from people. If you spend anything seeking to gain thereby the pleasure of God, you will be rewarded for it even if it is a morsel which you place in your wife's mouth."

Sad did not remain the father of just one child but was blessed thereafter with many children.

Sad is mainly renowned as the commander-in-chief of the strong Muslim army which Umar despatched to confront the Persians at Qadisiyyah. Umar wanted nothing less than an end to Sasanian power which for centuries had dominated the region.

To confront the numerous and well-equipped Persians was a most daunting task. The most powerful force had to be mustered. Umar sent despatches to Muslim governors throughout the state to mobilize all able-bodied persons who had weapons or mounts, or who had talents of oratory and other skills to place at the service of the battle.

Bands of Mujahidin then converged on Madinah from every part of the Muslim domain. When they had all gathered, Umar consulted the leading Muslims about the appointment of a commander-in-chief over the mighty army. Umar himself thought of leading the army but Ali suggested that the Muslims were in great need of him and he should not endanger his life. Sad was then chosen as commander and Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf, one of the veterans among the Sahabah said:

"You have chosen well! Who is there like Sad?" Umar stood before the great army and bade farewell to them. To the commander-in-chief he said:

"O Sad! Let not any statement that you are the uncle of the Messenger of God or that you are the companion of the Messenger of God distract you from God. God Almighty does not obliterate evil with evil but he wipes out evil with good.

"O Sad! There is no connection between God and anyone except obedience to Him. In the sight of God all people whether nobleman or commoner are the same. Allah is their Lord and they are His servants seeking elevation through taqwa and seeking to obtain what is with God through obedience. Consider how the Messenger of God used to act with the Muslims and act accordingly..."

Umar thus made it clear that the army was not to seek conquest for the sake of it and that the expedition was not for seeking personal glory and fame.

The three thousand strong army set off. Among them were ninety nine veterans of Badr, more than three hundred of those who took the Pledge of Riffwan (Satisfaction) at Hudaybiyyah and three hundred of those who had participated in the liberation of Makkah with the noble Prophet. There were seven hundred sons of the companions. Thousands of women also went on to battle as auxiliaries and nurses and to urge the men on to battle.

The army camped at Qadisiyyah near Hira. Against them the Persians had mobilized a force of 120,000 men under the leadership of their most brilliant commander, Rustum.

Umar had instructed Sad to send him regular despatches about the condition and movements of the Muslim forces, and of the deployment of the enemy's forces. Sad wrote to Umar about the unprecedented force that the Persians were mobilizing and Umar wrote to him:

"Do not be troubled by what you hear about them nor about the (forces, equipment and methods) they would deploy against you. Seek help with God and put your trust in Him and send men of insight, knowledge and toughness to him (the Chosroes) to invite him to God... And write to me daily."

Sad understood well the gravity of the impending battle and kept in close contact with the military high command in Madinah. Although commander-in-chief, he understood the importance of shura.

Sad did as Umar instructed and sent delegations of Muslims first to Yazdagird and then to Rustum, inviting them to accept Islam or to pay the jizyah to guarantee their protection and peaceful existence or to choose war if they so desired.

The first Muslim delegation which included Numan ibn Muqarrin was ridiculed by the Persian Emperor, Yazdagird. Sad sent a delegation to Rustum, the commander of the Persian forces. This was led by Rubiy ibn Aamir who, with spear in hand, went directly to Rustam's encampment. Rustam said to him:

"Rubiy! What do you want from us? If you want wealth we would give you. We would provide you with provisions until you are sated. We would clothe you. We would make you become rich and happy. Look, Rubiy! What do you see in this assembly of mine? No doubt you see signs of richness and luxury, these lush carpets, fine curtains, gold embroidered walls, carpets of silk...Do you have any desire that we should bestow some of these riches which we have on you?"

Rustum thus wanted to impress the Muslim and allure him from his purpose by this show of opulence and grandeur. Rubiy looked and listened unmoved and then said:

"Listen, O commander! Certainly God has chosen us that through us those of His creation whom He so desires could be drawn away from the worship of idols to Tawhid (the affirmation of the unity of God), from the narrow confines of preoccupation with this world to its boundless expanse and from the tyranny of rulers to justice of Islam.

"Whoever accepts that from us we are prepared to welcome him. And whoever fights us, we would fight him until the promise of God comes to pass." "And what is the promise of God to you?" asked Rustum. "Paradise for our martyrs and victory for those who live."

Rustum of course was not inclined to listen to such talk from a seemingly wretched person the likes of whom the Persians regarded as barbaric and uncivilized and whom they had conquered and subjugated for centuries.

The Muslim delegation returned to their commander-in-chief. It was clear that war was now inevitable. Sad's eyes filled with tears. He wished that the battle could be delayed a little or indeed that it might have been somewhat earlier. For on this particular day he was seriously ill and could hardly move. He was suffering from sciatica and he could not even sit upright for the pain.

Sad knew that this was going to be a bitter, harsh and bloody battle. And for a brief moment he thought, if only... but no! The Messenger of God had taught the Muslims that none of them should say, "If....." To say "If....." implied a lack of will and determination and wishing that a situation might have been different was not the characteristic of a firm believer. So, despite his illness, Sad got up and stood before his army and addressed them. He began his speech with a verse from the glorious Quran:

"And indeed after having exhorted (man), We have laid it down in all the books of Divine wisdom that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth." Surah al-Anbiyaa, 21:105).

The address over, Sad performed Salat az-Zuhr with the army. Facing them once again, he shouted the Muslim battle cry "Allahu Akbar" four times and directed the fighters to attack with the words:

"Hayya ala barakatillah Charge, with the blessings of God." Standing in front of his tent, Sad directed his soldiers and spurred them on with shouts of Allahu Akbar (God is Most Great) and La hawla wa la quwwata ilia billah (there is no power or might save with God). For four days the battle raged. The Muslims displayed valor and skill. But a Persian elephant corps wrought havoc in the ranks of the Muslims. The ferocious battle was only resolved when several renowned Muslim warriors made a rush in the direction of the Persian commander. A storm arose and the canopy of Rustam was blown into the river. As he tried to flee he was detected and slain. Complete confusion reigned among the Persians and they fled in disarray.

Just how ferocious the battle was can be imagined when it is known that some thirty thousand persons on both sides fell in the course of four days' fighting. In one day alone, some two thousand Muslims and about ten thousand Persians lost their lives.

The Battle of Qadisiyyah is one of the major decisive battles of world history. It sealed the fate of the Sasanian Empire just as the Battle of Yarmuk had sealed the fate of the Byzantine Empire in the east.

Two years after Qadisiyyah, Sad went on to take the Sasanian capital. By then he had recovered his health. The taking of Ctesiphon was accomplished after a brilliant crossing of the Tigris river while it was in flood. Sad has thus gone down in the annals of history as the Hero of Qadisiyyah and the Conqueror of Ctesiphon.

He lived until he was almost eighty years old. He was blessed with much influence and wealth but as the time of death approached in the year 54 AH, he asked his son to open a box in which he had kept a course woolen jubbah and said: "Shroud me in this, for in this (jubbah) I met the Mushrikin on the day of Badr and in it I desire to meet God Almighty."

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