

## 25. Hadith Al-Rayah, Investigating Its Authenticity

Before Hunayn (8 AH), ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ran away from the battlefield at least twice – during Khandaq (5 AH) and at Khaybar (7 AH). It was at Khaybar that *Hadith al-Rayah* was declared by the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*. We will therefore briefly examine what the second *khalifah* did during the Khandaq battle before moving on to Khaybar. Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) records:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا يزيد قال انا محمد بن عمرو عن أبيه عن جده علقمة بن وقاص قال أخبرني عائشة قالت خرجت يوم الخندق أظفوا آثار الناس قالت فسمعت وئيد الأرض ورائي يعني حس الأرض قالت فالتفت فإذا أنا بسعد بن معاذ ومعه بن أخيه الحارث بن أوس يحمل مجنة قالت فجلست إلى الأرض فمر سعد وعليه درع من حديد قد خرجت منها أطرافه فأنا أتخوف على أطراف سعد قالت وكان سعد من أعظم الناس وأطولهم قالت فمر وهو يرتجز ويقول (ليت قليلا يدرك الهيجا جمل ... ما أحسن الموت إذا حان الأجل) قالت ففقت فافتحمت حديقة فإذا فيها نفر من المسلمين وإذا فيهم عمر بن الخطاب وفيهم رجل عليه سبغة له يعني مغفرا فقال عمر ما جاء بك لعمري والله إنك لجرئة وما يؤمنك أن يكون بلاء أو يكون تحوز قالت فما زال يلومني حتى تمنيت أن الأرض انشقت لي ساعتئذ فدخلت فيها قالت فرفع الرجل السبغة عن وجهه فإذا طلحة بن عبيد الله فقال يا عمر ويحك انك قد أكثرت منذ اليوم وأين التحوز أو الفرار إلا إلى الله عز وجل

‘Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Yazid – Muhammad b. ‘Amr – his father – his grandfather ‘Alqamah b. Waqqas – ‘Aishah:

I went out on the Day of al-Khandaq **and I stood behind the people**. So, I heard footsteps coming from behind me. I turned around and saw Sa’d b. Mu’adh, and his nephew al-Harith b. Aws was carrying his armour. Therefore, I sat down on the ground and Sa’d passed by, wearing an iron armour from which his limbs had come out. I was afraid of Sa’d’s limbs. Sa’d was one of the most huge and tallest people. Sa’d passed by, singing a battle song, saying: “Very soon the battle will meet a camel ... What a good death it is when the time has come.”

**Then I stood up and entered a garden. There was a small group of Muslims there, and ‘Umar b.**

**al-Khaṣṣab was amongst them and there was another man who was wearing a mask.** ‘Umar said: “What brought you here? I swear by my life and I swear by Allah, you are a reckless woman! What assures you against the occurrence of a disaster or capture?” He kept blaming me so much until I wished that the earth would split open for me so that I could enter into it. Then the (masked) man removed the mask from his face, and he was Talhah b. ‘Ubayd Allah. So he said, “Woe to you, O Umar! You have said too much today! And where is the writhing movement or the flight except to Allah the Almighty?”<sup>1</sup>

‘Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) has copied the exact same narration in his *Sahihah*, and states:

أخرجه الإمام أحمد (6 / 141 - 142) عن محمد بن عمرو عن أبيه عن علقمة ابن وقاص، قال: أخبرتني عائشة قالت....

قلت: وهذا إسناد حسن. وقال الهيثمي في " مجمع الزوائد " (6 / 128): " رواه أحمد وفيه محمد بن عمرو بن علقمة وهو حسن الحديث، وبقيه رجاله ثقات". وقال الحافظ في " الفتح " (11 / 43): " وسنده حسن

Imam Ahmad (6/141-142) recorded it from Muhammad b. ‘Amr – his father – ‘Alqamah b. Waqqas – ‘Aishah....

I (Al-Albani) say: **This chain is *hasan***. Al-Haythami said in *Majma’ al-Zawaid* (6/128): “Ahmad recorded it and in the chain is Muhammad b. ‘Amr b. ‘Alqamah, and his *hadith* is *hasan*, and the other narrators in the chain are trustworthy”. Al-Hafiz also said in *al-Fath* (11/43): “**And its chain is *hasan***”.<sup>2</sup>

Imam Ibn Hibban (d. 354 H) too has documented the report in his *Sahih*<sup>3</sup>. ‘Allamah al-Albani says:

حسن

*Hasan*<sup>4</sup>

Shaykh al-Arnauṭ confirms this:

حديث حسن

*A hasan hadith*<sup>5</sup>

The question is: what was ‘Umar and his few colleagues doing in a garden, hidden from view, while the Messenger of Allah and the other Sahabah were actively in battle against the allied forces of the pagans? The people, as testified by Umm al-Muminin ‘Aishah, were at the warfront. She was standing

*behind* the fighting soldiers. So, ‘Umar and his small band were completely away from the front, *at the back* of everyone else. Was it a tactical *land* ambush by them?

But, that was not possible! Firstly, it was a *trench* war. If anything, ‘Umar and his colleagues should be standing with the Prophet *at the front* – by the trench – preventing the enemies of Allah from successfully crossing over. Secondly, the Messenger did not permit any Sahabi to leave his presence, as reported by the Qur’an about the Battle of Khandaq:

وإذ قالت طائفة منهم يا أهل يثرب لا مقام لكم فارجعوا ويستأذن فريق منهم النبي يقولون إن بيوتنا عورة وما هي بعورة إن يريدون إلا فرارا ولو دخلت عليهم من أقطارها ثم سئلوا الفتنة لآتوها وما تلبثوا بها إلا يسيرا ولقد كانوا عاهدوا الله من قبل لا يولون الأدبار وكان عهد الله مسئولا قل لن ينفعكم الفرار إن فررتم من الموت أو القتل وإذا لا تمتعون إلا قليلا

And when a party of them said, “O people of Yathrib! You do not stand any chance. Therefore, return”. And a band of them asked for permission of the Prophet, saying: “Truly, our homes are vulnerable!” But they (i.e. their houses) were not vulnerable. **They (i.e. those soldiers) only wished to flee!** And if the enemy had entered upon them from its (i.e. Madinah’s) borders, and they had been asked to commit sedition (against Islam), they would surely have committed it and would have only hesitated a little.

And indeed they had already made a covenant with Allah not to flee, and a covenant with Allah must be answered for. **Say: Running away will not benefit you** if you flee from death or killing, and then you will enjoy no more than a little while!”<sup>6</sup>

The verses confirm that the enemy never breached the borders of Madinah. They further establish that the homes of the people of the city were safe. Of course, it was the Battle of Khandaq (i.e. the Battle of the Trench). Therefore, all the fighting was supposed to be done *at the trench*, not within the boundaries of Madinah. Lastly, there is zero evidence of any deployment of anyone by the Prophet, during the battle, to mount any ambush in any garden in the city!

As such, the presence of ‘Umar and his colleagues in a safe garden had absolutely no military value or legitimacy. Moreover, one of them was masking his face to conceal his identity. Meanwhile, he too had no tactical or strategic reason to use a mask. It is obvious, from the circumstances and his conduct, that he felt shame for what they were doing in the garden, and would not like anyone to identify him with it, if they were detected. But, Umm al-Muminin ‘Aishah knew his voice very well, being his relative. So, it was pointless for him to conceal his identity before her while criticizing ‘Umar.

‘Umar and his colleagues were, without doubt, hiding from battle. They had fled! While the other Muslims were busy preventing the collapse of Madinah by blocking any crossover of the trench by the enemy, he and his colleagues were breathing safely in their hideout. Judging from the panic and instinctive outbursts of ‘Umar, one could also say that he was not aware of the real situation of things in the city. He

apparently thought that the enemy had entered it, and that it was extremely risky to move around. That explains why he moved into, and remained in, the garden in the first place.

At Khaybar, our second *khalifah* repeated his old feat. Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) records:

أخبرنا أبو العباس محمد بن أحمد المحبوبي بمرورنا ثنا سعيد بن مسعود ثنا عبيد الله بن موسى ثنا نعيم بن حكيم عن أبي موسى الحنفي عن علي رضي الله عنه قال : سار النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى خيبر فلما أتاها بعث عمر رضي الله تعالى عنه وبعث معه الناس إلى مدينتهم أو قصرهم فقاتلوهم فلم يلبثوا أن هزموا عمر وأصحابه فجاءوا يجبنونه ويجبنونهم فسار

Abu al-‘Abbas Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Mahbubi – Sa’id b. Mas’ud – ‘Ubayd Allah b. Musa – Na’im b. Hakim – Abu Musa al-Hanafi – ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, journeyed to Khaybar. When he arrived there, he appointed ‘Umar (as commander) and appointed some people with him (as his troops) to conquer their city or castle. So, they (‘Umar and his troops) fought them (i.e. the people of Khaybar). **But ‘Umar and his troops did not hesitate before fleeing.** So, they came back **and they (the troops) accused him (‘Umar) of COWARDICE** while he too accused them of cowardice.[7](#)

Al-Hakim says:

هذا حديث صحيح الإسناد

This *hadith* has a *sahih* chain<sup>8</sup>

Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) HHconfirms:

صحيح

*Sahih*<sup>9</sup>

Imam al-Hindi (d. 975 H) copies a fuller version:

عن علي قال : سار رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إلى خيبر فلما أتاها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم بعث عمر ومعه الناس إلى مدينتهم وإلى قصرهم فقاتلوهم فلم يلبثوا أن هزموا عمر وأصحابه فجاء يجبنونهم ويجبنونهم فسار ذلك رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال : لأبعثن عليهم رجلا يحب الله ورسوله ويحبه الله ورسوله يقاتلهم حتى يفتح الله له ليس بفرار فتطاول الناس لها ومدوا أعناقهم يرونه أنفسهم رجاء ما قال فمكث رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ساعة فقال : أين علي ؟ فقالوا : هو أرمد قال : ادعوه لي فلما أتته فتح عيني ثم تغل فيها ثم أعطاني اللواء فانطلقت به سعيا خشية أن يحدث رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فيها حدثا أو في حتى أتيتهم فقاتلتهم

فبرز مرحب يرتجز وبرزت له أرتجز كما يرتجز حتى التقينا فقتله الله بيدي وانهزم أصحابه فتحصنوا وأغلقوا الباب فأتينا الباب فلم أزل أعالجه حتى فتحه الله

Narrated 'Ali:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, journeyed to Khaybar. When the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, arrived there, he appointed 'Umar (as commander) and with him some people (as his troops) to conquer their city or castle. So, they ('Umar and his troops) fought them (i.e. the people of Khaybar). **But 'Umar and his troops did not hesitate before fleeing.** So, they came back and he accused them of cowardice **while they too (the troops) accused him ('Umar) of COWARDICE.** The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, roundly condemned that and said, "I will certainly appoint over you a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger too love him. He will fight them until Allah grants him victory. **He is not someone who flees.**"

So, the people longed for it (i.e. the expedition) and extended their necks, each of them wishing that he be the chosen one. The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, remained silent for a while and then said: "**Where is Ali?**" They said: "He is sore-eyed." He said: "Summon him for me." When I came to him, he opened my eyes and put his saliva on them. Then, he gave the flag to me and so I proceeded fast, fearing that the Messenger of Allah might make a new decision concerning it (i.e. the expedition), or me, until I reached them (i.e. the people of Khaybar). So, I fought them. Then Marhab (the warrior of Khaybar) offered a duel challenge, reciting war poetry and I accepted his duel challenge, reciting war poetry like people do, until we clashed and Allah killed him through my hand. As a result, his companions fled away into their castle, and locked the door. We went to the door and I did not stop trying to break it until Allah opened it. [10](#)

Al-Hindi comments:

والبزار وسنده حسن

Recorded by al-Bazzar **and its chain is *hasan*.** [11](#)

'Ali's encounter with Marhab is documented by Imam Muslim (d. 261 H) as well:

حدثنا أبو بكر بن أبي شيبة حدثنا هاشم بن القاسم ح وحدثنا إسحاق بن إبراهيم أخبرنا أبو عامر العقدي كلاهما عن  
عكرمة ابن عمار ح وحدثنا عبدالله بن عبدالرحمن الدارمي وهذا حديثه أخبرنا أبو علي الحنفي عبيدالله بن  
عبدالمجيد حدثنا عكرمة ( وهو ابن عمار ) حدثني إياس بن سلمة حدثني أبي قال

ثم أرسلني إلى علي وهو أرمم فقال لأعطين الراية رجلا يحب الله ورسوله أو يحبه الله ورسوله قال فأتيته عليا....

فجئت به أقوده وهو أرمد حتى أتيت به رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فبسق في عينيه فبرأ وأعطاه الراية وخرج مرحب فقال قد علمت خيبر أني مرحب ... شاكي السلاح بطل مجرب إذا الحروب أقبلت تلهب فقال علي أنا الذي سمتني أمي حيدر ... كليث الغابات كرية المنظره أوفيهم بالصاع كيل السندره قال فضرب رأس مرحب فقتله ثم كان الفتح على يديه

Abu Bakr b. Abi Shaybah – Hashim b. al-Qasim – Ishaq b. Ibrahim – Abu ‘Amir al-‘Aqdi – ‘Ikrimah b. ‘Amir AND ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Darimi – Abu ‘Ali al-Hanafi ‘Ubayd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Majid – ‘Ikrimah b. ‘Amir – Iyas b. Salamah – my father (Salamah):

.... Then he (the Messenger) sent me to ‘Ali, and he (‘Ali) was sore-eyed. So, he (the Prophet) said, “I verily will give the flag to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger or whom Allah and His Messenger love.” So, I went to ‘Ali and brought him, and he was sore-eyed , until I brought him to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, who applied his saliva to his eyes and he got well.

So, he (the Prophet) gave him the flag and Marhab (at the Khaybar battle ground) came out and said (during the duel), “Khaybar has already known that I am Marhab, a fully-armed and well-tried valorous warrior whenever war comes, spreading its flames.” ‘Ali replied, “I am the one whose mother named him Haydar, like a lion of the forest with a terror-striking countenance. I give them (i.e. my opponents) the measure of *sandara* (i.e. a heavy blow) in exchange for *sa’* (i.e. a small punch).” **‘Ali struck the head of Marhab and killed him. So, the victory was through his hands.**[12](#)

Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) has recorded the same report[13](#), and Shaykh al-Arnau<sup>9</sup> says:

إسناده صحيح على شرط مسلم

Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of Muslim.[14](#)

The Prophet of Allah testified that Amir al-Muminin ‘Ali, *‘alaihi al-salam*, was NOT a person who fled in *any* circumstance, however difficult. He too demonstrated that by accepting the challenge of Marhab in a mortal combat. As such, while all the other Sahabah – including Abu Bakr and ‘Umar – were repeatedly fleeing the battlefields, ‘Ali always stayed till the end. The matter, apparently, was *very* well-known among the Sahabah, which was why some of them did not bother mentioning his name while listing the firm ones at each battle. He made every list by default, and it might be pointless repeating his blessed name while everyone was already aware of this unique status of his.

Imam Ahmad further records another report, with an interesting additional detail:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا زيد بن الحباب حدثني الحسين بن واقد حدثني عبد الله بن بريدة حدثني أبي بريدة قال حاصرنا خيبر فأخذ اللواء أبو بكر فانصرف ولم يفتح له ثم أخذه من الغد عمر فخرج فرجع ولم يفتح له وأصاب الناس يومئذ شدة وجهه فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم انى دافع اللواء غدا إلى رجل يحبه الله

ورسوله ويحب الله ورسوله لا يرجع حتى يفتح له فبتنا طيبة أنفسنا ان الفتح غدا فلما ان أصبح رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم صلى الغداة ثم قام قائما فدعا باللواء والناس على مصافهم فدعا عليا وهو أرمم فتفل في عينيه ودفع إليه اللواء وفتح له قال بريدة وأنا فيمن تناول لها

‘Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Zayd b. al-Habab – al-Husayn b. Waqid – ‘Abd Allah b. Buraydah – Abu Buraydah:

We besieged Khaybar. **So, Abu Bakr took the flag and went. But, he did not achieve victory.** Then, the next day, ‘Umar took it (i.e. the flag), and went and returned without achieving victory. On that day, the people encountered hardship and fatigue. Therefore, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, “I will tomorrow give the flag to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger love him too. **He will not return unless he has achieved victory.**” So, we became absolutely certain that victory would be achieved the next day.

When it was morning, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, performed the morning *Salat*. Then he stood and asked that the flag be brought to him. The people were on their lines. So, he summoned ‘Ali and he (‘Ali) was sore-eyed. Then he spit into his eyes and gave him the flag, **and he (‘Ali) achieved victory.** I was one of those longing for it (i.e. the flag).<sup>15</sup>

Shaykh al-Arnau<sup>16</sup> states:

حديث صحيح وهذا إسناد قوي من أجل حسين بن واقد المروزي

**It is a *sahih hadith***, and this chain is strong (*qawi*) due to Husayn b. Waqid al-Maruzi.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently, Abu Bakr was the first to flee the battlefield at Khaybar, and then ‘Umar. Marhab must have offered both of them duel challenges – as he did to Amir al-Muminin – which they obviously declined and then sped away. The only way to conquer Khaybar was to kill Marhab, who was their legendary warrior, as ‘Ali demonstrated. The fact that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar returned without victory is evidence that both of them, as army commanders, feared Marhab and therefore avoided him.

Imam al-Hindi copies a related report:

عن عبد الرحمن بن أبي ليلى قال : كان علي يخرج في الشتاء في إزار ورداء ثوبين خفيفين و.... قال : أو ما كنت معنا يا أبا ليلى بخيبر ؟ قلت : بلى والله قد كنت معكم قال : فإن رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم بعث أبا بكر فسار بالناس فانهزم حتى رجع إليه وبعث عمر فانهزم بالناس حتى انتهى إليه فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم : لأعطين الراية رجلا يحب الله ورسوله ويحبه الله ورسوله يفتح الله له ليس بفرار فأرسل إلي فدعاني فأتيته وأنا أرمم لا أبصر شيئا فتفل في عيني

‘Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Layli:

‘Ali used to come out in winter wearing light clothes and ... he (‘Ali) said (to me), “Were you not with us, O Abu Layli, at Khaybar?” I said, “Yes, by Allah, I was with you.” He said, “Verily, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, appointed Abu Bakr as commander and he despatched with (some) people.

**BUT HE (ABU BAKR) FLED** until he returned to him (i.e. the Prophet).

And he appointed ‘Umar too as army commander, and HE (‘UMAR) TOO FLED with the people (i.e. his troops) until he got back to him (i.e. the Messenger). So, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, ‘I certainly will give the flag to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger love him too. Allah will grant him victory. **He is not someone who flees.**’ Therefore, he sent for me, and I got to him. I was sore-eyed, and could not see anything. So, he spit into my eye.”<sup>17</sup>

Al-Hindi comments:

والبزار وابن جرير وصححه

Al-Bazzar recorded it, as well as **Ibn Jarir (al-Tabari) WHO DECLARED IT SAHIH**<sup>18</sup>

At this point, let us do some mathematics:

1. Abu Bakr and ‘Umar used to flee from battlefields. Ali never fled, not even once.
3. ‘Ali accepted and won at least the duel challenge at Khaybar. Abu Bakr and ‘Umar ran away from the same duel challenge.
5. Ali was never accused of cowardice by anyone. Rather, the Prophet testified in favour of his absolute bravery and military doggedness. By contrast, ‘Umar was charged with cowardice by his own troops!
7. Abu Bakr and ‘Umar returned from the battlefield, defeated and humiliated. Meanwhile, ‘Ali never left the battlefield until he had achieved victory.
9. The Messenger of Allah had absolute confidence in ‘Ali’s military prowess, and was completely certain that the latter would never fail in his expeditions. On the other hand, both Abu Bakr and ‘Umar disappointed him in their military assignments, and he apparently did not have full confidence in their military abilities.

The question is: who was braver? Was it Amir al-Muminin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib? Or, were Abu Bakr and ‘Umar braver than him, as claimed by Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah? Even if we accepted our Shaykh’s re-definition of “bravery” as fearlessness of the heart, how can anyone still claim that Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman were “brave” *at all* despite that they used to flee the battlefield? Can a person who runs away from battle be said to have a fearless heart? Moreover, what made Amir al-Muminin so firm on the

battlefield? Was it not his fearless heart? From whatever angle we look at it, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman were timid cowards, while ‘Ali was a true warrior, with a completely fearless heart.

Our Shaykh is well aware that with the above facts, his theory can never stand. So, he goes on a voyage of historical revisionism:

فقال النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قبل قدومه لأعطين الراية رجلا يحب الله و رسوله و يحبه الله و رسوله يفتح الله علي يديه و لم تكن الراية قبل ذلك لأبي بكر و لا لعمر و لا قريبا واحد منهما بل هذا من الأكاذيب

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said before his (‘Ali’s) arrival, “I verily will give the flag to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger too love him. Allah will grant victory through his hands.” **The flag was never given before that to Abu Bakr or ‘Umar**, and neither of them even moved near it. **Rather, this (i.e. the claim that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar were given the flag before ‘Ali) is one of the lies.**<sup>19</sup>

But, does that *really* help him or his two *khalifahs*?

- [1.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muassasat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 6, p. 141, # 25140
- [2.](#) Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. ‘Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-‘Ahiyah wa Shayhun min Fiqhiyah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma‘arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1415 H), vol. 1, pp. 143–145, # 67
- [3.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad b. Hibban b. Mu‘adh b. Ma‘bad al-Tamimi al-Darimi al-Busti, ‘Ahih Ibn Hibban bi Tartib Ibn Balban (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 2nd edition, 1414 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 15, pp. 498–501, # 7028
- [4.](#) Ibid
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