

The Treaty of Hdaybiyya

According to the Muslim tradition, the Kaaba in Makkah was built by the Prophets Abraham and his son, Ismael. They consecrated it as the spiritual center of the world of the monotheists. And now Kaaba was the “Qibla” of the Muslims which means that they had to turn toward it when offering their prayers. But the custodians of the Kaaba were the idolaters of Makkah, and they were using it as the national pantheon of polytheism, housing in it 360 idols of their tribes.

By ancient Arab custom, everyone was free to visit the Kaaba – unarmed. Also, by ancient custom, fighting of any kind was prohibited during the four sacred months of the year. One of these months was Zilqa'ada, the 11th month of the calendar.

The Muslims longed to see what for them was the House of God. Therefore, in Zilqa'ada of the sixth year after the Migration, their Prophet declared that he would visit Makkah to perform *Umra* or the Lesser Pilgrimage – unarmed but with his followers. With this intent, he left Medina in late February A.D. 628 with 1400 of his followers. They had taken camels and other animals for sacrifice but no weapons except their swords.

When this caravan of the pilgrims reached the outskirts of Makkah, the Prophet was informed that the idolaters would not allow him to enter the city, and that, they would use force to prevent him from doing so. This report caused great agitation among the Muslims. They halted near a well in a place called Hdaybiyya in the north of Makkah.

The Prophet sent a message to the Quraysh that he wished only to make the customary seven circuits of the Kaaba, sacrifice the animals, and then return to Medina, with his followers. The Quraysh did not agree. Many other messages were sent but the Quraysh said that they would not admit the Muslims into Makkah.

Eventually, the Prophet ordered Umar bin al-Khattab to go to Makkah to explain to the idolaters the purpose of the visit of the Muslims, to assure them that they (the Muslims) had no intention of fighting against anyone, and to give them a pledge that after performing the rites of *Umra* they would leave Makkah immediately and would return to Medina.

But Umar refused to go. He said that there was no one in Makkah to protect him. He suggested, however, that the Prophet ought to send Uthman bin Affan with his message to Makkah since the idolaters would not do him any harm.

Sir William Muir

The first messenger from the Moslem camp to Mecca, a convert from the Beni Khozaa, the Coreish had seized and treated roughly; they maimed the Prophet's camel on which he rode, and even threatened his life. But the feeling was now more pacific, and Mohammed desired Umar to proceed to Mecca as his ambassador. Umar excused himself on account of the personal enmity of the Coreish towards him; he had, moreover, no influential relatives in the city who could shield him from danger; and he pointed to Othman as a fitter envoy.

(The Life of Mohammed, 1877)

S. Margoliouth

Presently it was determined to send a representative to Mecca, but the consciousness that most of the Moslems were stained with Meccan blood, rendered the heroes of Islam unwilling to risk their lives on such an errand; even Omar, ordinarily so ready with his sword, hung back. At last the Prophet's son-in-law, Othman s/o Affan, who had preferred nursing his wife to fighting at Badr, was sent as a grata persona.. *(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)*

It is really strange that Umar was unwilling to risk his life by visiting Makkah. There was no risk involved for him because he was not one of those Muslims who were “stained with Meccan blood.” Since Umar had not killed any Makkan, he would be grata persona with the idolaters at all times. His refusal to obey the command of the Messenger of God, therefore, is incomprehensible.

Umar did not go to Makkah. Nevertheless, he solved the problem by producing his stand-in, Uthman bin Affan. Instead of him, therefore, Uthman was sent to Makkah to parley with the Quraysh. Like Umar himself, Uthman also was not stained with any pagan blood.

The idolaters welcomed Uthman and told him that he was free to perform the *Umra*. But he said that he alone could not perform *Umra*, and that they had to admit the Prophet and all the Muslims with him, into the city. This was not acceptable to the Quraysh, and it was reported that they had arrested him. It was even rumored that they had killed him.

When the rumors of Uthman's execution reached the Prophet, he construed the action of the Quraysh as an ultimatum, and asked the Muslims to renew their pledge of fealty to him. All Muslims pledged their obedience to the Messenger of God regardless of the events which might take place thenceforth.

This pledge is called the “Pledge of Ridhwan” or the “Covenant of Fealty,” and those Muslims who gave it, are called the “Companions of the Tree,” because the Prophet of Islam stood under a tree as they

filed past him renewing their oath of allegiance to him. Their numbers are given as 1400.

The resolution of the Muslims to dare the consequences appears to have put the Quraysh in a more reasonable frame of mind, as they realized that their intransigence could lead to unnecessary bloodshed. Uthman, it turned out, had not been killed as it had been rumored but had only been arrested, and now they released him – an act reflecting a change in their attitude.

Also reflective of this change was the selection by them of one, Suhayl bin Amr, whom they sent to the camp of the Muslims to conclude a treaty with the Prophet of Islam. Suhayl was a man known to be a skillful but not an inflexible negotiator.

Suhayl arrived in Hudaibiyya and opened negotiations with Muhammad, the Messenger of God. After long and wearisome discussions and debate they succeeded in hammering out a treaty, the more important terms of which were as follows:

1. Muhammad and his followers would return to Medina without performing *Umra* (the Lesser Pilgrimage) of the current year.
2. There would be peace between the Muslims and the Quraysh for a period of ten years from the date of the signing of the treaty.
3. If any Makkan accepts Islam and seeks sanctuary with the Muslims in Medina, they would extradite him to Makkah. But if a Muslim, fleeing from Medina, seeks sanctuary with the pagans in Makkah, they would not extradite him.
4. All the tribes of Arabia would be free to enter into treaty relations with any party – the Muslims or the Quraysh.
5. The Muslims would visit Makkah to perform the pilgrimage in the following year but they would not stay in the city for more than three days, and the only weapons which they would be allowed to bring with them, would be their swords in the scabbards.

This treaty is called the Treaty of Hudaibiyya. It is the most important political document in the history of Islam. The secretary selected to indite its terms was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

When the Treaty of Hudaibiyya was being indited, an incident took place which throws a revealing sidelight upon the character of the various protagonists engaged in drafting its terms.

Dictating to Ali, the Prophet said: "Write, In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Beneficent." Suhayl, the Makkan envoy, at once raised objection, and said, "Do not write this. Instead, write, 'In Thy name O Allah.'" The Prophet complied with this demand.

The Prophet next asked Ali to write: "This is a treaty of peace between Muhammad, the Messenger of

God and the Quraysh...” Suhayl again objected, and said: “If we had acknowledged you a messenger of God, why would we be fighting against you? Therefore, do not write the words, ‘the Messenger of God,’ and write only your own name and the name of your father.”

The Prophet was agreeable to comply with this demand also but Ali had already written the words, “Muhammad, the Messenger of God,” and he refused to delete them. He said to his master: “This high rank has been bestowed upon you by Allah Himself, and I shall never delete the words ‘Messenger of Allah’ with my hand.” Thereupon, the Prophet took the pen in his own hand, and deleted the words which were offensive to the idolaters.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya was signed on two copies, one for each party.

R.V.C. Bodley

The original of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya was retained by Mohammed while the duplicate was handed to Suheil for safekeeping in the archives of Mecca. (*The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, 1946*)

In Makkah the leaders of the Quraysh hailed the Treaty of Hudaibiyya as a triumph of their diplomacy. They assumed that Muhammad had at last been outmaneuvered, and that the treaty was tantamount to, even if it was not a formal declaration of, “surrender.” The Quraysh gloated over what they fancied to be the surrender of the enemy but events were soon to show that they were wrong. Far from being a surrender, the Treaty of Hudaibiyya was one of the greatest triumphs of Islam.

Among the followers of the Prophet, however, the Treaty of Hudaibiyya was to produce some violent allergic reactions. Oddly, just like the pagans of Makkah, the “chauvinists” in the Muslim camp also equated it with “surrender.” They were led by Umar bin al-Khattab. He considered its terms “dishonorable,” and he was so much distressed by them that he turned to Abu Bakr for answers to his questions, and the following exchange took place between them:

Umar: Is he (Muhammad) or is he not the Messenger of God?

Abu Bakr: Yes. He is the Messenger of God.

Umar: Are we or are we not Muslims?

Abu Bakr: Yes, we are Muslims

Umar: If we are, then why are we surrendering to the pagans in a matter relating to our faith?

Abu Bakr: He is God's Messenger, and you must not meddle in this matter.

But Umar's defiance only escalated another notch after the admonition by Abu Bakr, and he went to see the Prophet himself. He later said: “I went into the presence of the Prophet, and asked him: ‘Are you not the Messenger of God?’ He answered, ‘Yes, I am.’ I again asked: ‘Are we Muslims not right, and are the

polytheists not wrong?' He replied: 'Yes, that is so.' I further asked: 'Then why are we showing so much weakness to them? After all we have an army. Why are we making peace with them?' He said: 'I am the Messenger of God, and I do whatever He commands me to do.'"

But it appears that Umar was not satisfied even with the answers of the Prophet himself to his questions. The terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya had generated grave doubts in his mind, so he said: "I repeatedly questioned the Prophet regarding the terms of this treaty, and I had never before talked with him in this manner."

Sir John Glubb

Many of the Muslims were disappointed at the outcome of Hudaibiyya, having anticipated a triumphant entry into Mecca. Umar ibn al-Khattab, as usual, voiced his indignation. 'Is he not God's Apostle and are we not Muslims and are they not polytheists?' he demanded angrily from the quiet and faithful Abu Bakr. 'Why not fight them; why compromise thus?' (*The Great Arab Conquests*)

Tor Andre

Umar turned excitedly to Abu Bakr and other leaders who were near the Prophet to ascertain whether they really intended to submit to this humiliation (sic). He declared later that never before had he such doubts concerning Mohammed's truthfulness, and if he had found merely a hundred like-minded men, he would have resigned from the umma of Islam. (*Mohammed – the Man and his Faith*)

Maxime Rodinson

Umar and some others were angry at the idea of treating with these pagans. The future caliph came to upbraid the Prophet. He declared later that if he had a hundred men on his side, he would have seceded. But Muhammad was immovable. (*Muhammad, translated by Anne Carter*)

R.V.C. Bodley

Most of the pilgrims, and Omar especially, were deeply mortified that Mohammed had given in to the Koreishites on practically every point. It seemed incredible to them that, after being brought all this way by their leader who had not been afraid to pursue an enemy which had defeated him, they should be halted outside their objective.

It seemed even more incredible that he should humiliate himself before the Meccan envoy to the extent of neither calling his God by His rightful name nor using his own title, merely because the infidel had so demanded. Omar went as far as to ask: "Are you really God's messenger?"

Omar went to see what the other Moslems felt. He found them much in the same frame of mind as he. For the first time since Islam had come into being, there were signs of revolt. (*The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed*)

Umar declared later that ever since he accepted Islam, he had never had such doubts about the truthfulness of Muhammad as he had on the day the Treaty of Hdaybiyya was signed.

This means that Umar was assailed by doubts from time to time about the truthfulness of Muhammad and his prophetic mission. He probably repressed them each time when they surfaced. But at the touchstone issue of the Treaty of Hdaybiyya, his chronic doubts erupted with such terrific force that he could not suppress them. Haunted by his doubts, he actually considered leaving the fraternity of Islam itself but could not find anyone in the camp who would give him moral support in his “enterprise.”

The traditional Sunni line has been that in showing defiance and insolence to Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bait), Umar was prompted by his love of Islam. According to them, he loved Islam so much that he was “carried away.” Earlier, he had refused to obey the Prophet's order to carry a message to the Quraysh in Makkah. That refusal, probably, was also prompted by the same love.

Those people who attribute Umar's histrionics to his love for Islam, are, in fact, suggesting that he loved Islam more than Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, himself did! Also, by his conduct, he was suggesting that God's Messenger was wrong in seeking peace with the Quraysh but he himself was right, and that it was his duty to “correct” him (Muhammad Mustafa).

Only a day or so earlier, Umar had taken an oath to “obey the Messenger of God” through thick and thin, in peace and in war, in prosperity and in adversity. It was perhaps this pledge that impelled him to show himself more “royalist” than the “king” himself!

If it is a coincidence that both the Quraysh in Makkah, and Umar and his supporters in the Muslim camp, read in the Treaty of Hdaybiyya, the “surrender” of the Muslims, then it was truly remarkable. But if Umar's saber-rattling that day had led to a showdown with the Quraysh, then one can surmise what part he would have played in it, judging by his own “track record” both before and after.

Writing about the Treaty of Hdaybiyya, Lt. General Sir John Glubb says in his book, *The Life and Times of Mohammed*:

The anxieties endured by the Muslims at Hdaybiyya are emphasized by the way in which those days of suspense remained etched on their memories. Many years after, when the Muslim armies had already built up a great empire, when veteran comrades spoke of the early days, the deepest respect was always shown to the men who had fought at Badr and to those who had taken the oath at Hdaybiyya – the two most tense crises of the rise of Islam. (*The Life and Times of Mohammed*)

There was no one among all the companions of Muhammad Mustafa who acquitted himself so honorably, both in the battle of Badr and at Hdaybiyya, and in fact, in all the critical moments in the history of Islam, as Ali ibn Abi Talib.

In the past, he had shown himself to be the first in war; in Hudaibiyya everyone saw that he was also the first in peace. He had demonstrated many times in war that he had absolute trust in Muhammad and his mission, and now he was demonstrating in peace that there was nothing that could ever shake his faith in his master.

After the departure of the Makkah emissaries, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to shave their heads and to offer their animals as sacrifice, as rites of *Umra*. But he was shocked to notice that many of them were in a rebellious mood and did not want to obey his commands.

What actually had happened was that Umar had publicly defied the Apostle of God, and by his example, he had encouraged his followers also to do the same. The Apostle entered his tent, and told his wife that the Muslims were disobeying his orders. She said that if he ignored them, and performed the operations himself, they would follow him.

S. Margoliouth

The Moslems were sulkily silent when told by him (the Prophet) to shave their heads and offer their sacrifices. At last (by the advice of his wife, Umm Salamah), he performed the operations himself, and his followers did the same.

(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam)

His mission accomplished, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, left Hudaibiyya with the pilgrims, to return to Medina. He was still at seven days' journey from Medina, when the following revelation came from Heaven:

Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory (Chapter 48; verse 1)

It was the Treaty of Hudaibiyya that the new revelation called "The Manifest Victory."

Amin Dawidar, the Egyptian historian, writes in his book *Pictures From the Life of the Prophet* (Cairo, 1968, p. 465) that when the Messenger of God promulgated this latest revelation called "Victory," Umar bin al-Khattab came to see him, and asked: "Is this what you call a Manifest Victory?" "Yes," said the Messenger of God, "by Him in Whose hands is my life, this is the Manifest Victory."

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya was truly the "Manifest Victory" as the unfolding drama of history was to reveal, notwithstanding the reservations about it of many Muslims in the camp of the Prophet.

Muhammad Mustafa was the Apostle of Peace. If he had yielded to the pressures of the "chauvinists" in his camp to use strong-arm methods, his whole mission would have been compromised, and the generations of the future would have indicted him for his love of "aggression." But he resisted pressures to appeal to the arbitration of arms, and instead, appealed to the arbitration of peace, and achieved results which no military victory could have gained.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya was a product of inspired statesmanship and political genius of the highest order. It brought immense advantages to Islam. Among them:

1. The Quraysh of Makkah acknowledged Muhammad as an equal. Heretofore, they had considered him a rebel and a fugitive from their vengeance.
2. By signing the treaty, the Quraysh gave tacit recognition to the nascent Islamic State of Medina.
3. Those Muslims who were in Makkah, concealed their faith from the idolaters for fear of persecution by them. But after the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, they began to practice Islam publicly.
4. Till 6 A.H., Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had been locked up in a ceaseless struggle with the pagan Arabs and the Jews, and there had been no opportunity for them to see Islam in action. After the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, they could “appraise” Islam for the first time. This “appraisal” led to the conversion of many of them, and Islam began to spread rapidly. The Treaty of Hudaibiyya opened the gates of proselytization.
5. Many Arab tribes, though still heathen, wanted to enter into treaty relations with the Muslims but felt inhibited by the opposition of the Quraysh. Now they were freed to make alliances with the Muslims.
6. The Treaty of Hudaibiyya is the best answer to those critics who allege that Islam was spread on the point of the sword. There is no better proof than this Treaty of the repudiation, by Muhammad, of war, as an instrument of policy, and of his genuine love of peace. The pagan Arabs were strongly influenced by the Qurayshite propaganda that Muhammad lusted for war. Now they could see with their own eyes that Muhammad retired to Medina without even a “quid pro quo,” even though he had an army with him, and even though he had defeated the Quraysh twice – in 624 and 627.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya also points up the aversion of Qur'an for war. Before the treaty, the Muslims had won the two historic battles of Badr and Ahzab (Trench). If they had been defeated in either of them, Islam would have vanished for all time from the face of the earth.

Victory in both of these battles guaranteed the physical survival of Islam. And yet, Al-Qur'an al-Majid didn't call either of them a manifest victory. In the sight of Qur'an, among all the campaigns of Muhammad, the Treaty of Hudaibiyya alone was the Manifest Victory.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya was the prelude to the victory of Islam over the forces of paganism, polytheism, idolatry, ignorance, injustice and exploitation. Umar bin al-Khattab had bridled at the third clause of the Treaty since it was not reciprocal; but it was precisely this clause that put the Quraysh on the defensive almost immediately, and they came a-begging to the Prophet to repeal it.

Eighteen months after the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, marched into Makkah, as a conqueror, and he was accompanied by ten thousand believers. The conquest of Makkah was a direct result of this Treaty.

Because of these results, many historians have rightly called the Treaty of Hdaybiyya the tour de force of Muhammad's statesmanship.

Marmaduke Pickthall

There was dismay among the Muslims at these terms (the terms of the Treaty of Hdaybiyya). They asked one another: 'Where is the victory that we were promised?' It was during the return journey from Al-Hdaybiyah that the surah entitled *Victory* was revealed. *This truce proved, in fact, to be the greatest victory that the Muslims had till then achieved.*

War had been a barrier between them and the idolaters, but now both partners met and talked together, and the new religion spread more rapidly. In the two years which elapsed between the signing of the truce and the fall of Mecca, the number of converts was greater than the total number of all previous converts.

The Prophet traveled to Al-Hdaybiyah with 1400 men. Two years later, when the Meccans broke the truce, he marched against them with an army of 10,000. (*Introduction to the translation of Holy Qur'an, 1975*)

Two important principles of Islam can be seen in their application in the Treaty of Hdaybiyya, viz.

1. War must be eschewed at all costs unless it is absolutely inevitable. Solution of all problems must be sought and found through peaceful means, without, of course, compromising with the principles of Islam. To the pagans and to many Muslims, it had appeared that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had given "carte blanche" to Suhayl, the Makkan emissary, so that he (Suhayl), in a sense, dictated his own terms.

Notwithstanding such appearances, Muhammad had accepted those terms. Of course, there was no compromise with any principle. It was unthinkable that the Prophet of Islam would compromise with any principle of Islam

2. A Messenger of God does not have to defer to the opinions or wishes of his followers, or of the people in general. An overwhelming majority of the companions of Muhammad had been opposed to the signing of the Treaty of Hdaybiyya. But he ignored their opposition, and went ahead and signed it.

He, in fact, did not even seek the advice of any of them in the matter. From beginning to end, he was guided, not by the wishes of the "people" or by the wishes of the "majority" of the people but only by the commandments of God, enshrined in His Book, specifically in the following verse:

So judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that hath come to thee... (Chapter 5; verse 51)

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