

Chapter 50: The Battle of Ta'if

Ta'if is one of the fertile country towns of the Hijaz. It is situated in the south-east of Makkah at a distance of twelve leagues from there. It is one thousand metres above sea level. On account of its fine weather, gardens, and palm groves, the town of Ta'if was the centre of a group of people who led very comfortable lives.

This town was inhabited by the tribe of Saqif who were one of the powerful and popular tribes of the Arabs. The Arabs of Saqif tribe were amongst those people, who fought against Islam in the Battle of Hunayn. After suffering a signal defeat they took refuge in their own town which possessed strong and elevated forts.

In order to complete the victory, the Prophet ordered the fugitives of the Battle of Hunayn to be pursued. Abu 'Amar Ash'ari and Abu Musa Ash'ari were deputed along with a unit of the soldiers of Islam to pursue some of the fugitives who had taken refuge in Awtas. The first commander lost his life in the encounter, but the second one scored complete victory and dispersed the enemies.¹

The Prophet himself proceeded to Ta'if along with the remaining army² and, while on his way, destroyed the fort of Malik, (who had sparked off the Battle of Hunayn). Of course, the demolition of the fort of Malik did not carry an aspect of revenge.

What the Prophet desired was that he should not leave a point which could serve as an asylum to the enemies.

The groups of the army of Islam moved one after the other and made the various sides of the town their camping places. The Fort of Ta'if was situated at a great height and had very strong walls, and its watch towers fully controlled the outside area.

The army of Islam proceeded to besiege the fort, but it had not yet been completely encircled, when the enemies checked their advance with a shower of arrows and killed some of them on the spot in the very first moment.³

The Prophet ordered the army to retreat and to transfer its encampment to a point which was beyond the

reach of the arrows of the enemies.⁴ Salman Muhammadi, from whose military plans the Muslims had availed at the time of the Battle of the Ditch, suggested to the Prophet that the fort of the enemy might be stoned by means of catapults. During the battles of those days a catapult served the same purpose as artillery serves in modern warfare. The Muslim officers erected a catapult under the guidance of Salman and stoned the towers and the interior of the fort for about twenty days. However, the enemies, too, continued to shoot arrows and thereby inflicted injuries on the soldiers of Islam.

Now let us see as to how the Muslims procured a catapult at that juncture. Some say that Salman made it himself and taught the Muslim soldiers how to operate it. Others believe that the Muslims came in possession of this military weapon at the time of the conquest of Khayber and brought it with them to Ta'if.⁵ It is not improbable that Salman himself made the catapult and taught the Muslims how to install and use it.

History tells us that this was not the only catapult available with the Muslims, because, simultaneously with the Battles of Hunayn and Ta'if, the Prophet had sent Tufayl bin 'Amr Dowski to pull down the idol-temples of the tribe of Dows. He returned after successfully carrying out his assignment and came to the Prophet at Ta'if along with four hundred soldiers, all of whom belonged to his own tribe, as well as a catapult and a military vehicle. And during this battle these military equipments, which had been acquired by Tufayl bin 'Amr Dowski as war booty, came into use.⁶

Splitting The Wall Of The Fort By Means Of Military Vehicles

In order to make the enemy surrender, it was necessary to attack it from all sides. It was, therefore, decided that, simultaneously with the installation of the catapult and throwing stones, the military vehicles should also be utilized to create a rent in the wall of the fort, so that the army of Islam might enter it.

However, the battalions of the army of Islam were faced with a great difficulty in accomplishing this task, because arrows were showered on their heads from the towers and other spots of the fort and none could manage to approach the wall. The best means of achieving this purpose were the military vehicles which were available with the organized armies of those times in an imperfect shape. A military vehicle was made of wood and was covered with a thick hide. Strong soldiers took their places inside it and pushed it towards the fort and began making holes in the wall under its cover.

By making use of this military device the soldiers of Islam busied themselves bravely in splitting the wall. However, the enemies threw melted iron and wires on the vehicle and burnt its covering; inflicted injuries on them. This military device, therefore, proved to be unsuccessful on account of the planning of the enemy and the Muslims failed to achieve victory. Hence, when a number of Muslims were wounded and killed, they abandoned their attempt."⁷

Economic And Moral Blows

Achievement of victory does not depend on material military devices only. A skilful commander can diminish the power of the enemy by dealing economic and moral blows at him and can thus make him surrender. More often than not moral and economic blows prove to be more effective than corporal injuries which are occasionally sustained by the soldiers of the enemy.

Ta'if was an area of date-palms and vine and was well-known throughout the Hijaz for its fertility. As its inhabitants had taken great pains in developing the palm-groves and the vineyards, they were keenly interested in their safety.

In order to threaten those, who had shut themselves within the fort, the Prophet announced that, if they continued to resist, their gardens would be plundered. However, the enemies did not pay any heed to this threat, because they did not imagine that the kind and merciful Prophet would resort to such an action.

However, as they observed, all of a sudden that compliance with the orders to pull down the gardens and to cut the date-palms and the vines had already commenced, they began to wail and cry and requested the Prophet to refrain from this action as a mark of respect for the proximity and relationship which existed between them.

The Prophet, notwithstanding the fact that those who had now taken refuge in the fort were the very persons, who were responsible for the battles of Hunayn and Ta'if and these two battles had proved very costly, he showed his mercy and kindness once again in the battlefield, which is usually a theatre of wrath and vengeance. He ordered his companions to desist from cutting down the trees.

Though he had lost many officers and men in these two battles (which had been occasioned by the conspiracy of the people of the Saqif tribe who had conducted a night attack on the army of Islam and had now taken refuge in their burrow like a fox) and would have been justified in destroying their farms and gardens as a measure of revenge, his kindness and mercy subdued his anger and he asked his friends to refrain from taking punitive action.

From the conduct of the Prophet and the manner in which he always treated his enemies, it can be safely said that the orders given by him to cut down the trees were a mere threat and if this weapon had not proved effective, he would certainly have refrained from using it.

The Last Stratagem To Conquer The Fort

The people of Saqif tribe were rich and affluent and possessed a large number of slaves and slave-girls. In order to obtain information about the state of affairs within the interior of the fort and to assess the strength of the enemy as well as to create differences amongst that organized group, the Prophet got

announced that those slaves of the enemy, who came out of the fort and took refuge with the army of Islam, would become free.

This device proved effective to some extent and about twenty slaves escaped from the fort very skillfully and joined the Muslims. On enquiries having been made from them it was known that those within the fort were not prepared to surrender at any cost, and even if the siege continued for one year they would not be faced with any shortage of provisions.

The Army Of Islam Returns To Madina

The Prophet used all the physical and moral military devices in this battle, but the experience gained thereby proved that the conquest of the fort needed further activities and patience, whereas the conditions prevailing at the time, the prolongation of war, and the resources of the army of Islam, did not permit any further stay in Ta'if, because, firstly during the period of this siege thirteen persons had been killed.

Out of them seven were from amongst Quraysh, four were Ansar and one belonged to some other tribe. Furthermore, some persons, whose number and names have not unfortunately been recorded in the books, were also killed as a result of the deceitful attack of the enemy in the valley of Hunayn and consequently there appeared lack of discipline and morale in the Muslim army.

Secondly, the month of Shawwal was terminating and the month of Zi Qa'd (during which warfare was forbidden amongst the Arabs, and Islam later confirmed this tradition as well) was fast approaching.⁸

In order to safeguard this tradition it was necessary that the siege should be raised as early as possible so that the Arab tribe of Saqif might not be able to charge the Prophet with the violation of the good tradition.

Moreover, the Haj season was near and the supervision of Haj ceremonies was the responsibility of the Muslims, because before this all the ceremonies of Haj were performed under the supervision of the polytheists of Makkah.

A very large number of the people came to Makkah from all parts of Arabia to participate in Haj ceremonies and it was the best occasion to propagate Islam and to acquaint the people with the realities of the Divine faith. It was necessary that the Prophet should take full advantage of this opportunity, which had become available to him for the first time and should think of much more important matters as compared with the conquest of an outlying fort. Keeping all these matters in view, the Prophet raised the siege of Ta'if and proceeded, along with his soldiers, to Ji'ranah.

Events After The War

The war of Hunayn and Ta'if terminated and, without achieving any final result, the Prophet proceeded to Ji'ranah to distribute the booty of the Battle of Ta'if.

The war booty which fell in the hands of the Muslims in the Battle of Hunayn was the largest of the booties which had so far been acquired by the army of Islam in different battles, because, when the Prophet reached Ji'ranah, 6000 prisoners, 24,000 camels, more than 40,000 sheep and 852 grams of silver were with him⁹ and during those days a part of the expenses of the army of Islam was also met from this source.

The Prophet stayed in Ji'ranah for thirteen days. During this period he was engaged in distributing the war booty in a special manner; setting some prisoners free and returned them to their kinsmen; drawing up a plan for the surrender and embracement of Islam by Malik bin Awf (the man who was solely responsible for the battles of Hunayn and Ta'if); manifesting the spirit of appreciation and gratefulness for the services rendered by different persons; attracting, with his wise policies, the hearts of the enemies of Islam to the true religion; and ending, by means of an attractive speech, a dispute which had arisen between him and a group of the Ansar.

Here are the details of the matters mentioned above:

1. One of the distinguished qualities of the Prophet was that he never ignored the services rendered by the people or the rights belonging to them, however insignificant and small they might be. And if any person rendered some service to him, he compensated him for it to a longer extent than that.

The Prophet had spent his childhood amongst the tribe of Bani Sa'd, which was a branch of the tribe of Hawazin, and Halimah Sa'diyah had fostered him and had brought him up in her tribe for five years.

The tribe of Bani Sa'd who had taken part in the Battle of Hunayn against Islam, a number of their women and children as well as property had fallen into the hands of the Muslims, were now regretful for what they had done. However, they had in mind that Muhammad had been brought up in their tribe and had been nurtured by their women, and being a kind, magnanimous and grateful person, he would certainly set their prisoners free if he was reminded of his childhood.

Hence, fourteen chiefs of the tribe, all of whom had embraced Islam, came to the Prophet. They were headed by two persons one of whom was Zuhayr bin Sa'd and the other was the foster-uncle of the Prophet and spoke thus:

"Among the prisoners are your foster-aunts and foster-sisters as well as those, who served you during your childhood, and kindness and affection demands that, keeping in view the rights, which some of our women have upon you, you should free all our prisoners, including women, men and children. And in case we had made such a request to No'man bin Munzir or Harith bin Abi Shamir, the rulers of Iraq and

Syria, we would have hoped for its acceptance by them, not to speak of yourself who are the embodiment of all kindness and love".

In reply to this, the Prophet asked them: "What do you value more; your women and children or your property?" They replied: "We would not exchange our women and children for anything". The Prophet said:

"I am prepared to forego my own share as well as that of the descendants of Abdul Muttalib, but the shares of the Muhajirs, the Ansar and other Muslims concern them and it is necessary that they themselves should give up their rights. When I have finished the noon prayers you should stand up between the rows of the Muslims and address them thus:

"We make the Prophet our intercessor before the Muslims and make the Muslims our intermediaries before the Prophet so that our women and children may be returned to us". In the meantime I shall stand up and shall return to you my own share as well as that of the descendants of Abdul Muttalib and shall also advise others to do the same".

The representatives of Hawazin addressed the Muslims after the noon prayers as advised by the Prophet and the Prophet gifted away to them his own share as well as that of the descendants of Abdul Muttalib. Imitating him the Muhajirs and the Ansar also agreed to forgo their shares.

However, only a very few persons like Aqra' bin Habis and 'Uyainah bin Hisn Fazari declined to surrender their shares. The Prophet said to them: "If you hand over your prisoners, I shall give you, against every one of them, six prisoners, who fall into my hands in the first battle to be fought hereafter".¹⁰

The practical steps taken by the Prophet and his impressive words occasioned the release of all the prisoners of the Hawazin tribe except one old woman whom 'Uyainah refused to release. Thus a good and pious action, the foundation of which was laid by Halimah Sa'diyah sixty years ago in the tribe of Bani Sa'd, proved fruitful after a very long time and as a result of it all the prisoners of Bani Hawazin got freedom.

Then the Prophet called Shaymah, his foster-sister and having spread his own cloak on the ground made her sit on it and enquired about her own welfare as well as that of her family.¹¹ By releasing their prisoners the Prophet made the people of Bani Hawazin incline towards Islam. All of them, therefore, embraced Islam whole-heartedly and consequently Ta'if lost its last ally as well.

Malik Bin 'Awf Embraced Islam

2. In the meantime the Prophet availed of the opportunity to solve, through the representatives of Bani Sa'd, the problem of Malik, the headstrong chief of Nasr tribe, who had provoked the Battle of Hunayn, and to attract him towards Islam. In this connection he enquired about the state of his affairs and was

informed that he (Malik) had taken refuge in Ta'if and was co-operating with Bani Saqif. The Prophet said: "Convey my message to him, that if he embraces Islam and joins us, I shall release his people and shall also give him one hundred camels".

The representatives of Hawazin conveyed the Prophet's message to him. Malik had realized that the strength of Bani Saqif had weakened and was also aware of the ever-increasing power of Islam. He, therefore, decided to leave Ta'if and join the Muslims. He was, however, afraid that if Bani Saqif became aware of his decision they would detain him within the fort.

He, therefore, chalked out a plan. He directed that a camel-litter might be kept ready for him at a place distant from Ta'if. Reaching that place he came to Ji'ranah immediately and embraced Islam. The Prophet meted out the same treatment to him as he had already promised and later appointed him as the chief of the Muslims belonging to the tribes of Nasr, Thamalah and Salimah. On account of his pride and the honour which he gained from the side of Islam, he made life miserable for the people of Saqif tribe and subjected them to economic distress.

Malik felt ashamed of the kindness shown to him by the Prophet and recited verses in praise of his sublimity: "I have not seen or heard of amongst the entire mankind anyone, who may be like Muhammad".¹²

Distribution Of War Booty

3. The companions of the Prophet insisted that the war booty should be distributed as early as possible. The Prophet, in order to prove his disinterestedness, stood by the side of a camel, took some wool from its hump and, while holding it between his fingers, turned to the people and said: "I don't enjoy any right in your booty, even in this wool, except khums and I shall return to you even the khums to which I am entitled. Hence, everyone of you should return all kinds of booty, even though it may be a needle and a thread, so that it may be distributed amongst you equally".

The Prophet distributed the entire contents of the treasury amongst the Muslims and also distributed its khums, which was his own share, amongst the chiefs of Quraysh, who were converted to Islam only recently. He gave one hundred camels to each including Abu Sufyan, his son Mu'awiyah, Hakim bin Hizam, Harith bin Harith, Harith bin Hisham, Suhayl bin Amr Huwaytab bin Abdul 'Uzza, 'Ala' bin Jariyah and others, all of whom had till a few days earlier been the chiefs of blasphemy and polytheism and the sworn enemies of Islam. To persons belonging to another group, whose position was lower as compared with the aforesaid persons, he gave fifty camels per head.

On account of these big gifts and special shares these persons began entertaining feelings of love and affection for the Prophet and were, however, drawn to Islam. In Islamic jurisprudence such people are called Mu'allafatul Qulub (those whom it is desired to encourage) and one of the purposes for which zakat can be spent is expenditure on them.¹³

Ibn Sa'd said: "All these gifts were given from khums which was the personal property of the Prophet and not even a Dinar was spent out of the shares of the others for the encouragement of the people belonging to this group."¹⁴

These gifts and expenditures allowed by the Prophet were strongly resented by a number of the Muslims and especially by some of the Ansar. They, who were not aware of the higher interests kept in view by the Prophet in making these gifts, thought that ties of kinsmanship had prompted him to distribute the khums of the booty among his relatives.

A man named Zul Khuwaysirah who belonged to the tribe of Bani Tamim showed so much impudence that he said to the Prophet: "Today I have studied your activities very minutely and have seen that you have not been just in distributing the booty". The Prophet was annoyed on hearing his words. Signs of anger appeared on his face and he said: "Woe be to you! If I don't act according to equity and justice who else will do so?"

The Second Caliph requested the Prophet for permission to kill that man but the Prophet said: "Leave him alone. In future he will be the leader of a group who will quit Islam in the same manner in which an arrow quits a bow".¹⁵ As predicted by the Prophet, this man became the leader of the Khawarij (apostates) during the Rulership of Ali and undertook the guidance of that dangerous group. However, as it is opposed to the principles of Islam that punishment be awarded before an offence is committed, the Prophet did not take any action against him.

Representing the Ansar, Sa'd 'Ubadah communicated their grievances to the Prophet, whereupon the Prophet said to him:

"Assemble all of them at one place so that I may explain the matter to them". The Prophet arrived in the assembly of the Ansar with great dignity and addressed them thus: "You were a misguided group of people and you received guidance through me. You were poor and you became rich. You were enemies and became friends". All of them said: "O Prophet of Allah! All this is correct".

Then the Prophet said; "You can give me a reply in another way as well and as against my services and can mention the rights which you have over me and may say: "O Prophet of Allah! When Quraysh refuted you, we acknowledged you. They didn't help you and we helped you. They made you shelterless and we provided you asylum. There was a time when you were penniless and we helped you". O group of Ansar! Why have you been grieved because I have given some small property to Quraysh so that they may become steadfast in Islam and have given over Islam to you?

Are you not satisfied that others should take away the camels and the sheep whereas you should take away the Prophet with you. By Allah! If all other people go one way and the Ansar go the other way, I will choose the way adopted by the Ansar. Thereafter he invoked Allah's blessings for the Ansar and for their children. The words of the Prophet aroused their sentiments so much that all of them began to cry and said: "O Prophet of Allah! We are contented with our share and don't have the least complaint in this

behalf".

-
1. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, pp. 915 – 916.
 2. Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 162.
 3. Seerah-i Halabi, vol III, page 132.
 4. Tabaqat, vol. II, page 158.
 5. Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 134.
 6. Tabaqat, vol. II, page 157.
 7. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, page 928.
 8. This statement is supported by the fact that the Prophet left Makkah on the 5th of Shawwal and the period of the siege was 20 days and the remaining five days of the month were spent in the Battle of Hunayn as well as in journeying. As regards the period of the siege being 20 days it is in accordance with a narrative quoted by Ibn Hisham. However Ibn Sa'd has mentioned the period of the siege to be 40 days (vide Tabaqat, vol. II, page 158).
 9. Tabaqat-i Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, page 152.
 10. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, pp. 949 – 953.
 11. Tabaqat, vol. II, pp. 153–154 and Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 49.
 12. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 491.
 13. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. III, page 493.
 14. Tabaqat, vol. III, page 153.
 15. Mughazi says that the Prophet said about him (i.e. Zul Khuwaysirah): "He will have friends as compared with whose worship your prayers and fasting will be insignificant. They will recite the Qur'an but their recitation will not go beyond their larynx. They will go out of the religion of Islam just as an arrow flings away from the bow". (Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 496.)

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/the-message-ayatullah-jafar-subhani/chapter-50-battle-taif>