

Chapter 53: The Battle of Tabuk

The lofty and strong fort, which had been built by the side of a spring on the road leading from Hijr to Damascus in the border area of the territory of Syria, was called Tabuk. In those times Syria was one of the colonies of the Eastern Roman Empire. Its capital was Constantinople. Its frontier people were the followers of Christianity and the chiefs of the districts were satellites of the Ruler of Syria who himself took orders directly from the Roman Emperor.

The rapid penetration and expansion of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and the brilliant conquests by the Muslims in the Hijaz were being noticed in areas beyond the Hijaz, and were making their enemies tremble and think of ways and means to check this tide.

The fall of the Government of Makkah, the adoption of Islam by the prominent chiefs of the Hijaz, and the bravery and sacrifices of the Muslim warriors, made the Roman Emperor decide to launch a surprise attack on the Muslims with the help of a well-equipped army, because he felt his empire to be in grave danger on account of the extraordinary influence and expansion of Islam. He was very much afraid of the increase in the military and political power of the Muslims.

In those days Rome was the only powerful adversary of Iran and possessed the greatest political and military strength. It was very proud on account of the victories which it had achieved against Iran and the defeat which it had inflicted on the Iranian army.

The Roman army, which consisted of 4000 mounted soldiers and infantry-men and was equipped with the armour of the latest model available in those times, encamped in the frontier strip of Syria. The tribes residing in the border areas (like the tribes of Lakham, 'Amilah, Ghassan and Jazam) also joined them and the vanguard of the army advanced up to Balqa'.¹

News about the encampment of a group of the Roman soldiers in the frontier strip of Syria reached the Prophet through the caravans, which were travelling between the Hijaz and Syria in connection with trade. He found no alternative except to give a reply to the aggressors with a big army and to protect, from the surprise attacks of the enemy, the religion, which had spread at the cost of the lives of the dear ones of Islam, and of his personal sacrifices, and had since taken root, and was about to spread

throughout the world.

This unpleasant news reached him at a time when the people of Madina had not yet properly collected their produce, and the dates were about to ripen, and Madina and its suburbs were, so to say, in the grip of a sort of famine. However, for the godly persons the spiritual life and the protection of high ideals, and jihad in the path of Allah are preferable to everything else.

Inviting Warriors And Procuring Expenses Of War

The Prophet was aware to some extent of the capability and experience of the enemy and was sure that besides necessitating spiritual capital (viz. faith in Allah and fighting for the sake of Allah), victory in this battle also depended on a big army. Keeping this fact in view he sent men to Makkah as well as to the areas adjoining Madina to invite Muslims to fight in the path of Allah and also to ask well-to-do Muslims to provide for the expenses of war by making payment of zakat.

Soon after the proclamation made by the Prophet, 30,000 persons declared their readiness to participate in the battle and gathered in the camping ground of Madina (Thaniyya tul Wida'). The expenses of war were provided by collecting zakat. Out of these 30,000 men, 10,000 were mounted soldiers and the remaining 20,000 were infantry-men. Later the Prophet ordered that every tribe should choose a standard for itself.²

Persons Opposed To Participation In The Battle

The Battle of Tabuk was the best occasion on which the self-sacrificing persons and the pretenders and hypocrites could be recognized, because general mobilization was ordered when the weather was very hot and the business community of Madina was ready to harvest the palm-dates. Refusal of some of them, on various pretexts, to take part in the battle cast off the veil from their real faces and Qur'anic verses were revealed condemning their action. All these verses are contained in Surah al-Tawbah.

Some persons declined to take part in this sacred jihad for the following reasons:

1. When the Prophet proposed Jadd bin Qays, who was an influential man, for joining the army against the Romans, he replied thus: "I have a fanatical attachment with women. I am, therefore, afraid that I may chance to see Roman women and may not be able to control myself". On having heard this childish excuse of his the Prophet decided to leave him alone and to contact others. Jadd was condemned by Allah in this verse:

Some of them ask you, "Make us exempt from taking part in the battle and do not try to tempt us by telling what we may gain from the battle; many people have died in the battle". Hell certainly encompasses the unbelievers. (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:49).

2. The hypocrites: those persons, who had ostensibly embraced Islam but had, in fact, no interest in it,

were preventing the people on different pretexts from taking part in this jihad. At times they put forth the excuse that the weather was very hot. The Divine revelation replied to their objection in these words:

Say: The fire of Hell is much severer in heat, if they but understood. (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:81).

There were some persons who frightened the Muslims of participation in this battle and said: "The Arabs are not competent to fight with the Romans and consequently all the participants in the battle will be tied with ropes and sold in the free markets ".³

Discovery of the centre of espionage in Madina: The great leader of Islam attached great importance to intelligence reports and half of his victories were the result of prior information about the conditions of the enemies and the mischief-mongers. By this means he nipped many of their satanic deeds and anti-Islamic schemes in the bud.

A report was received by the Prophet that the house of a Jew named Suwaylam had become the centre of anti-Islamic activities and the hypocrites gathered there and chalked out schemes to prevent the Muslims from participating in this sacred jihad. The Prophet therefore, decided to frighten the conspirators in such a way that they might not entertain any such satanic thoughts in future.

He ordered Talhah bin Ubaydullah to go with some brave companions and set the house of Suwaylam on fire while their meeting was in progress. As directed by the Prophet, Talhah set the house on fire when the conspirators were busy discussing anti-Islamic plans. All of them ran away from the flames of fire and one of them injured his foot. This action was so effective that it served as a great lesson to the hypocrites for the future.⁴

A group of persons who shed tears: some of the companions of the Prophet, who were very keen to take part in this sacred jihad came and requested him to provide them facilities for the journey so that they could discharge that sacred religious duty. When the Prophet told them that he did not possess any animal for riding which he might place at their disposal, they wept bitterly and tears trickled down their faces.

If there were some persons amongst the companions of the Prophet who conspired or indulged in hindrances or coined excuses, there were also others amongst them, who were anxious to participate in jihad, which at times costs one one's life, and non-participation in it made them weep bitterly. In the terminology of history these persons are called criers and the Qur'an makes a mention of their faith in these words:

Those who come to you (Muhammad) asking to be taken to the battle, but you cannot find the necessary means for them, are exempt from the duty of fighting for the cause of Allah, even though they leave you with their eyes flooded with tears because of not being able to help the cause of Allah. (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:92).⁵

3. Another group consisted of persons like Ka'b, Hilal and Mararah who had full faith in Islam and were also desirous of participating in jihad, but as they had not yet collected their produce they decided that after collecting the produce they would join the warriors of Islam. In the terminology of the Holy Qur'an (vide Surah al-Tawbah, 9:118) they are the same three violators who were severely reprimanded by the Prophet on return from Tabuk and the rebuke administered to them also served as an example for others.

Ali Did Not Participate In This Battle

One of the distinctions of the Commander of the Faithful is that he accompanied the Prophet and was his standard-bearer in all Islamic battles except in the Battle of Tabuk, he stayed in Madina and did not participate in jihad under the orders of the Prophet himself. The Prophet took this decision, because he knew very well that the hypocrites and some persons from amongst Quraysh were seeking an opportunity to bring about disorder and topple the newly established Islamic Government in his absence.

Tabuk was the farthest point to which the Prophet travelled in connection with the battles in which he participated. He realized perfectly that it was possible that during his absence anti-Islamic groups might create disturbance and might call their sympathizers from different places to join them for the success of their nefarious schemes. Hence, although he had nominated Muhammad bin Maslamah to act as his representative in Madina during his absence, he also said to Ali:

"You are the guardian of the Ahl al-Bayt and my kinsfolk and the group of the Muhajirs, and none except myself and you is suited for this task".

The stay of the Commander of the Faithful in Madina upset the conspirators very much, because they realized that they could not put their schemes into practice in the presence of Ali who was continuously vigilant.

Hence, in order to ensure the exit of Ali from Madina, they decided upon another plan and circulated the rumour that the Prophet had asked Ali very earnestly to take part in jihad but the latter had declined to participate in this sacred battle on account of the very long journey and excessively hot weather. In order to contradict these people Ali saw the Prophet and placed the matter before him. At this moment the Prophet uttered his historical sentence which is a clear proof of Ali's Imamate and his immediate succession as Caliph after the demise of the Prophet. He said:

"O my brother! Return to Madina, because none is more suited to preserve the dignity and position of Madina than myself and you. You are my representative amongst the Ahl al-Bayt and my kinsfolk. Don't you feel happy when I say that your relationship with me is similar to the one which existed between Harun and Musa except that no prophet will come after me. Just as Harun was the immediate successor of Prophet Musa you are my successor and Caliph after me".⁶

The Army Of Islam Proceeds Towards Tabuk

The usual practice of the Prophet was that, while performing a journey to chastise a people, who obstructed the advancement of Islam, or intended to attack the Muslims, or had evil designs against them, he did not make his aims and objects known to the officers and the soldiers, and made the army march through comparatively unfrequented routes. Thus he did not let the enemies become aware of his intentions and came upon them absolutely unawares.⁷

However, in order to rout the Roman forces, who had collected on the frontiers of Syria to attack the Muslim territories, he made his aim clearly known to all concerned on the very day the general mobilization was proclaimed. The point in doing so was that the mujahids (warriors) should become aware of the importance of the journey and the hardships involved on the way, and should carry sufficient provisions with them.

Furthermore, in order to strengthen the army of Islam, the Prophet was obliged to seek help from the tribes of Tamim, Ghatfan and Tayyi' and they were residing at far-off places from Madina. In view of this the Prophet wrote letters to the chiefs of these tribes and also wrote a letter to 'Atab bin Usayd, the young Governor of Makkah, and invited the tribes as well as the Makkans to partake in this sacred jihad⁸ as extension of such a general invitation was not possible secretly.

Hence it was necessary that he should make the particulars of the expedition and its importance clearly known to the chiefs of the tribes so that they might place sufficient provisions and animals for riding at the disposal of their mujahids.

March Past Of The Army Before The Prophet

The day for the departure of the army of Islam arrived. On that day the Prophet reviewed his troops in the army headquarters of Madina. The magnificent scene of the march past of the faithful and self-sacrificing men who had preferred, for the sake of their objective, hardships and death to comfort and worldly gains with enthusiasm and faith, impressed the audience.

At the time of departure the Prophet addressed the soldiers to strengthen their morale, and explained to them his aim in ordering general mobilization. Then the soldiers proceeded towards the prescribed route.

The Story Of Malik Bin Qays

After the army of Islam had marched off Malik bin Qays returned to Madina from his journey. It was very hot on that day. He found that loneliness prevailed over Madina and came to know about the departure of the soldiers of Islam. In the meantime he arrived in his garden and saw that his beautiful wife had erected a shade for him. He cast a glance at the attractive face of his wife and also stared a little at the food and water which she had prepared for him.

Thereafter he thought of the painful difficulties of the Prophet and his companions who were proceeding to perform jihad in the path of Allah and to face death in such a hot weather. Then he decided not to avail of the water and food prepared by his wife or the shade erected by her but to ride his animal immediately, and join the army of Islam as early as possible.

He, therefore, turned to his wife and said: "It is not at all fair that I should take rest under this shade along with my spouse and eat delicious food, and drink cold and wholesome water, whereas my master should be proceeding for jihad in such scorching heat. No. This doesn't accord with justice and the rules of friendship, and faith and sincerity don't permit me to do so".

He said these words, picked up some small provisions for the journey and went his way. On the way he met 'Umar bin Wahab, who, it would appear, lagged behind the Islamic army, and both of them reached the Prophet when he was at Tabuk.⁹

This man did not acquire the blessing of accompanying the Prophet in the beginning, still he eventually offered his services in this noble cause by means of his commendable self-sacrifice. On the other hand there are some persons at whose door good luck knocks itself but they remain away from it on account of their lack of suitability and competence and consequently throw themselves into adversity and perdition.

For example, Abdullah bin Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites, had pitched a tent in the camping place of the Prophet so that he might participate in this jihad in the company of the Prophet. Since he was an ill-intentioned person and a ruthless enemy of Islam, he changed his mind when the army was about to march off and returned to Madina along with his supporters so that he might create disturbance there, in the absence of the Prophet. The Prophet did not also pay the least heed to him, because he was aware of his hypocrisy and did not consider his participation in the jihad to be of any use at all.

Difficulties On The Way

The army of Islam was faced with great difficulties on its way from Madina to Syria and it is for this reason that it had been given the name of *Jayshul 'Usrah* (the army of hardship). However, their faith and fervour overcame all these difficulties and they welcomed all the hardships that came in their way.

When the army of Islam reached the land of 'Thamood' the Prophet covered his face with a cloth on account of the hot and scorching winds blowing there, and passed by that place in great haste and said to his companions "Reflect over the end of the lives of the people of Thamood who became subjected to the wrath of Allah because of their obstinacy and disobedience, and remember that no true believer should think that the end of his life will not be like that of those people. The death-like quietness of this place and the ruined houses which have gone into deep silence are a lesson for other nations".

Thereafter, the Prophet ordered the soldiers not to drink water of that place or prepare food or bread with

it and that they should not even perform ablution with it, and if they had, in some cases, prepared food or kneaded flour with that water they should give it to the animals to eat.

Then the army of Islam continued its march under the guidance of the Prophet and when a part of the night had passed they reached a well from which the camel of Swaleh had drunk water. On reaching that spot the Prophet gave orders that all should encamp there and take rest.

Precautionary Orders

The Prophet was fully aware of the poisonous and fast winds and the violent storms of that area, which at times overtook the men and the camels and buried them under the mounds of sand and dust. He, therefore, ordered that the knees of the camels should be tied and none should go out of the camping place alone at night.

Experience proved that the precautionary orders given by the Prophet were very useful, because two men belonging to the tribe of Bani Sa'idah violated them and came out of the camping-place alone at midnight with the result that the intense storm suffocated one of them and flung the other on a hill. The Prophet came to know about it and was very much unhappy for those who lost their lives on account of their indiscipline. He, therefore, asked the soldiers once again to maintain discipline.¹⁰

'Abbad bin Bishr, who headed a group which was responsible for the safety and security of the army of Islam, reported to the Prophet that the Muslim soldiers had become involved in difficulties owing to shortage of water, and the entire storage of water was likely to be finished soon. Hence, some of them slaughtered very precious camels to utilize the water available in their bellies, and others had submitted to the Divine will and were awaiting anxiously the blessing of Allah.

The Almighty Allah, who had promised victory to His Prophet, once again helped him and his faithful companions. Torrential rains came and all drank water to their fill. Furthermore, those appointed to stock provisions, as well as the entire army, stored as much water as they desired.

Occult Information Of The Prophet

There is no gain saying the fact that, as clearly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an,¹¹ the Prophet could give information about occult matters of which other people knew nothing. However the knowledge of the Prophet was limited and depended on what he was taught by Allah. It is, therefore, possible that he might not have been aware of certain matters.

For example, he might lose some money or misplace the key of the house and might not have been able to locate it. At times, however, he gave occult information about most obscure and intricate matters and left the people wonder-struck. The reason for this ascension and descent is the same as mentioned above viz. whenever Allah willed the Prophet gave information about matters related to the occult world.

On the way the camel of the Prophet was lost and some of his companions went to search it. In the meantime one of the hypocrites got up and said: "He says he is the Prophet of Allah and gives information about the heavens, but it is strange that he doesn't know the whereabouts of his camel".

The Prophet came to know about this and made the position clear by means of an eloquent remark. He said: "I know only that what Allah tells me. Just now Allah has informed me about the whereabouts of my camel. It is available in this desert in such and such valley. Its bridle has got entangled in a tree and has prevented it from moving further. Go and bring it".

Some persons went immediately to that place and found the camel exactly in the same position as was described by him.¹²

Another Occult Information

The camel of Abu-Dharr became incapable of walking and Abu-Dharr was left behind the army of Islam. He waited for some time but without any result. Eventually he left the camel, loaded the provisions on his own back and walked on so that he might join the army of Islam as early as possible.

The Muslim soldiers had encamped on a spot as ordered by the Prophet and were taking rest. Suddenly they saw, at a distance, the figure of a man who was traversing the path with a heavy load on his back. One of the companions informed the Prophet of the position. He said: "It is Abu-Dharr. May Allah forgive Abu-Dharr! He walks alone, will die alone and will be brought to life alone".¹³

The later events proved that what the Prophet had predicted was absolutely correct, because Abu-Dharr died in a very pitiable condition, away from habitation in the desert of Rabzah, when only his daughter was by his side.¹⁴

Army Of Islam Arrives In The Area Of Tabuk

The army of Islam arrived in the area of Tabuk in the beginning of the month of Sha'ban 9 A.H. However, no trace of the Roman army could be seen there. It appears that the commanders of the Roman army became aware of the numerical strength of the Muslim soldiery and their bravery and unparalleled self-sacrifices, a small specimen of which had already been seen by them from very close quarters in the Battle of Mu'tah. Hence, they considered it expedient to recall their army within the frontiers of their own territories. By doing so they practically wished to deny that they had mobilized forces against the Muslims, and wanted to give the impression that they had never thought of launching an attack, and that any such report was a mere gossip, and thus wished to prove their impartiality regarding the events which took place in Arabia.

At this juncture the Prophet assembled his esteemed officers, and acting on the established Islamic principle of consultation, asked for their views as to whether they should advance into the territory of the

enemy or should return to Madina.

As a result of military consultations it was decided that the army of Islam which had suffered innumerable hardships while performing the journey to Tabuk should return to Madina to revive its strength.

Furthermore, by performing this journey the Muslims had already achieved their major aim, which was to scatter the Roman army. The Romans were so much frightened and intimidated that for quite a long period they did not think of launching an attack and during that period, therefore, the security of Arabia from the northern side was ensured.

In order to safeguard the position of the Prophet and to make it clear that their own suggestions could be rejected or withdrawn, the members of the war consultative council added this sentence also: "If you have been ordered by the Almighty Allah to advance you should give orders, and we too shall follow you".¹⁵

The Prophet said: "No order from Allah has been received and if any such order had been received from Him I would not at all have consulted you. According respect to the views of the consultative council, therefore, I have decided to return to Madina from this very point".

The rulers who inhabited the frontier areas of Syria and the Hijaz and wielded influence amongst their people were all Christians and it was possible that one day the Roman army might utilize these local powers and attack the Hijaz with their assistance. It was, therefore, necessary for the Prophet to conclude non-aggression treaties with them so that he might acquire better security.

He personally contacted those frontier rulers, who belonged to areas adjoining Tabuk, and concluded non-aggression treaties with them, subject to certain conditions. As regards areas lying at a greater distance from Tabuk he sent deputations to the rulers concerned so that better security could be ensured for the Muslims.

He also contacted the Rulers of Aylah, Azri'at and Jarba' and non-aggression pacts were concluded between the parties. Aylah is a coastal city situated on the coast of the Red Sea and is at some distance from Syria. Its ruler named Yuhanna (John) son of Rowbah came from his capital to Tabuk, wearing a golden cross round his neck. He presented a white mule to the Prophet and expressed his obedience to him. The Prophet appreciated his gesture and also gave him a present in return.

The said ruler decided to remain a Christian and agreed to pay three thousand Dinars per year as *jizyah* (tribute) and also to receive every Muslim who passed through the region of Aylah. A pact on the following lines was signed by the parties: "This is a non-aggression pact from the side of Allah and His Prophet, Muhammad for Yuhanna and the residents of Aylah. According to this pact all their means of transport whether by sea or by land and all the persons belonging to Syria, Yemen and the islands, who may be with them, shall be under the protection of Allah and His Prophet. However, if anyone of them

violates the rule his wealth shall not save him from punishment. All sea routes and land routes are open for them and they are entitled to frequent them".¹⁶

This pact shows that if a nation co-operated with the Muslims in a peaceful manner it was provided all the facilities, and its security was also guaranteed by them.

The Prophet also concluded pacts with the frontiers-men like the people of Azri'at and Jarba' whose lands had great strategic importance, and thus ensured the safety of the Islamic territories from the northern side.

Khalid Bin Walid Is Dispatched To Dowmatul Jandal

The populous region with green trees, running waters and a strong fort situated at a distance of about fifty leagues from Syria was called Dowmatul Jandal.¹⁷ In those days the Christian Okaydar bin Abdul Malik Kindi ruled there. The Prophet feared that in the event of a renewed attack by the Roman army the Christian Ruler of Dowmah would assist them and thus endanger the security of Arabia.

For this reason he considered it necessary to derive the maximum benefit from the force available with him, and to depute a unit under the command of Khalid to subjugate the said region. Khalid reached near Dowmatul Jandal along with mounted soldiers and lay in ambush outside the fort.

During that moonlit night Okaydar came out of the fort along with his brother Hassan for hunting. They had not gone far away from the fort they came face to face with the soldiers of Khalid. During the brief encounter, which took place between the two groups. Okaydar's brother was killed, and his men fled and took refuge in the fort and shut its gate, and Okaydar was taken prisoner.

Khalid promised him that if the inmates of the fort opened its gate under his orders and surrendered their arms to the army of Islam he would forgive him and would take him before the Prophet .

Okaydar was aware that the Muslims were truthful and kept their promises. He, therefore, gave orders that the gate of the fort might be opened and the arms surrendered to the Muslims. The arms available in the fort consisted of 400 coats of mail, 500 swords and 400 spears. Khalid left for Madina along, with this booty and Okaydar also accompanied him.

Before arriving in Madina, Khalid sent to the Prophet Okaydar's brocade mantle, which the latter used to put on his shoulders like kings. The eyes of the worldly-minded persons were dazzled to look at the mantle, but the Prophet displayed perfect indifference towards it and said: "The dress of the people who will go to Paradise will be more wonderful".

Okaydar reached the Prophet. He declined to embrace Islam, but agreed to pay tribute to the Muslims and an agreement was concluded between him and the Prophet. Thereafter the Prophet gave him costly presents and appointed 'Abbad bin Bishr to convey him safely to Dowmatul Jandal.¹⁸

Evaluation Of The Journey To Tabuk

As a consequence of this tedious journey the Prophet did not come face to face with the enemy and no fighting took place, but a number of benefits were achieved.¹⁹

Firstly, this expedition enhanced the prestige of the army of Islam and the Prophet was enabled to impress his greatness and strength on the hearts of the people of the Hijaz and the frontiers—men of Syria. Consequently the friends as well as the enemies of Islam came to know that its military power had grown so much that it could face the biggest powers of the world and could frighten and intimidate them.

Crime and rebellion had become second nature with the Arab tribes. However, their becoming aware of the strength of the army of Islam could restrain them for quite some time from opposing the Muslims and revolting against them.

Hence, after the return of the Prophet to Madina the representatives of the tribes, which had not surrendered till then, began coming to Madina and making declarations regarding their submission to the Islamic Government and embracement of Islam, so much so that the ninth year of migration began to be called the year of deputations.

Secondly, on having concluded various agreements with the frontiers—men of the Hijaz and Syria the Muslims ensured the safety of this region, and were satisfied that the chiefs of these tribes would not co-operate with the Roman army.

Thirdly, by performing this painful journey the Prophet made conquest of Syria easier. He made the commanders of the army acquainted with the difficulties of this region and taught them the method of warfare against the big powers of that time.

Hence, the first region which the Muslims conquered after the demise of the Prophet was the territory of Damascus and Syria. Furthermore, by general mobilization the true believers were distinguished from the hypocrites and profound understanding was created among the Muslims.

The Hypocrites Plot Against The Holy Prophet

The Prophet stayed in Tabuk for ten days²⁰ and returned to Madina after dispatching Khalid to Dowmah. Twelve hypocrites, out of whom eight were from amongst Quraysh and the remaining four were the inhabitants of Madina, decided to scare the camel of the Prophet from the top of a defile situated on the route between Madina and Syria and to make him fall into the valley.

When the army of Islam reached the first point of the defile, the Prophet said: "Whoever desires to go through the desert may do so because the desert is quite extensive". However, he himself went above the defile while Huzayfah was driving his camel and 'Ammar was holding its bridle.

When he turned back his head he saw in the moonlit night that some mounted persons were pursuing him. To ensure that they might not be identified they had covered their faces and were conversing in very low voices. The Prophet became angry and challenged them and ordered Huzayfah to turn away their camels with his stick.

The call of the Prophet frightened them very much and they realized that he had become aware of their plot. They therefore, immediately went back the way they had come and joined other soldiers.

Huzayfah says: "I identified them from the marks of their camels and said to the Prophet: "I can tell you who they are so that you may punish them". But the Prophet instructed me in a kind voice not to divulge their secret, because it was possible that they might repent. He also added: "If I punish them the non-Muslims would say that now that Muhammad has achieved power, he has made a victim of his own companions".²¹

Cold War

No scene is more grand than the scene of the return of a victorious army to its homeland, and nothing is more pleasant to a soldier than victory over the enemy which protects his honour and ensures his safety and existence. It so happened that both of these things were apparent and visible at the time of the return of the victorious army of Islam from Tabuk.

After covering the journey between Tabuk and Madina the army of Islam arrived in Madina with great splendour. The soldiers of Islam were very much elated and the pride of distinction as a warrior and of predominance was apparent from their gait and conversation. The reason for this pride was also evident, because they had made a big power retreat; the power, which had defeated earlier its powerful adversary (Iran). The Muslims had frightened and over-awed the Romans and had also subjugated the frontiers-men of Syria and the Hijaz.

These persons had admittedly secured an honour by overpowering the enemy and were evidently justified in priding themselves over others, who had stayed on in Madina without a just cause.

However, it was possible that this way of thinking and this victorious return might create undue pride in the narrow-minded persons, and might result in insult to some of those persons, who had stayed on in Madina for some good excuse, but their hearts were with the soldiers in the battlefield and they sincerely shared their weal and woe.

Hence, the Prophet addressed the army of Islam, at a place near Madina where it had stayed for a short time, in these words: "There are some persons in Madina, who joined hands with you in this journey and kept step with you".

The Prophet was asked as to how it could be imagined that those, who stayed in Madina also participated in the journey with the army. He replied: "They, in spite of being very keen to take part in this

sacred obligation (jihad), could not join on account of some good excuse".²²

By means of this brief speech the Prophet alluded to one of the instructional programmes of Islam and directed the people that good intentions and upright thinking take the place of pious deeds, and those people, who are deprived of doing good deeds on account of lack of strength or resources, can become partners of others in the matter of spiritual reward and recompense for good deeds.

If Islam desires outward reformation it is all the more keen on spiritual reformation and purity of thinking, because the real source of reformation is reformation of belief and the way of thinking, and all our actions originate from our thoughts.

Thus the Prophet removed the unjustified pride of the mujahids and guaranteed the position of the excusable persons, but he determined from that very moment that he would award exemplary punishment to those violators, who had no just excuse to offer, and would make their lives miserable. The following event is an example of such an action.

On the day general mobilization was proclaimed in Madina three Muslims named Hilal, Ka'b and Murarah came to the Prophet and requested that they might be excused from participating in the jihad. The reason mentioned by them was that their produce from the jungle and from their gardens had not yet been collected and was still half-ripe. They also promised the Prophet that when their produce was collected within a few days they would join the army of Islam at Tabuk.

Those persons, who do not differentiate between material gain and political independence, are the short-sighted people who consider the transient worldly pleasures to be at par with respectable life, which is passed under the banner of intellectual, political and cultural independence and at times even prefer the former to the latter.

The Prophet was obliged, after his return, to punish such persons and incidentally to prevent this disease penetrating into the minds of others as well. Not only that these persons had not participated in the jihad but they had also not kept the promise made by them with the Prophet. They were still busy in their trade and in accumulating wealth when suddenly the news of the victorious return of the Prophet spread in Madina.

These three persons, in order to make amends for their misconduct and to deceive other Muslims, went to welcome the Prophet like all others and paid their respects to him and congratulated him; but he did not pay any heed to them.

On reaching Madina he addressed the people amidst all the rejoicing and tumult, and the first thing which he said was this: " O people! These three persons belittled the Islamic orders and didn't keep the promise they had made with me. They preferred worldly gains to the respectable life under the banner of Islam. Hence you should cut off all relations with them"

The number of the violators reached ninety, but as most of them belonged to the group of hypocrites and it could not be expected from them that they would join in jihad against the enemy, the pressure was directed towards these three Muslims of whom, Murarah and Hilal, had participated in the Battle of Badr and enjoyed a reputation amongst the Muslims.

The wise policy of the Prophet, which is an integral part Islam, had a wonderful effect. The trade and business of the violators came to a perfect standstill. Their commodities had no demand in the market. Their nearest ones cut off their relations with them and refrained from even conversing with them or visiting them. Social boycott by the people lowered the spirits and morale of these persons, so much that the spacious land of Madina was nothing more than a cage for them.²³

Hence, it was fortunate that these three persons realized, through their intelligence and insight, that life in Islamic environments was not possible without whole-hearted association with the Muslims, and the life of an insignificant minority, opposed to the majority, could not last long, especially when the minority consisted of a group of mischievous, quarrelsome, and spiteful persons.

On the one side they had been called to account and on the other side the natural and instinctive force pulled them once again towards real faith, and they repented before Allah of their cowardly act. The Almighty also accepted their repentance and informed His Prophet of their being forgiven. Orders regarding the termination of the boycott were, therefore, promulgated immediately.²⁴

The Event Of Masjid Zirar

In the Arabian Peninsula Madina and Najran were considered to be two extensive areas and big centres for the people of the Scriptures. Hence some Arabs belonging to the tribes of Aws and Khazraj were inclined towards Judaism and Christianity and had become followers of these religions.

During the Age of Ignorance Abu 'Amir, father of Hanzalah, the well-known martyr of the Battle of Uhud, had become very much inclined towards Christianity and had become a monk. When Islam dawned in Madina and absorbed the religious minorities, Abu 'Amir was upset and began co-operating earnestly with the hypocrites of Aws and Khazraj.

The Prophet became aware of his subversive activities and wanted to arrest him, but he ran away from Madina to Makkah and then to Ta'if and after the fall of Ta'if, to Syria. From there he began guiding the spying network of the hypocrites.

In one of his letters Abu 'Amir wrote to his friends:

"Construct a mosque in the village of Quba' opposite the mosque of the Muslims. Assemble there at the time of prayers and on the pretext of offering prayers, discuss and chalk out plans against Islam and the Muslims".

Like the present day enemies of Islam Abu 'Amir had also realized that in a country in which religion is fully established, the best way to destroy it, is to use the name of religion itself, and religion can be harmed more by using its own name rather than by any other factor. He knew fully well that the Prophet would not permit the hypocrites to build a centre for themselves under any circumstances, except when they gave that centre a religious tinge and erected a meeting-place for themselves with the name of a mosque.

When the Prophet intended proceeding to Tabuk the representatives of the hypocrites came to him and requested him to accord them permission to construct a mosque in their own area, on the pretext that when the nights were dark or it was raining their old men and invalids were not in a position to cover the long distance between their houses and Masjid Quba. The Prophet did not give them any reply, either in the affirmative or in the negative, and postponed final decision in the matter till after his return from the intended journeys.²⁵

The hypocrites selected a place in the absence of the Prophet and completed the construction of their rendezvous as quickly as possible, giving it the name of mosque. On the day the Prophet returned to Madina they requested him to perform the opening ceremony of this place of worship by offering a few rak'ats of prayers there.

In the meantime the Archangel Jibreel came and informed the Prophet of the position and called the building Masjid Zirar as it had been constructed to create differences amongst the Muslims.²⁶ The Prophet ordered Masjid Zirar to be razed to the ground, its beams to be burnt, and its rubbish thrown there for some period.²⁷

Destruction of Masjid Zirar was a serious blow to the hypocrites and thereafter their group broke up and Abdullah bin Ubayy, their sole supporter, also died after two months of the Battle of Tabuk.

Tabuk was the last Islamic campaign in which the Prophet took part. After that he did not participate in any battle.

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1. Tabaqat, vol.II, page 165
 2. Tabaqat, vol. II, page 166.
 3. Mughazi-i Waqidi, page 1003.
 4. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 517.
 5. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 518; Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, pp.992-993
 6. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 520; Bihar, vol. XXI, page 207.
 7. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, page 990.
 8. Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 244.
 9. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 520. But Waqidi has ascribed this incident with a little variation, to Abdullah bin Khaythamah
 10. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. III, page 152.
 11. (He is) the Knower of the Unseen, and He reveals to none His secret, save to every messenger whom He has chosen.

(Surah al-Jinn, 72:26 – 27).

12. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 523.
13. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 525.
14. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, page 1000.
15. Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 161.
16. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 526; Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 160 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 160.
17. Dowmah is situated within ten miles of Madina. (Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, page 1025).
18. Tabaqat, vol. II, page 146 and Biharul Anwar, vol. II, page 246.
19. The Prophet stayed in Tabuk for twenty days. One day, after offering morning prayers he delivered a detailed, eloquent and instructive sermon. Thereafter he quotes the text of the sermon. (Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, pp. 1014 – 1015).
20. The period of stay of the Prophet in Tabuk is stated to be twenty days. (Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. III, page 527 and Tabaqat-i Ibn Sa'd vol. II, page 168).
21. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol. III, pp. 1042 – 1043; Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 247 and Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 162.
22. Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 163; Biharul Anwar, vol. XX, page 219.
23. The contents of this sentence are an extract from the Qur'an wherein it has been said: "As though there was no place in the whole vast earth to hide them or in their souls to console them" (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:118).
24. (Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 165 and Biharul Anwar, vol. X, page 119). The Prophet's instructive method serves as an example for us, Muslims, in the matter of insignificant minorities. Such opposition can be tackled only by sincerity, determination and unity. Waqidi has given a more detailed account of the three persons. (vide Mughazi, vol. III, pp. 1049 – 1056).
25. Mughazi-i Waqidi, vol III, page 1046.
26. Verses 107 – 110 of Surah al-Tawbah were revealed in connection with Masjid Zirar.
27. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 530 and Bihar, vol. XX, page 253.

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