

## Chapter 9: The Battle of the Ditch

Five years covering important events passed from the date of migration, and these five years pushed Islam forward as much as five centuries in the sense that during this short period the Prophet (S) humiliated Quraysh and vanquished and made helpless the tribes of Ghatfan and Huzayl and eventually by means of the entire strength, which he had at his command, he put out the flames of the Arabian pride, at times in the shape of attack and at times in the form of defence and broke up the thorns of their communion. Of course, all this success was achieved by him under the aegis of monotheism and through the propagation of peace and security.

As a result of these activities and successes Islam gained strength and became popular and the voice of the Holy Prophet (S) also reached far and wide. Side by side with this the defeated elements joined hands against the Prophet (S) and every enemy who felt even a small vigour within himself rose to take revenge on the Prophet.

During the first thirteen years of his mission in Makkah, Quraysh, who were the Holy Prophet's kinsfolk, had condemned his views and thoughts and the obstinate members of this tribe called him a silly person and waged a war against him. However, he continued his efforts as usual.

During this period of contention Quraysh often placed at his disposal wealth and persons? So that he might abandon his call. He, however, continued to pursue his path and sought aloofness from them, till at last he migrated to Madina.

A few months after his migration, the Prophet (S) organized an army, fought in Badr and at other places and returned to Madina after achieving victory and acquiring war booty. Apparently Quraysh contended and disputed with him as they condemned his mission, but later they rose against him openly as well as secretly to avenge their financial losses as well as loss of their lives, and to check his influence and therefore, began to array troops.

The Jews who lived in the neighbourhood of the Prophet (S) and owned vast lands and also benefited from craftsmanship, requested him to expel the Jews of Bani Qaynuqa<sup>1</sup> and Bani Nazir from Madina notwithstanding all their wealth and position among the Jews.

This group of Jews, all of whom possessed property and wealth, had felt on the very day of the Prophet's arrival in Madina that their influence was in danger. For this reason they planned to create mischief and thought, on account of their wealth and the influence which they wielded in Madina, that they would be able to subdue the shelterless Prophet (S) and his followers.

It is evident that the Prophet (S) could not yield to the enmity of the Jews and if he had surrendered to their strength and influence, it would have been as good as his having proclaimed his own defeat. In view of this he, in the first instance, warned the Jews of Bani Qaynuqa and then those of Bani Nazir to refrain from creating trouble. As, however, they did not pay any heed to the warnings, he was obliged to give orders regarding their expulsion and they left the city in a state of great humiliation and helplessness and thus saved their lives. They were not allowed to carry away anything except the provisions for their journey up to Khayber (in the interior of the Hijaz) or Azra'at (situated in Syria).

On the other side were the Arabs of Ghat'i'an and Huzayl and other tribes of the suburbs, and similarly the tribes of Najd and the frontiers of Syria, who were seeing the phantom of the new system, felt that Islam had brought its own rules and was inviting people to work and make efforts so that they might lead their lives in this manner, instead of indulging in fighting and plundering. They had therefore, sharpened their stings like a monster and were clutching at the face of the Holy Prophet (S) and had become a barrier before his reforms. They were afraid that the new system would eradicate the very foundations of their tribal life and the ways of their plundering.

In short, Quraysh in Makkah, his neighbours the Jews of Madina, the Arabs of Ghatfan and Huzayl, the tribes living in nearby places and those belonging to Najd and the frontiers of Syria, and so to say the entire Arab world had risen and mobilized against him.

Although Islam had become sufficiently strong, the enemies of Islam who had cooperated with one another possessed a great strength. Apart from that, in those days the Holy Prophet (S) was faced with a group of hypocrites. The hypocrisy of these persons was reckoned to be a weak point of Islam and a proof of the slackness of its authority, and the enemy could break the fort of Islam through this way and enter it.

The proofs of the Prophethood of Muhammad (S) are many, but his greatest miracle and sign was their peace of mind and confidence which was firm in this critical situation and he was not afraid of the fire of mischief and hypocrisy which had encircled him from all sides; rather he gained more strength of mind every day to achieve his cherished goal.

Amidst all the brawls and uproars, and throughout his campaigns, and also during the intervals of these dreadful events, in the course of five years, in which the greatness and honour of Islam increased and at the same time the number of the opponents of Islam also increased, ‘Ammar, the hero of our story, that tall and strong man, who had tasted the flavour of death during summer as well as winter, and was not afraid in any circumstances, had now achieved such a position that death feared him. During the intervals of these campaigns death was under his control and had made a covenant with him. At times he ordered death during summer that it should fall upon and take the life of those enemies who used to pull him to the point of annihilation with cruelty.

According to his old habit of going to the masjid to hear the address of the Holy Prophet (S), ‘Ammar went to the masjid one day to learn something from the Prophet (S) and act upon it or to execute an order given by him. On that day, while on his way to the masjid, he observed, contrary to the previous days, signs and marks which did not augur well for victory and success, as the general conditions of the city had assumed another shape. As soon as he entered the masjid he observed that the condition of the masjid on that day differed from the previous day, because in earlier days, when the companions of the Prophet were relieved of campaigns and were resting under the auspices of his kindness and support, he usually delivered sermons in regard to regulation of the affairs of life and establishment of the rules of discipline and good order. On that day, however, the atmosphere of the masjid had assumed a new shape and the conditions indicated a different outlook.

On observing these conditions ‘Ammar was somewhat worried and wished to enquire about this change in the conditions. However, the wisdom of Luqman i.e. wisdom of silence, which was his old habit prevented him from doing so, and he waited till his turn to speak arrived. And then the position became clear without unnecessary inquisitiveness on his part.

‘Ammar had not made a mistake in refraining from making enquires about the matter, because he enjoyed such a position in the eyes of the Prophet (S) that even the most confidential matter could not remain hidden from him, not to speak of a secret, which had been disclosed now, and the faces of the hypocrites became dark and gloomy on this disclosure. The divulgence of this secret also haunted the entire Muslim community of Madina like a nightmare.

After ‘Ammar had taken his seat amongst the esteemed companions, he learned that the Jews of Bani Nazir tribe had revealed their malicious nature, and had instigated all the tribes of Arabia to rise against the Holy Prophet, and that the criminal minded Jews incited all the opponents of Islam, who were in majority in Arabia, to fight against the Muslims of Madina, who were in the minority, so that they might strike them a final blow. 1

‘Ammar came to know that Hay bin Akhtab and Salam bin Haqiq and a group of the Jews belonging to

the tribe of Bani Nazir as well as the leaders of the Jews had instigated Quraysh to rise against the Prophet. Abu Sufyan bin Harb had mobilized an army consisting of four thousand warriors out of whom 300 hundred were horsemen and 1,500 were on camels and the standard-bearer of this army was 'Uthman bin Talha.

Similarly Bani Fazara had been instigated, and 'Uyayna bin Hisn Fazari had mobilized 1000 men mounted on camels; and the tribe of Bani Ashja ' had also risen and 400 warriors of theirs were ready to march under the command of Ma'r bin Rakhila; and the tribe of Bani Murra had despatched Harith bin' Awf with 400 warriors, and the tribe of Bani Salim had also sent 700 fighters against the Prophet of Islam.

Furthermore, Bani Asad and Bani Sa'd were also going to participate in the attack and they and their allies had mobilized and despatched an army the like of which had not been seen by Arabia before. And all these groups had entrusted the supreme command to Abu Sufyan who was on his way to Madina.

In the meantime it also became known that Hay bin Akhtab had undertaken to rouse the Jews of Bani Qurayza against the Prophet (S) and to persuade them to violate the pact concluded by them with the Prophet (according to the pact, they were residing in Madina and were enjoying the support of the Prophet), and thus create trouble within Madina and pave the way for the victory of their army, so that they might make a sudden attack in the severe winter season and rout the Muslims.

When 'Ammar learnt about these matters, he realized that the Muslims of Madina were justified in being worried on account the serious situation in which they were placed. However, on such occasions 'Ammar used to look intently at the face of the Prophet (S) and to judge his impression and anxiety, before being impressed by the anxiety of others arriving at a decision. He, therefore, fixed his eyes on the face of the Prophet.

As a result of this careful observation he felt that the Prophet (S) was as cheerful as ever and he was enjoying perfect peace of mind. At last, therefore, he concluded that the bright countenance of the Prophet (S) showed that the mobilization of forces by Abu Sufyan and the Jews fell under the category of the events which did not call for any worry and that the Muslims should be bold and brave. The Prophet (S) did not consider the matter important enough to make others worry about it.

In view of this, 'Ammar became contented like all those persons whose souls acquire confidence with the strength of faith, and who do not entertain fear on account of any event, however great and terrible it may be.

The Prophet (S) called a meeting of his companions and consulted them about the event which was likely to take place soon, and especially invited their views about the Jews and the polytheists. In this

meeting thinkers and warriors from amongst the Muhajirs and the Ansar were present. At the end of consultations two views emerged:

1. The Muslims should go out of the city and face the enemies at Uhud or some other place.
2. They should fortify themselves within Madina and resist the enemies, because by offering such resistance there was no danger of being subdued.

The second view was considered to be the better one. It was supported by the suggestion of Salman Farsi regarding digging a ditch, which was endorsed by all those present. All of them praised Salman for his originality.

On this occasion the Muhajirs claimed that Salman was one of them and said: "Salman belongs to us."

The Ansar also put forward a similar claim and said: "Salman belongs to us."

The Holy Prophet (S), however, intervened and said: "Salman is one of the members of my family."

Salman said: "My suggestion is that we should remain inside Madina and close all the breaches. Thereafter we should dig a ditch round the city which would prevent the entry of the enemies. And when their entry has been blocked we shall overcome them and defeat them by military tactics. In that event time will be in our favour, because we shall be in our own places of safety and the wind, storm and rains will not do us much harm. On the contrary the enemies will be very much harassed on account of harsh winds and severe cold and it is quite possible that the storm may pull down their tents. Further more, we have sufficient stocks and provisions, and can face the enemy for quite a long time. In the circumstances it would be better if we remain within the city and block the entry of the enemies by digging a ditch, so that they may lose patience and if some one of them attacks us he will be annihilated."

Those present proceeded immediately and occupied themselves in digging the ditch under the guidance of the Holy Prophet (S).

The Prophet (S) ordered a number of shovels, picks and other necessary implements to be brought. The same were procured, and then in the name of Allah he personally started the work. He was the first person who struck the pick on the ground and was the first person on whose head and face the dust settled; while digging the ditch he encouraged the Muslims to work hard and prayed: "O Lord! Verily the life is life of the hereafter. So, O Lord! Forgive the Ansar and the Muhajirs."

The persons who were sincere and devout in Islam dug the earth as expeditiously as possible and threw the soil out of the ditch, but the hypocrites who were not inclined to work willingly dissimulated, and

whenever they found an opportunity they misled others, slipped away to their houses and rested there. It was in relation to the condition of these persons that Allah sent a revelation to the Holy Prophet (S) and said:

***Do not address the Prophet as you address each other: Allah indeed knows those of you who slip away surreptitiously and take shelter in their houses. Let those who disobey Allah's command should fear that a calamity may overtake them or a dreadful punishment may descend upon them. (Surah al-Nur, 24:63)***

But as regards the true believers, who gave up work on account of some valid excuse, and left with the permission of the Prophet, the Almighty Allah has said:

***The true believers are those who have faith in Allah and His Prophet and as and when they cooperate with the Prophet in a particular work, they do not go away without his permission. Surely those who take your permission are the persons who believe in Allah and His Prophet. In this case if they seek your permission (to go) to do some work, which they may have to do, accord permission to whomever you like, and seek forgiveness for them from Allah, because Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Surah al-Nur, 24:62)***

Anyhow, for six days the Muslims had been labouring hard to dig the ditch, and eventually they constructed a fort for the city of Madina. This fort did not resemble the forts which the Arabs used to construct, because the forts which they constructed previously were on the ground, but this fort had been dug in the earth and the unbelievers were stunned by this sudden initiative of the Muslims

If we say that during this period of six days every other Muslim was faced with one degree of toil and inconvenience we should say that 'Ammar was faced with twice as much as that.

Again, during the continuous toils and efforts of these days the Muslims observed that not even a single day passed when the Prophet (S) did not wipe off dust from the head and face of 'Ammar with his own hands. He repeated this particular sentence: "Alas! O son of Sumayya! A rebellious group will kill you! "

The day of the ditch was the most brilliant and effective factor for the victory and success of Islam and simultaneously it was a period when Islam was threatened with great dangers on account of the presence of the hypocrites because it was these very hypocrites, who dispirited and discouraged the people and said: "Muhammad used to promise us the treasures of Kaiser and Kisra, whereas he is now digging our graves in this ditch. Did he mean this Iranian innovation which will be of no avail before the rush and attack of the, army of Abu Sufyan. He promises us treasure and that too the treasure of gems. But that treasure won't be anything other than our lifeless bodies ".

The hypocrites uttered these words with different tones and these very gossips and rumours became the

cause of the fear and worries of the people of Madina.

The Holy Qur'an has described this state of affairs in a very subtle and elegant manner. It says:

***When they (the enemies) came upon you from above and from below and the eyes grew wild and hearts reached to the throats, and you were imagining vain thoughts concerning Allah. There were the believers sorely tried, and shaken with a mighty shock. And when the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, were saying: 'Allah and His messenger promised us naught but delusion.' And when a party of them said: 'O folk of Yathrib! There is no stand (possible) for you, therefore turn back'. And some of them (even) sought permission of the Prophet, saying: 'Our homes lie open (to the enemy)'. And they lay not open. They but wished to flee.***<sup>2</sup> (Surah al Ahzab, 33:10-13)

In any case the tools of work and the means of victory and success in this dreadful war were three things viz. planning by Salman, the sword of 'Ali and the war tactics of the Holy Prophet.

It goes without saying that from among these three factors the most important factor and tool of work was the war tactics employed by the Prophet, because he sent Na'im bin Sa'd, whose embracement of Islam had not yet been made public, to his tribesmen and he made them lose hope of help from the Jews. By this means the morale of those people deteriorated and the sense of mutual confidence and reliance which previously existed between those two parties disappeared. Hence, the tribes were faced with doubt, hesitation and anxiety and their united strength became scattered and divided. As a result of this the Muslims were victorious and the invaders retreated and fled during a dark night when strong and cold winds were campaigning against them.

After having violated the pacts which they had concluded with the Muslims, Bani Qurayza were left alone in their forts and Hay bin Akhtab was also with them. In the circumstances, was it not necessary that they should receive punishment for their treachery?<sup>3</sup>

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1. In the present century the descendants of this injurious germ have instigated the authorities in power in England, France and America, to annihilate Islam. They have made more than one million Muslims homeless and usurped Palestine. It has been reported in a newspaper that the Pope has pronounced a judgement that the Jews did not crucify Prophet 'Isa!

2. Prof. Dr Muhammad Hamidullah says in his treatise entitled 'The Holy Prophet in the battlefield: "Abu Bakr and 'Umar were sitting near each other in a tower situated by the bank of the ditch and were very much frightened and 'Umar wrote some words on a slab of stone in his own hand. It clearly shows how frightened he was."

3. These treacherous people were executed in accordance with the arbitration of Sa'ad bin Mu'az and the commands of the Torah.

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