The First Migration

Migration of a group of Muslims to Ethiopia is a clear proof of their faith and deep sincerity. With a view to get rid of the mischief and atrocities of Quraysh and to acquire a peaceful atmosphere for observing their religious ceremonies and worshipping Allah the One they decided to leave Makkah and to forsake their wealth business children and relatives.

They however wondered what to do and where to go for they saw that idolatry prevailed throughout the Arabian Peninsula and there was not a single point where the name of Allah could be proclaimed aloud or the laws of Islam could be introduced. They therefore decided to place the matter before the Prophet -the foundation of whose religion was laid on: "Allah's land is spacious. Worship Me alone" (Choose that place for residence where you can worship Allah). (Surah al-Ankabut 29:56).

The Holy Prophet was fully aware of the pitiable condition of the Muslims. Although he himself enjoyed the support of Bani Hashim and they protected him from every harm his devotees mostly consisted of slave-girls and slave-boys and some unprotected free men. The chiefs of Quraysh persecuted these helpless persons incessantly and in order to forestall tribal wars the powerful chiefs of various tribes tortured those persons of their tribes who had embraced Islam. An account of the torture and persecutions to which Quraysh subjected the people has already been given in the foregoing pages.

It was on this account that when the companions of the Prophet sought advice from him regarding migration he replied: "If you travel to Ethiopia it will be very profitable for you because on account of the presence of a mighty and just ruler nobody is oppressed there and the land of that country is good and pure and you can live there till Almighty Allah provides you relief."[1]

No doubt a pure environment where a worthy and just person is at the helm of affairs is a specimen of Paradise and the only object of the companions of the Holy Prophet in occupying such a land was that they might perform their religious duties with perfect security and peace of mind.

The penetrating words of the Holy Prophet had such a wholesome effect that soon after that those who were already quite ready packed their luggage and proceeded to Jeddah at night either mounted or on foot without their enemies (idolaters) becoming aware of their departure. The total number of those who migrated this time was ten and they included four Muslim women as well.

It is worthy of note why the Holy Prophet did not mention other places. However when the conditions then prevailing in Arabia and other places are studied the secret of the selection of Ethiopia becomes quite clear. The reason for this was that migration to places inhabited by the Arabs who were usually idolaters was dangerous.

The idolaters were reluctant to receive the Muslims either because they wished to please Quraysh or because they loved the religion of their forefathers. The places in Arabia inhabited by the Christians and the Jews were not at all fit for migration because they were fighting and quarrelling with each other for their spiritual penetration and there was no room for a third rival. Furthermore these two groups considered people of the Arab descent to be inferior and humble.

Yemen was under the influence of the King of Iran and the Iranian authorities were not prepared to accommodate Muslims in that land so much so that when Khusro Pervez received the letter from the Holy Prophet he at once wrote to the Governor of Yemen to arrest the new Prophet and send him to Iran. Hira too was under the domination of Iran like Yemen. Syria was far away from Makkah. Furthermore Yemen and Syria were the markets for Quraysh and they had close relations with the people of these areas. If the Muslims had taken shelter there those people would have expelled them on the request of Quraysh who had made a similar request to the King of Ethiopia who turned it down.

During those days journey by sea particularly with women and children was an extraordinarily difficult job. Undertaking such a journey and abandoning means of livelihood was a sign of devotion and pure faith. Jeddah (and according to Jurji Zaydan the port of 'Shoaibiyah' of those days) was a developed trading port and by chance two trading vessels were then ready to sail from there for Ethiopia. The Muslims fearing pursuit by Quraysh made known their intention to perform the journey and boarded the vessel in much haste on payment of half a dinar. A report regarding the departure of the Muslims had also reached the ears of the chiefs of Makkah and they sent some persons to bring them back but by the time they reached there the vessel had left the coast of Jeddah and could not be seen.

Pursuit of those who had taken refuge in a foreign land only for the safety of their faith is a clear proof of the villainy of Quraysh. The migrants had forsaken their property children residences and business but the chiefs of Makkah were not prepared to leave them alone The elders of 'Darun Nadwah' feared the outcome of this journey and discussed amongst themselves the matters which will be mentioned later.

The members of this group did not belong to one family and according to Ibn Hisham [2] everyone of these ten persons belonged to a separate family. Another migration took place

after this and the leader of these migrants was Ja'far son of Abu Talib. This migration was arranged with perfect freedom and some of the migrants were therefore successful in taking their women and children also with themselves.

Consequently the number of the Muslims in Ethiopia reached eighty three and if we take into account the children who were taken there or were born in that land the number would exceed this figure.

As the Prophet had described the Muslims found Ethiopia to be a prosperous country with a calm and free atmosphere. Umm Salama the wife of Abi Salama who later had the honour of marrying the Prophet says thus about that country: "When we settled in Ethiopia we found ourselves under the protection of the best patron. We did not meet with any trouble or hear any bad word from anyone".

From the verses composed by some migrants it transpires that the atmosphere of Ethiopia [was very pleasant. Details may be seen in the Seerah-i Ibn Hisham.[3

QURAYSH SEND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES TO THE COURT OF ETHIOPIA

When the chiefs of Makkah learned about the freedom and peaceful life of the Muslims in Ethiopia the flames of rancour kindled in their hearts they were disturbed by the happy life being led by them there because that country had proved to be a haven for them. They were very much afraid lest the Muslims should have access to the Negus (ruler of Ethiopia) and they might be able to attract him to the religion of Islam and thus arrange the invasion of the Arabian Peninsula by a well-equipped army.

The elders of 'Darun-Nadwah' conferred once again and unanimously decided to send representatives to the court of Ethiopia and to arrange for proper presents for the King and his ministers to earn their good will and then to accuse the migrant Muslims of stupidity and ignorance and of inventing a religion. In order that their plan might meet with an immediate success they selected from amongst themselves two persons known for their cunning and deceitful activities.

One of whom later became a juggler in the field of politics. The lot fell upon 'Amr bin As and Abdullah bin Rabi'ah. The president of 'Darun Nadwah' instructed them that before meeting the ruler of Ethiopia they should present gifts to the ministers and have conversation with them in advance and should try to bring them round so that when they met the king they (the ministers) might support them. After having been briefed on these lines the said two persons proceeded to Ethiopia.

The ministers of Ethiopia met the representatives of Quraysh and the latter after presenting the gifts spoke to them thus: "A group of our young men have abjured the creed of their forefathers

and have invented a religion which is opposed to our religion as well as yours. They are now residing in your country. The elders and chiefs of Quraysh earnestly request the King of Ethiopia to expel them as soon as possible. Incidentally we also desire that the council of ministers may support us in the presence of the King. And as we are fully aware of the shortcomings and ways and manners of these persons it will be expedient that the matter is not discussed with them at all and the head of the State should not also grant them an audience".

The greedy and short-sighted persons (i.e. the ministers) assured them of their full support. On the following day the representatives of Quraysh were admitted in the royal court and after conveying their greetings and presenting the gifts they communicated the message of Quraysh to the King in the following words:

"O honourable ruler of Ethiopia! Some foolish young men of ours have taken steps to propagate a religion which does not conform either with the official religion of your country or with that of their ancestors. These people have recently taken refuge in your country and are taking undue advantage of the freedom available in this State. The elders of Quraysh earnestly request your Majesty that orders may be issued for their expulsion so that they may return to their own country....."

As soon as the speech of the representatives of Quraysh ended the voices of the ministers who were sitting round the royal throne became loud. All of them supported the representatives of Quraysh and confirmed what they had said. However signs of anger appeared on the face of the wise and just Ruler of Ethiopia. Opposing his courtiers he thundered: "This cannot be. I can't hand over to these two persons without proper investigation the people who have taken refuge in my country. It is necessary that the condition and particulars of these refugees should be looked into. And I will return them to their country only after the statements of these two persons about them have been substantiated thorough scrutiny. On the other hand if what these persons have said about them is not based on reality I will not forsake them but will render them more assistance".

Thereafter a special emissary of the royal court was sent to the emigrant Muslims and he brought them before the King without providing them any prior information. Ja'far bin Abu Talib was introduced as the representative of those persons. Some of the Muslims were worried as to how he would address the Christian monarch of Ethiopia. To alleviate their anxiety Ja'far told them that he would communicate to the King exactly what he had heard from the Holy Prophet.

The King of Ethiopia turned to Ja'far and said: "Why have you abjured the creed of your

forefathers and adopted a faith which does not conform either to our religion or to that of your ancestors?"

Jatfar replied: "We were an ignorant and idolatrous people. We did not avoid eating the dead bodies. We always indulged in abominable deeds. We had no respect for our neighbours. The weak and the helpless were oppressed by the strong. We quarrelled and fought with our kinsmen. We spent quite a long time in this manner till a person from amongst us who has a very brilliant and pure past rose up and invited us under the commandment of Allah to worship the One and only Deity and declared the praise of idols to be despicable. He also ordered us to return the things entrusted to us by others; to avoid impurities to behave well with our kinsmen and neighbours and to shun bloodshed unlawful contacts false evidence usurpation of the property of orphans and imputing bad deeds to women.

He has ordered us to offer prayers to fast and to pay taxes on our wealth. We have believed in him and occupied ourselves with the praise and worship of Allah the One. We consider that which He has declared lawful to be lawful. However Quraysh have behaved with us cruelly and have tortured us day and night so that we might abjure our faith revert to the worship of stones and idols and do all sorts of evil deeds. We resisted them for quite some time till our energy was exhausted. Despaired of our life and property we have taken refuge in Ethiopia to save our faith. The fame of the justice of the Ruler of Ethiopia attracted us like magnet and now also we have perfect faith in his justice."[4]

The appealing and fascinating speech of Ja'far impressed the King so much that he with tears in his eyes said to him: "Read something from the Heavenly Book of your Prophet". Ja'far recited some verses from Surah Maryam. He continued reciting these verses and fully explained the view-point of Islam about the chastity of Maryam and the elevated position of Prophet 'Isa. He had not yet finished the Surah when the King and the bishops began to cry loudly and their beards and the pages of the books which were lying open before them became wet with their tears.

For some time after this silence prevailed in the assembly and the humming ceased. Then the King intervened and said: "The words of their Prophet and that which Prophet 'Isa brought have emanated from one and the same source of light. Be gone. I will never surrender them to you". Contrary to what the ministers and the representatives of Quraysh had expected this meeting ended to their disadvantage and no ray of hope was left for them.

'Amr As who was a diplomatic and cunning person had a conversation with his friend Abdullah bin Rabi'ah and said to him: "We had better adopt another method tomorrow and it is possible that that method may end in the annihilation of the emigrants. Tomorrow I shall tell the King of

Ethiopia that the leader of these refugees has a particular belief about Prophet 'Isa which does not at all conform to the fundamentals of Christianity". Abdullah checked him from doing so and pointed out that amongst the refugees there were also persons who were related to them. His advise was not however effective. On the following day they went to the royal court along with all the ministers.

This time they pretended sympathy and support for the official religion of Ethiopia and criticized the beliefs of the Muslims with regard to Prophet 'Isa and said: "These people have specific beliefs about 'Isa which do not at all conform to the fundamentals and beliefs of the Christian World and the presence of such persons is dangerous for the official religion of your country. It should be possible for Your Majesty to enquire about it from them".

This time also the wise Ruler of Ethiopia decided to investigate the matter and ordered that the immigrants should be brought before him. The Muslims pondered over the reason for their being called again. It appeared as if it had been revealed to them by inspiration that the purpose of their being called was to enquire about their beliefs with regard to the founder of Christianity. Once again Ja'far was introduced as their spokesman.

He had already promised his friends that he would say only those things on the subject which he had heard from the Holy Prophet.

The Negus turned to the representative of the refugees and said: "What is your belief about Prophet 'Isa?"

Ja'far replied: "Our belief with regard to 'Isa is that which has been taught to us by our Holy Prophet. He was the servant and Prophet of Allah. He was the Spirit and Word of Allah with which He blessed Maryam".

The King of Ethiopia was very much pleased to hear the remarks of Ja'far and said: "By Allah! 'Isa did not enjoy a higher position than this". The ministers and the deviated persons did not like this observation of the King. However notwithstanding their views he praised the beliefs of the Muslims and allowed them full freedom. He threw the presents of Quraysh before their representatives and said: "God has not taken any bribe from me while giving me this authority. [It is not therefore appropriate that I should accumulate wealth by such means".[5

RETURN FROM ETHIOPIA

Some persons who had migrated to Ethiopia left that country and returned to the Hijaz on account of false reports to the effect that Quraysh had embraced Islam. On their return they came to know that the reports received by them were false and the pressure and persecution of the Muslims by Quraysh had not yet abated. Most of them therefore returned to Ethiopia and only a small minority entered Makkah either secretly or under the protection of some mighty

person of Quraysh.

Uthman bin Maz'un entered Makkah under the protection of Walid bin Mughayrah [6] and became safe from the atrocities of the enemy. He could however see with his own eyes that other Muslims were being persecuted and tortured by Quraysh. Uthman was very much grieved to observe this discrimination. He therefore requested Walid to declare publicly that the son of Maz'un was no longer under his protection so that he might also be in the same position in which other Muslims were and should share their grief and sorrow. Walid therefore declared in the mosque: "From this moment Ibn Maz'un is not under my protection". And Uthman also said aloud: "I confirm it".

Soon thereafter Labid the Arabian poet entered the mosque and began reading his well-known Qasidah (laudatory poem) in the big assembly of Quraysh.

He said: "Everything except Allah is unreal and illusory". Uthman said: "You are right". Labid then read the second hemistich:

"All the blessings of Allah are unstable". Uthman was disturbed and said: "You are mistaken. The blessings of the Hereafter are permanent and eternal". Labid took ill the objection of Uthman and said: "O Quraysh! Your circumstances have changed. In the past your assemblies were in good order and your companions did not feel any grief. Since when has this change occurred in your condition? Who is he?" One of those present said: "He is a foolish man who has abjured our creed and follows a man like himself. Don't pay heed to his words". Then the man rose and gave Uthman a strong slap in the face and blackened it. Walid bin Mughayrah said: "O Uthman! Had you remained under my protection you would not have suffered all this". Uthman replied: "I am under the protection of Almighty Allah". Walid said: "I am prepared to [offer you protection once again". Uthman replied: "I shall not accept it at all".[7

MISSION OF THE CHRISTIANS

Consequent upon the propagation of Islam by the Muslim immigrants an inquiry mission visited Makkah on behalf of the religious centre of the Christians of Ethiopia. They met the Prophet in the mosque and asked him certain questions. The Prophet gave replies to their questions and invited them to embrace Islam and recited some verses of the Holy Qur'an before them.

The Qur'anic verses changed their mentality in such a way that tears began to flow from their eyes involuntarily and they immediately expressed belief in his prophethood and confirmed all the signs of the promised Prophet about whom they had read in the Injeel.

Abu Jahl disliked this enthusiastic and well-concluded meeting. He said to those persons with much harshness: "The people of Ethiopia sent you on an inquiry mission and it was not the

intention that you should abjure the religion of your ancestors. I don't think there are more stupid persons than yourselves on the face of the earth".

Those persons uttered conciliatory words in reply to the Pharaoh of Makkah who wanted to [hide the invigorating rays of the sun like a dark cloud and thus put an end to the dispute.[8

THE MISSION OF QURAYSH

The mission of the people of Ethiopia became a means of the awakening of Quraysh and they also decided to make investigation. A group of persons including Harith bin Nasr and 'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'it left for Yathrib (Madina) as representatives of Quraysh with a view to place the question of the 'prophethood' and 'call' of Muhammad before the Jews. The Jewish scholars advised the mission to ask Muhammad the following questions:

1. What is the reality of the soul?
2. Story of the persons who disappeared in bygone times (the people of the Cave).
3. The adventures of the man who travelled in the east and in the west of the world. (Dhulqarnayn).

They told them that if Muhammad was in a position to reply to these questions they should rest assured that he is the chosen one of Allah but if he failed to give the requisite replies they should consider him to be a liar who must be got rid of as early as possible.

The representatives returned to Makkah in a very happy mood and informed Quraysh of the above-mentioned questions. A meeting was therefore arranged to which the Prophet was also invited. The Prophet told them that he was waiting for Divine revelation in connection with the three questions.[9] Heavenly revelation came. Reply to the first question (regarding 'soul') is contained in Surah Bani Isra'il 17:85. As regards the other two questions they have been replied to in detail in Surah al-Kahf 9-28 and 83-98. Detailed replies of the Holy Prophet to these three questions are found in the books of exegeses and need not be repeated here.

Notes

[1] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 321 and Tarikh-i Tabari vol. II page 70.

[2] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 245.

[3] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 353.

[4] Tarikh-i Kamil vol. II pp. 54-55.

[5] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 338.

[6] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 369.

[7] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 371.

[8] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I page 392.

.[9] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. I pp. 300 - 301

The Message, By: Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, P. 232 - 242