

Hostile Attitude of Jews towards the Holy Prophet Muhammad (.S.A.W

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For a long time, the Jews were masters of Medina. The tribes of Aws and Khazraj (the Ansar) had settled there later. Gradually, these tribes gathered strength and equaled the Jews in power and prestige. The internecine war of the Bu'ath, however, weakened them, and the Jews again assumed ascendancy. The Jews were a prosperous people and money lending at exorbitant rates of interest was one of their main occupations. With the deterioration in the economic situation of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj, many of them became heavily in debt to the Jews.

The position of authority and eminence, which their material superiority and strength gave to the Jews, received a big setback when Islam started spreading in Medina. The expansion of Islam was, therefore, viewed by them with great indignation and apprehension. This has always been their attitude and will always remain so.

Certainly you will find the most violent of all people in enmity for those who believe (Muslims) to be the Jews and those who are polytheists, and you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe to be those who say: We are Christians. This is so because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not arrogant. (Qur'an, 5:82) In this verse, the Muslims are told by the Almighty that their most bitter enemies are the Jews, and that their best friends may be from among the Christians who, unlike the Jews, are not characterized by arrogance. Despite this verse, we see many leaders of Muslim countries vying with each other to lick the Jews' shoes when they are supposed to be guarding themselves against their mischief.

Expediency had actuated the Jews to enter into a pact with the Muslims, but soon they began plotting against Islam. They would distort the words and verses of the Qur'an and mock and jeer at the Muslims. But the Prophet was bidden to bear it patiently: And you shall certainly hear from those who have been given the Book before you and from those who are polytheists much annoying talk, and if you are patient and guard (yourself against evil), surely this is one of the matters of great resolve.(Qur'an, 3:186)

The Prophet tried his best to maintain friendly ties with the Jews. He even prayed for one of them (who had lent him some money) once that the Almighty would safeguard his beauty. Till his death at the age of 80, that Jew's hair never turned gray. Read this incident on p. 15,

Vol. 18, of Bihar al-Anwar. It is also recorded in the classic reference titled Al-Kharaij. The Qur'an stressed the fundamental unity between both religions, Islam and Judaism, and asked the Jews to come to terms with the Muslims: Say: O people of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: That we shall not worship any but Allah and (that) we shall associate nothing with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah,

but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.(Qur'an, 3:64)

Neither kindness nor fair dealing on the part of the Prophet could, however, conciliate the Jews. They tried to revive the rift between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Some Jews would accept Islam one day and renounce it the next in order to show that there was nothing significant in Islam.

And a party of the people of the Book says: Profess faith in that which has been revealed to those who believe in the first part of the day and disbelieve therein at the end of it, perhaps they will go back on their religion.(Qur'an, 3:72)

They conspired with the munafiqun and sent emissaries to the enemies of Islam. Apprehension and envy at the growing power of the Muslims following their victory at Badr rankled in their hearts, and they redoubled their efforts to exterminate the new religion. Quraish were further instigating them to do so, sending a threatening epistle to them: "You possess arms and fortresses. You should fight our enemy (Muhammad); otherwise, we will attack you and nothing will prevent us from grabbing the arms of your women.'

Ka'b ibn Ashraf, Jewish chieftain of Banu Nadir, was a poet of considerable fame and fortune. Like so many others, he was bitterly hostile to Islam. With his fiery poems, he began to incite the people to rise up against the Muslims. After the battle of Badr, he composed a number of eulogies mourning the Meccan chiefs slain in the battle. He used to recite them at every gathering. He contacted Abu Sufyan with a view to making a combined effort to wipe out the

Muslims. He openly recited a number of poems derogatory to the Prophet.

As poetry had a high place in the life of the Arabs and could deepen influence and sway feelings, Ka'b ibn Ashraf had become not only a nuisance but a serious menace. We have it on the authority of al-Ya'qubi and hafiz Ibn Hajar that Ka'b plotted to kill the Prophet. When this plot became known to the Prophet, he consulted his companions and it was decided that Ka'b should be silenced forever. Muhammad ibn Maslamahh undertook to carry out the job and, on getting an opportunity, he killed Ka'b ibn Ashraf on Safar 14, 3 A.H./August 9, 624 A.D.

Banu Qinaqa', the most powerful Jewish tribe, were the first to resile from the alliance with the Muslims. Says Ibn Sa'd, "The Jews attempted sedition during the battle of Badr and were envious of the Muslims, retracting from their pact with them.'

An incident in 2 A.H./623 A.D. led to a flare-up. A veiled Muslim lady had gone to the shop of a Jew. She was pestered and her clothes thrown up. A Muslim standing nearby was unable to tolerate this indecent behaviour, so he killed the Jew. The Jews, thereupon, killed the Muslim. The Prophet remonstrated with them but they defiantly replied that they were not (as weak as) Quraish (who were defeated in Badr) and would show him what battle was. Within the security of their fortress, they started making preparations for war. The fortress was besieged by the Muslims for fifteen days and the Jews had to sue for peace, promising that they would accept the Prophet's decision.

The Prophet decided to kick them out of Medina for good, giving them ten days to depart to Greater Syria on the pain of death, allowing them to take all their movable possessions except their arms. First they paid no heed to his order and were resolved to resist. They were besieged within the walls of their fortresses for fifteen days following which they surrendered and were expelled in the Summer of 4 A.H./625 A.D. Most of them proceeded to Khaybar where they had possessed landed property; some of them marched to Syria and Palestine.

Their immoveable property was confiscated. Buildings were distributed among the Muhajirs who still had no houses of their own in Medina since the date of their migration from Mecca. Some Ansar who also had no dwellings of their own were provided with the dwellings. Some of them did not like the idea of leaving their houses to be occupied by the Muslims, so, they demolished them. The Qur'an refers to the various aspects of this expulsion in Surat al-Hashr: He (Allah) it is Who caused those (Jews) who disbelieved (in Muhammad) from among the People of the Book (Torah) to get out of their homes in the first banishment; you did not think that they would get out, while they were certain that their fortresses would defend them against Allah, but Allah came to them from where they did not expect and cast terror into their hearts; they demolished their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers; therefore, take a lesson, O you who have eyes! And had it not been that Allah had decreed for them the exile, He would certainly have punished them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have the chastisement of the Fire. This is so because they opposed Allah and His Prophet (Muhammad), and whoever opposes Allah, then surely Allah is severe in retributing (evil).(Qur'an, 59:2-4)

Some European critics see only the immediate cause, that is, the indecent behaviour with the Muslim lady and, ascribing it to boyish prank, they try to minimize it. In their view, therefore, the punishment was too harsh, but they fail to take notice of the constant efforts of the Jews to undermine the Islamic movement. It was not one incident but a series of events that had .brought on the final clash

Expulsion of Banu Nadir (625 A.D.)

Medina's Jews plotted to kill the Prophet, encouraged by the Meccans and by 'Abdullah ibn Ubay. The Prophet was once with some of his companions when he paid the Jews a visit, seeking their help in arranging the payment of blood-money of two persons from the tribe of Banu 'Amir. The Jews asked the Prophet to come inside their fortress, but the Prophet did not like the idea. Instead, he sat outside the fortress's wall. They sent one man to climb the wall from inside the fortress and kill the Prophet by throwing a big boulder on his head.

The Prophet, through divine revelation, came to know of this treacherous scheme in the nick of time and immediately left the place.

Then he sent Banu Nadir an ultimatum with Muhammad ibn Maslamah: Since they had broken their treaty, they should leave Medina within ten days. They wanted to migrate when 'Abdullah ibn Ubay encouraged them not to leave Medina, promising them help with 2,000 warriors. The Jews then refused to leave Medina. The following ayat refers to this promise of help: Have you not seen those who have become hypocrites? They say to those of their brethren who disbelieve from among the people of the Book: If you are driven forth, we shall certainly go forth with you, and we will never obey anyone concerning you; and if you are fought, we will certainly help you, and Allah bears witness that they are most surely liars. Certainly, if these are driven forth, they will not go forth with them, and if they are fought, they will not help them, and even if they help them, they will certainly turn (their) backs, then they shall not be helped.(Qur'an, 59:11-12)

Their fortress was besieged, and 'Abdullah ibn Ubay did nothing to help them as predicted in the Qur'anic verses cited above. After 15 days, they agreed to leave Medina. They were allowed to take away all their movables which they could take except weapons of war.

They passed through Medina's market singing and beating drums to show that they were not disheartened by that banishment and that they would soon avenge this defeat. Some of them went to Syria while others settled with the Jews of Khaybar.

Since there was no war, according to the command of Allah (see Sura 59, verses 6 to 10), all the wealth left by them became the personal property of the Prophet who, having consulted with the Ansar, distributed all movable property to poor Muhajirun and three poor companions from the Ansar: Sahl ibn Hani, Abu Dajjanah and Zayd. He gave the immovable property to Ali ibn Abu Talib who made it waqf (trust) for the descendants of Fatima.

The 59th Chapter of the Qur'an (The Banishment) describes various aspects of Banu Nadir's .expulsion as quoted above

Banu Quraizah Defeated (627 A.D.)

According to the terms of the treaty which Banu Quraizah had contracted with the Muslims, they were bound to assist the Muslims against outside aggression. But, not to speak of assisting the Muslims or even remaining neutral, they had sided with the Meccans and joined the besieging foe. What was worse, they had tried to attack the fortress where Muslim women and children had been lodged for safety. Living in such a close proximity to Medina, they had become a serious menace.

Having put aside his armour after his return from the site of the Battle of Khandaq, the Prophet, on the same day when the battle had come to a close, was washing his hands and face at the house of his beloved daughter Fatima whom he used to visit before proceeding to his own house and whenever he returned from an expedition or an expedition. It was then and there that arch-angel Gabriel brought him the divine command to proceed immediately against the Jews of Quraizah. He instantly sent Ali with his standard, then he followed in person with his army and laid the siege of their fortress, a siege which the enemy had not expected, thinking that the Muslims were already worn out following one of their most exhausting battles.

First, Quraizah Jews resisted, but the siege of twenty-five days sufficed to bring them to their knees and prepare them to pay for their treachery. They ultimately opened the gates of their fortresses on the condition that their fate should be decided by Sa'd ibn Mu'ath, chief of the Aws, a long time friend and ally of the Jews. Sa'd had been wounded during the battle of the moat and was still under treatment when he was brought to decide the fate of Banu Qurayzah. He came riding a mule and looking quite weak. He could not walk, so he was supported by some of his friends. He was surrounded by men of his tribe who were all urging him to be lenient towards Jewish prisoners, reminding him of their services to the Aws when the war of Bu'ath was raging. Basing his judgement upon the verses of the Old Testament itself, Sa'd ruled that the fighting men, six hundred in number according to some accounts, should be killed, the women and children be taken captive, and their possessions be confiscated and divided among the besieging troops. The sentence was carried out.

Ibn 'Abbas narrates the following with reference to the Prophet's conquest over Banu Qurayzah: When the Messenger of Allah called Ka'b ibn Asad so that he would be beheaded, he said to him, "O Ka'b! Did you avail yourself of the advice of Ibn Hawash who came from Syria? He (Ibn Hawash) said, "I have left wine and all intoxicants and came to misery and dates for the sake of a Prophet to be delegated. His advent will be in Mecca, and this (Medina) is the place to which he will migrate. He is the one who smiles quite often, and who quite often kills. A bit of bread and a few dates suffice him. He rides the donkey without a saddle. In his eyes

there is redness. He puts the sword on his shoulder and does not care who faces him. His domain will reach so far that nobody can go beyond it." Ka'b said, "Yes, all of this is true, O Muhammad! Had the Jews not taunted me of being too coward to fight you, I would have believed in you and followed you, but I am a follower of Judaism; a Jew do I live, and a Jew shall I die.' The Messenger of Allah then said, "Bring him forward and strike his neck,' and so it was[1].

It was in reference to this conquest that the following ayats were revealed: And He drove down those of the people of the Book who backed them from their fortresses, and He cast awe into their hearts: some you killed and some you took captive. And He made you inherit their land and their dwellings and their possessions, and (to) a land which ye have not yet trodden, and God has power over all things.(Qur'an, 33:26-27)

Some critics had described this punishment as harsh. But what other punishment could be meted out to them? They had violated the pact and, instead of helping the Muslims, they joined the forces of their enemies and had actually besieged the Muslims. There were no prisons where prisoners of war could be detained nor any concentration camps where they could be put to forced labor, and the capture of women and children, though allaying to the notions of the present age, was probably the only method known in those days to provide sustenance to them when the earning members of their families had lost their lives. At any rate, this was the cust'Omariy aftermath of a war.

One of the greatest losses suffered by the Muslims in the Battle of Khandaq (Moat) is the death of Sa'd ibn Mu'ath one month after the end of the battle under the weight of his wounds. That was in 5 A.H./626 A.D. Ubayy has narrated saying that Sa'd ibn 'Abdullah quotes Ibrahim ibn Hashim quoting al-Husain ibn Yazid al-Nawfali quoting Ziyad al-Sukuni quoting Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq who in turn quotes his father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir saying that the Prophet performed the funeral prayers for Sa'd ibn Mu'ath then said, Ninety thousand angels, including Gabriel, have attended the funeral of Sa'd ibn Mu'ath today to bless him and pray for him. I asked Gabriel, "What did he do to deserve your prayers, all of you, today?!" Gabriel said, "He used to recite Surat al-Ikhlās (Ch. 112 of the Holy Quran) standing, sitting, riding, walking, going or coming.'[2]
.May Allah have mercy on Sa'd ibn Mu'ath

Jews of Banu Mostaliq (627 A.D.)

The Jews of Banu Mostaliq were neighbours of Banu Qurayzah. Although they saw what had happened to the latter, they did not learn a lesson from it and started making preparations to

invade the part of Medina where the Muslims were residing. Having come to know of their designs, Prophet Muhammad sent them Buraydah ibn al-Hasib in order to verify the reports that had reached him. Upon his return, Buraydah confirmed the truth of what the Prophet had heard. A pre-emptive war was imminent. With Ali as the standard bearer, the Prophet led his troops on Sha'ban 2, 5 A.H./December 30, 626 A.D. to battle the Banu Mostaliq Jews. The fighting broke out, and ten Jews were killed, including the leader of Banu Mostaliq, namely al-Harith ibn Abu Zarar. Having seen their leader being killed, the Jews took to flight but not before the Muslims captured two hundred of them along with one thousand camels and five hundred sheep. Juwayriyya, daughter of the slain Jewish chief, was among the captives. Before the fight began, her father had already pleaded to the Prophet not to sell her in the slave market as was usually done in those days. Captives who could not buy their ransom or get someone to pay it on their behalf used to be auctioned at the slave market. Juwayriyya embraced Islam and was married to the Prophet who safeguarded her dignity and treated her .like a queen. In order to please her even more, Muhammad set all her relatives free

The Battle of Khaybar (628 A.D.)

Banishing the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir and Qinaqa' from Medina intensified the Jews' animosity towards the Muslims. These tribes were instigating other tribes, Jewish and pagan, to join them in a conclusive assault upon the Muslims. Two years ago, they instigated a number of powerful bedouin tribes, with whom they entered into alliances, as well as the Quraishites of Mecca, to raid and besiege Medina, but their attempts failed. Their chief, Ibn Abul-Haqiq, who enjoyed security at the fort of Qamus, instigated the tribe of Banu Fizarah and other bedouins to raid Medina. In fact, the Battle of Ahzab, or of Khandaq (moat), was the first attempt in which the Jews had actually participated in besieging the Muslims. Ibn Abul-Haqiq in particular had played an active role in that siege. These Jewish tribes had settled down in Khaybar at a distance of about 80 miles (or 96 Arabian miles or 8 stages) north-east of Medina. "Khai-Bar' means: "fortified place'. The valley of Khaybar was studded with fortresses strongly situated on rocky hills numbering ten. The more fortified ones were seven: Naim, Qamus (on a hill of the same name), Katiba, Shiqu, Natat, Watih and Sulalim, of which Qamus (where Ibn Abul-Haqiq resided) was the most fortified. It was the one that proved to be a formidable challenge to the Muslims. Past reverses they suffered did not deter them. Usir ibn Razam, another prominent Jew of Khaybar, rallied behind him all the Jewish tribes then solicited the aid of Ghatfan for a final showdown. To demonstrate their strength, Ghatfan sent a posse headed by none other than

'Oyaynah, chief of the tribe of Banu Fizarah, that captured twenty camels belonging to the Prophet after killing their herdsman and capturing his wife. This incident took place in Rabi' I of that year 7 A.H./July 628 A.D.. In the next month (Rabi II), the Banu Ghatfan tribe, an ally of the Jews, with the instigation of the latter, made a similar attempt, sending Muhammad ibn Maslamah with ten men. All those ten men were killed by the Muslims, and the leader of the scheme was seriously wounded. He was mistaken as having been killed, so his body was put together with the corpses of the other ten men. Finding an opportunity, however, he fled. In the same year, Oib died and was succeeded by 'Osayr ibn Zarim who renewed his attempts to hatch plots against the Muslims with the tribe of Banu Ghatfan. News reached the Prophet of their schemes. The news of the preparation of the Jews was reaching the Prophet in Medina frequently. At last, the Prophet decided to crush them once and for all before they could destroy the Muslims. It was the "near victory" foretold in the Sura of "Victory" revealed just after the truce of Hdaybiya: Indeed, God was well-pleased with the Believers when they swore allegiance to thee under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility on them and rewarded them with a near victory.(Qur'an, 48:18)

By mid-Muharram, 7 A.H./May 28, 628 A.D., the Prophet marched on Khaybar with 1,400 (or 1600 according to some accounts) strong. In order to surprise the enemy, the Prophet's troops marched during the night and halted during the day. A road guide had to be hired to show the army the way. The Jews had made a maze of roads surrounding their fortresses. In about seven days, six of the Jewish fortresses were overrun by the Muslims. Then Qamus was besieged. As the Muslims were busy for one month attacking less fortified fortresses, the Jews were equally busy laying waste the country surrounding them with the intention to starve the Muslims. They destroyed even their own date trees growing around their fortresses. They successfully repulsed every attempt of the Muslims to advance.

Abul-Fida' says the following in his Tarikh, book of history: In those days, the Prophet sometimes used to suffer from partial headaches. As a matter of chance, on the day he reached Khaybar, he suffered from the same. Abu Bakr, therefore, took the standard and went out to fight but returned unsuccessful. Then "Omar took the standard and fought hard, more than his predecessor, but returned equally unsuccessful. When the Prophet came to know of these reversals, he said, "By Allah, tomorrow I will give the standard to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger and whom Allah and His Messenger love, one who is constant in onslaught and does not flee, one who will stand firm and will not return till victory is achieved.' Having heard this, both the Immigrants and the Helpers aspired for the flag.

When the day dawned, having said the morning prayers, the Prophet came and stood among his companions. Then he called for the standard. At that moment, every companion was engrossed in the hope and desire of getting the flag, while the Prophet called for Ali who was suffering from sore eyes. The Prophet took some of his own saliva on his finger and applied it to Ali's eyes. The eyes were at once cured and the Prophet handed over the standard to him.

Madarijun-Nubuwwah proceeds to state the following: "Then Ali started with the flag in his hand and, reaching under the fort of Qamus, planted the standard on a rock. A rabbi who was watching from the fort asked, 'O standard-bearer! Who are you?' Ali replied, 'I am Ali son of Abu Talib.' The rabbi called unto his people, 'By the Torah, you will be defeated! This man will not go back without winning the battle.'" Shaikh 'Abdul-Haqq, the Dehlavi muhaddith (traditionist), author of Madarijun-Nubuwwah, states the following: "Perhaps that Jew was well informed of Ali's valour and had seen his praises in the Torah."

He further states the following in his afore-mentioned book: Al-Harith, brother of Marhab (the most courageous Jewish warrior), first sallied forth from the fort with a huge spear whose point weighed about 3 mounds[54]. In his immediate attack, he killed a number of Muslim veterans. Then Ali proceeded towards him and killed him in one stroke. When Marhab was informed of his brother's plight, he rushed out of the fort accompanied by some of the bravest soldiers from the Khaybar garrison to avenge his brother's death. It is said that Marhab was the strongest, tallest, and the fiercest among the warriors of Khaybar and that none equalled him in his might. That day, he was armed twice over, wearing double armour with two swords dangling by his sides. He was also wearing two turbans with a helmet over and above.

He marched ahead in the battlefield singing about his own valour. Nobody among the Muslims dared to fight him in the battlefield. Ali, therefore, darted out, reciting about his own valiance in response to Marhab's. Taking the initiative, Marhab attacked Ali with his sword. But Ali avoided the blow and rendered with Thul-Fiqar such a forceful blow on Marhab's head that it cut through the latter's helmet, the double turban, the head, till it reached the man's throat. According to some narratives, Marhab was cut up to his thigh, in others that it tore him into two parts upon the saddle. Marhab took his way to the hereafter in two pieces. Then the Muslims under the command of Ali began fighting the Jews. Ali himself killed seven generals of the Jewish forces each one of whom was considered to be most valiant.

After these had been killed, the remnants of the Jewish troops ran helter-skelter towards their fort. Ali followed them in hot pursuit. In this rush, one Jew delivered a blow to Ali's hand wherein he carried his shield. The shield fell down. Another Jew picked it up and made good with his booty. This infuriated Ali and who was now strengthened with such a spiritual force

and divine strength that he jumped across the moat and came straight to the door of the iron gate. He dislodged it from its hinges, held it up as a shield and resumed fighting. According to Ibn Hisham's Sirat, and according to Al-Tarikh al-Kamil and Abul-Fida's Tarikh, Abu Rafi' is cited saying, "When the Prophet gave the flag to Ali and bade him fight the forces of Khaybar, we, too, accompanied him. When Ali was a short distance from the fort, fighting all along, a Jew struck a blow on his hand with such a force that the shield Ali was holding fell down. Ali at once pulled out a part of the gate of Khaybar, held it up as a shield and fought till Allah granted him a clear victory. Once the fighting was over, he threw it away. It was so heavy that eight men from among us could hardly turn it over from one side to the other.' An agreement was reached with the Jews of Khaybar. Their lands and movable property were left in their hands. They were allowed to practice their religion freely. In return for the protection they would receive, they were required to pay the Muslims half the produce of their lands. The Prophet maintained the right to turn them out of their lands whenever he so decided. The battle of Khaybar is important as it put an end to the Jewish resistance and, for the first time, a non-Muslim people were made "Protected Persons" of the Muslim commonwealth. On the same day, Ja'far ibn Abu Talib returned from Ethiopia. The Prophet said: "I do not know on which blessing of Allah I should thank Him more: on the victory of Khaybar or on the return of Ja'far

Notes:

[1] al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 15, p. 206.

[2] Shaikh Abu Ja'fer Muhammed ibn Ali ibn al-Husain ibn Babawayh al-Qummi al-Saduq, Al-amali (or Al-Majalis), pp. 323-324