

THE CHALLENGE AT UHUD

The decisive victory in Badr had shown all of Arabia that the Muslims were serious and dedicated to their deen and their beloved prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It also demonstrated that the tide was turning in Arabia. In the past, the Muslims would not retaliate and were subject to much misery and persecution at the hands of the Makkans. This victory in Badr demonstrated that the period of thirteen years of brutal hardship was now over.

Things were different after the command from Allah had come which allowed the Muslims to defend themselves and fight back. The Muslims were no longer a down trodden and persecuted group of believers but were an example of piety and justice. They could stand up against tyranny and injustices where before they practiced patience.

After Badr, there had been a few tribes that were preparing to fight the Muslim community and attacking Madina. All these threats were easily countered with patrols being sent to different areas to stand up against the aggressors and troublemakers. There were a few small skirmishes here and there but on the whole, everything was resolved peacefully.

After Badr, there was one community that weren't pleased at the Muslim victory. These were the Jewish tribes in and around Madina and the Jews of Qaynuqa in particular. The Qaynuqian Jews had a treaty of peaceful co-existence with the Muslims which had ensured peace in Madina. However, they were in open violation of the treaty and created mischief within the community. They would ridicule the Muslims and instigate enmity and hatred against them.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) called them together and warned them about this unacceptable behaviour. He told them that they should honour this agreement of peace just as the Muslims had honoured it to the letter. He told them to stop this unacceptable bad behaviour that was doing harm to the community..

The Qaynuqa Jews replied in an impolite and arrogant manner. They said that the Muslims may have beaten the inexperienced Makkan Army but they would find the Jews of Qaynuqa so easy to beat. They were masters of warfare and experienced in the art of war. This was a warning and a threat to the prophet (pbuh) that if there was a confrontation between them, they would easily beat the Muslims.

The Jews of Qaynuqa were a well-armed, more warrior-like people who made weapons and sold them in their markets in Madina. They were well armed and more powerful than the Muslims of Madina with over 700 warriors in their midst. They were also known for their bravery in battle.

The situation in Madina was simmering and it took one major incident to set this alight. One of the Muslim women were in the market place of the Jews when one of the merchants tied her clothes behind her back so that when she stood up it caused her body to be exposed. The Jews in the market place laughed at her but one Muslim man who witnessed this incident stepped in. After a small fight between the Muslim and the Jew, the Jew was killed and the on-looking Jews killed this Muslim.

The family of the deceased Muslim asked for help and justice from the Muslims and the prophet (pbuh) commanded the Muslims to gather their forces. The Muslims began a march towards Qaynuqa with this small army and the Qaynuqian Jews quickly retreated to their forts. They wanted to face the Muslims from inside their fortified positions rather than in open combat. The Muslims marched to Qaynuqa and laid siege to their forts.

Allah caused fear to spread into their camps and it was a matter of fifteen days before the siege was over. Qaynuqians were already taken prisoner when Abdullah ibn Ubai' stepped in. He argued that in the days of old, his tribe were allies and had a treaty with the Jews. He requested for leniency to be shown. They decided that the Jews would be allowed to leave without any reprimand for all the trouble they had caused and the treaty which they had broken. So this community left Madina, leaving their lands and possessions, and moved to Syria where they setup their homes again.

Another person who was strongly against the Muslims was Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf. He was gutted when he heard that Muslims had beaten the army of the Makkans. He went around creating problems for the Muslims and would speak ill of them. He would spread many lies about the Muslims and invite the people to show hostility towards the Muslims.

When he went to the Makkans, he encouraged them to raise an army to fight the Muslims promising his full support. He even compromised his own beliefs saying that the religion of the idol worshipping Makkans was closer to theirs than Islam. Muslims and Jews believe in the one and same God whilst the Makkans believed in many gods and worshipped idols.

When Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf returned back to his fort near Madina, he would write poems in which he would say nasty things against the Muslims and the Prophet (pbuh). He would even insulted Muslim women in the love poems he wrote. He tried to attack Islam and the Muslims by every means open to him.

The prophet (pbuh) asked some of the Sahabah to rid them of this menace before he could spread his message of evil and hate further. A group of sahabah went to meet Ka'b in his heavily fortified fort and soon won his trust over. One night, they attempted to arrest Ka'b during which he was killed and one of the Sahabah, al-Harith ibn Aws was badly injured.

When the sahabah returned to the prophet (pbuh), they told him the whole story. The prophet (pbuh) did a dua for him and put some saliva on the al-Harith's wound which healed instantly.

The restriction on trading from Makkah continued. The Makkans were starting to feel the pinch of these sanctions. The Makkans had a meeting in which they decided on a new route which was kept secret from the Muslims. The Makkans then sent out their caravan filled with goods through this unknown secret route.

The news of this new caravan leaked out and soon made its way to the Muslims in Madina. The prophet (pbuh) sent out a group of Muslims and intercepted the caravan. Some of the traders and soldiers of the caravan got away whilst some were injured or killed in the confrontation. The goods were confiscated and taken to Madina.

The Makkans decided that it was time to get their army together and attack Madina. They had already spoken with many tribes and had enlisted the help of neighbouring tribes. This army was much bigger than before and better armed. It consisted of 3000 warriors. This time it included women who would beat drums and sing songs, encouraging the men to fight bravely.

The army swiftly made its way towards Madina whilst a message was hurriedly despatched to the prophet (pbuh) of its intention and whereabouts. The information reached the prophet (pbuh) when he was in the Masjid in Quba, just outside Madina. He immediately called an emergency meeting of the Sahabah to discuss how they would defend Madina against such an enormous army.

The meeting was called and the best strategy was discussed.

Many of the Muslims suggested that they should go out and meet the Makkan army head on and fight them. After much persuasion, it was decided that the Muslims should go and meet the Makkan army in the open. The Muslim army went to arm themselves to fight the Makkan army which was approaching the mountain of Uhud, close to Madina.

The Muslims managed to muster an army of one thousand or so soldiers to defend Madina. When the prophet (pbuh) came out of his house, some of the Muslims such as Mu'ad bin Sa'd said that it was not good that they had offered their opinions after the prophet (pbuh) had made a suggestion. They said that they would stay and defend the city instead of fighting the Makkans in the open, if He (pbuh) so wished.

The prophet (pbuh) said that we should proceed with the plan and face the Makkan

army. Shortly afterwards, the Muslim army moved out. When the Muslims got near the battlefield, the hypocrites decided that they too would show their true colours and at that point they decided to leave the Muslim army. These deserters were an important part of the army because it consisted of about three hundred people. This left a small army of 700 people to face the mammoth Makkan army which had about 3000 men

Abdullah ibn Ubai, the leader of the hypocrites, encouraged as many people to join him and leave the army. The people of true faith stayed behind to fight even though the odds were stacked against them in this unfortunate situation. Abdullah ibn 'Amr bin Haram complained to his people to stay behind and fight like men but his words fell on deaf ears.

The prophet (pbuh) sorted his troops out and arranged them in key positions. He told everyone to follow his command carefully and carry out their duties. The most important element was the fifty archers who guarded the rear of the army. The Muslims did not have a cavalry and the archers would protect the army from being attacked from behind.

As the moment of the battle drew closer, it became apparent to any onlooker that this was an unfair battle with a small Muslim army facing a huge Makkan force. The glaring difference in numbers between the two was astonishing but the Muslims were determined to defend Islam. They knew that they would either win the battle or would be martyred in the cause of Islam, hence attaining paradise.

What would happen to the Muslims in such a trying and difficult time? This was by far the biggest trial facing the Muslims so far. What would happen when the two armies met? Would the overwhelming numbers of the Makkan army swamp the Muslims?