

Chapter 7: The Persecution of the Muslims

Though Abu Lahab frequently succeeded in dispersing the crowds that gathered to hear the message of Islam, word nevertheless spread in Makka about it. People talked about the message of Islam. The thoughtful ones among them posed the question: "What is this religion to which Muhammad is inviting us?" This question showed curiosity on their part and a few of them wanted to know more about Islam.

In the days that followed, Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, made many attempts to preach to the Makkans. Abu Lahab and his confederate, Abu Jahl, did what they could to sabotage his work but they could not deflect him from his aim.

It was a strange message that Muhammad brought to the Arabs, and it was unique. No one had ever heard anything like it before. Muhammad as messenger of Allah, told the Arabs not to worship the inanimate objects which they themselves had fashioned, and which had no power either to give anything to them or to take anything away from them, and to whom they had given the status of gods and goddesses. Instead, he told them, they ought to give their love and obedience to Allah, the One Lord of the whole universe. He also told them that in His sight – in the sight of their Creator – they were all equal, and if they became Muslims, they would all become brothers of each other.

But idolatry was an old "fixation" for the Arabs, and they were not quite ready to dump their idols. They resented Muhammad's diatribes against idolatry, and they were not very finicky about showing him their resentment.

Muhammad also called upon the rich Arabs to share their wealth with the poor and the under-privileged. The poor, he said, had a right to receive their share out of the wealth of the rich. Such sharing, he further said, would guarantee the equitable distribution of wealth in the community.

Most of the rich Arabs in Makka were money-lenders; or rather, they were "loan sharks." They had grown rich by lending money to the poor classes at exorbitant rates of interest. The poor could never repay their debts, and were thus held in economic servitude in perpetuity. The money-lenders thrived on usury as vampires thrive on blood. Sharing their ill-gotten wealth with the same people they had been exploiting, was, for them, something like a "sacrilege." By suggesting to them that they share their wealth

with the poor, Muhammad had tampered with a hornets' nest!

Muhammad also wished to reorganize Arab society. The new doctrine that he put forward for this purpose, made Faith instead of Blood, the "linchpin" of the community. But the Arabs were bred in the code of pagan custom and convention; they believed in the basic tribal and kinship structures. For them "Blood" was the only workable basis of social organization. In their perception, if Faith were allowed to supplant Blood in this equation, it would wreck the whole structure of the Arab society.

But Muhammad had little interest in "Arab society." His aim was to create and to consolidate an "Islamic society," which is held together by Faith and not by Blood. He, therefore, assiduously cultivated and promoted the redeeming, transcending power of Faith.

Philip K. Hitti

Substituting the religious for the centuries-old blood bond as the basis for social cohesion was, indeed, a daring and original accomplishment of the Prophet of Arabia.

(Islam, A Way of Life)

For the Arabs, all these were new and unfamiliar ideas; in fact, they were revolutionary. By preaching such revolutionary ideas, Muhammad had made the old establishment furious. Most furious and most assertive in the old establishment was the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh. Its members were the leading usurers and capitalists of Makka, and they were the high priests of the pagan pantheon. In Muhammad and the message of Islam, they saw a threat to their social system which was based upon privilege, elitism and force. His ideas, therefore, were most abhorrent to them, and they were resolved not to let him change the status quo.

Philip K. Hitti

"...The Quraysh – particularly its Umayyad clan – custodians of the Kaabah and the Zamzam, controllers of the caravan trade, and oligarchic masters of the city, had special reasons for resistance (to Muhammad). The new preaching might jeopardize pilgrimage to the Kaabah, next to trade their main source of income. Moreover, the once-poor orphan was introducing such dangerous economic doctrines as the rightful claim of beggars and the destitute to a share in the wealth of the rich. Additionally he (Muhammad) advocated a dangerous doctrine, one that would substitute faith for blood as the social bond of community life. If "the believers are naught but brothers" (Quran, 49: 10) was acted upon, the entire family, clan, and tribal unity would be undermined and replaced by religious unity..."

(Islam – A Way of Life)

The hostility of the Umayyads to Muhammad and Islam was marked by unrestrained vehemence, partly because it was atavistic. Their reflexes were conditioned by generations of heathenism. They symbolized die-hard opposition to Muhammad when he was in Makka, and they spearheaded an

implacable war against Islam when he migrated to Medina.

Philip K Hitti

"...the core of the opposition, the Umayyads, remained adamant in its hostility (to Muhammad)..."

(Islam – A Way of Life)

But there were also a few individuals who found a strong appeal in these new ideas which Muhammad was introducing, collectively called Islam. In fact, they found them so attractive that they accepted them. They abjured their idols and they began to worship Allah – their Creator.

Islam held special appeal for the depressed classes in Makka; for those who were "poor and weak." Muslim historians have noted that the first followers of the apostles and the prophets of the past also, were invariably "poor and weak." When members of these classes became Muslim, they also became aware that as pagans they were despised and rejected by the highly class-conscious and race-conscious aristocracy of Makka but Islam gave them a new self-esteem. As Muslims they found a new pride in themselves.

Most of the early converts to Islam were "poor and weak." But there were a few rich Muslims also like Hudhayfa bin Utba, and Arqam bin Abil-Arqam. And all those men whom Abu Bakr brought into Islam, such as Uthman, Talha, Zubayr, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, Saad bin Abi Waqqas and Abu Obaidah Aamir ibn al-Jarrah, were also rich. They were members of various clans of the Quraysh.

We may assume that at the beginning, the pagan aristocrats of Makka witnessed the efforts of Islam to win recognition, more with amusement than with irritation, not to speak of the hatred and the hysteria which gripped them a little later. But as the movement began to gather momentum, they sensed that the ideas which Muhammad was broadcasting, were really "dangerous," and that there was nothing "funny" about them. They argued that their forefathers had worshipped idols for countless generations; therefore idolatry was right, and they were not going to abandon it because Muhammad was denouncing it. But Muhammad was not content merely with denouncing their idolatry. Far more dangerous and frightening to the all-grasping Umayyads, were his ideas of economic and social justice which threatened to pull down the fortress of their privileges; to dismantle the peccant system of their monopolies, to demolish the old structure of authority and hierarchy; and to smash all the fossilized institutions of the past. They, therefore, made it clear that privilege was something they were not going to relinquish – at any cost – come hell or high-water.

But the one idea that the self-selected elite of the Quraysh found most outrageous was the "notion" fostered by Muhammad that the members of the depressed, despised and exploited classes, many of them their slaves, were their equals – the equals of the high and mighty Quraysh! And even more outrageous to them was the idea that if a slave accepted Islam, he actually became superior to all the chiefs and lords of Quraysh. The staple of their life was arrogance and conceit; and equality with their

own slaves, ex-slaves and clients, was utterly unthinkable to them. They were obsessed with delusions of their own grandeur, and their "superiority" to the rest of mankind. Equality and brotherhood of men were totally alien and odious ideas to them.

By promulgating the "heterodox" doctrine of equality – the equality of the slave and the master, the poor and the rich; and the Arab and the non-Arab, and by repudiating claims of superiority of the bloodline, Muhammad had committed "lese majesty" against the Quraysh!

The Quraysh worshipped many idols, and race was one of them.

But racial pride is discounted by Quran Majid when it declares that all men have descended from Adam, and Adam was a handful of dust. Iblis (=Satan, the Devil) became the accursed one precisely because he argued for the superiority of his (presumed) high origins as against what he considered to be the lowly origins of man. "Man," he said, "was created from dust whereas I was created from fire." Such a sense of exclusivism which also comes to a people purely out of a desire to claim superior quality of blood in their being, has been denounced by Islam in the strongest terms.

(Iblis) said: "I am better than he (Adam): Thou createdst me from fire, and him Thou createdst from clay."

(God) said: "then get thee out from here: for thou art rejected, accursed.

"and My curse shall be on thee till the day of judgment." (Chapter 38; verses 76, 77, 78)

Islam has knocked down the importance of race, nationality, color and privilege, and has forbidden Muslims to classify men into groups on grounds of blood and/or geographical contiguity or particular privilege which they may claim for themselves. In the sight of Quran, the most exalted person is the mutti i.e., one who loves and obeys Allah most. In Islam, the only test of a person's quality, is his or her love for Allah. All other trappings of individual life are meaningless.

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Chapter 49; verse 13)

But as noted above, the Quraysh of Makka were not in a receptive mood for such ideas. They were perhaps intellectually incapable of grasping them. They considered them as rank blasphemy. It was then that they resolved to oppose Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt) and to destroy the "heresy" called Islam before it could strike roots and become viable. Their judgment was obscured by their perversity, rapacity, paranoia, and warped perceptions. They were driven by Hubris – the pride that inflates itself beyond the human scale – and by their dense materialism to make such a resolve against Muhammad and Islam.

With this resolution, the Quraysh declared their intention to fight, to the last ditch, in the defence of their

idols and fetishes as well as in the defence of their economic and social system which guaranteed their privileges.

Makka was in a state of war!

The Quraysh opened the campaign against Islam by harassing and persecuting the Muslims. At the beginning, persecution was confined to insults, jeers and mockery but as time went on, the Quraysh moved from violence of words to violence of deeds. They hoped that through their violence, they would destroy, or, at least, erode, the faith, of the Muslims. They refrained from inflicting personal injury upon Muhammad himself for fear of provoking reprisals but they had no inhibitions in hurting the rank-and-file Muslims. For a long time, it were the latter who bore the brunt of the malignity and the wrath of the Quraysh.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Then the Quraysh incited people against the companions of the Apostle who had become Muslims. Every tribe fell upon the Muslims among them, beating them and seducing them from their religion. God protected His Apostle from them through his uncle (Abu Talib), who, when he saw what Quraysh were doing, called upon Bani Hashim and Bani Al-Muttalib to stand with him in protecting the Apostle. This they agreed to do, with the exception of Abu Lahab.

(Life of the Messenger of God)

Among the victims of persecution were:

Bilal, the Ethiopian slave of Umayya bin Khalaf. His master and other idolaters tortured him in the savage glare of the sun of Makka, and they tortured him beyond the limits of human endurance. But he was fortified by inner sources of strength and courage which never failed him. Love of Allah and love of His messenger made it possible for him to endure torture with cheer. Abu Bakr brought deliverance to Bilal from torture when he bought him from his master, and set him free. When the Apostle of God and his followers migrated to Medina, he appointed Bilal the first Muezzin of Islam. His rich and powerful voice rang through the air of Medina with the shout of "Allah-o-Akbar" (=Mighty is the Lord). In later years, when the conquest of the peninsula was completed, the Apostle appointed Bilal his secretary of treasury.

Khabab ibn el-Arat. He was a young man of 20 when he accepted Islam. He was a client of Bani Zuhra. The Quraysh tortured him day after day until the time came when he migrated to Medina with the Prophet of Islam.

Suhaib ibn Sinan. Suhaib came to Makka as a slave. When he became a Muslim, his master beat him up brutally, but could not break his spirit.

Abu Fukaiha, the slave of Safwan bin Umayya. He accepted Islam at the same time as Bilal. Like Bilal,

he was also dragged on hot sand by his master with a rope tied to his feet. Abu Bakr bought him and emancipated him. He migrated to Medina but died before the battle of Badr.

Lubina was a female slave of Bani Mumlil bin Habib. Amin Dawidar writes in his book, *Pictures From the Life of the Prophet* (Cairo, 1968), that Umar ibn al-Khattab, a future khalifa of the Muslims, tortured her, and whenever he paused, he said: "I have stopped beating you not out of pity but because I am exhausted." He resumed beating her after he had taken rest.

Abu Bakr bought her and set her free.

Zunayra was another female slave. When she declared that she had accepted Islam, Umar ibn al-Khattab and Abu Jahl, took turns in torturing her. They tortured her until she became blind. Amin Dawidar says that a few years later she recovered her sight, and the Quraysh attributed this recovery to the "sorcery" of Muhammad. Abu Bakr bought her and set her free.

Nahdiyya and Umm Unays were two other female slaves, and their masters tortured them for accepting Islam. Abu Bakr is said to have bought both of them and emancipated them.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

...Abu Bakr bought many of the slaves and clients who were thus being tortured by the unbelievers. Among these there was even a slave woman whom Abu Bakr had bought from Umar ibn al-Khattab before the latter's conversion. One woman is known to have been tortured to death because of her attachment to Islam and her refusal to return to the old faith.

(*The Life of Muhammad*, Cairo, 1935)

There were some other Muslims who though not slaves, were "poor and weak," and were, therefore, exposed to the malevolence of the Quraysh. One of them was Abdullah ibn Masood. He was distinguished among the companions of the Prophet by the vast range of his knowledge and learning. He had probably more familiarity with the ethos of Islam and the vitals of the Islamic legal system than most of the companions of the Prophet.

Abdullah ibn Masood was one of the earliest huffaz (=men who know Quran by heart) in Islam. As each new verse was revealed, he memorized it, and he compiled his own copy of Quran. This copy was seized by Uthman bin Affan, the third khalifa, during his caliphate, and was burned.

It is reported that when a new chapter of Quran – Sura Rahman (the 55th chapter) – was revealed, the Apostle of God asked his companions who among them would go into the Kaaba, and read it before the pagans. Other companions staggered but Abdullah ibn Masood volunteered to go. He went into the Kaaba and read the new chapter out aloud. Next to Muhammad Mustafa himself, Abdullah ibn Masood was the first man to read Quran in Kaaba before a hostile crowd of the idolaters. They mauled him, not once but repeatedly, but they could not intimidate him into silence.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Yahya b. Urwa b. al-Zubayr told me as from his father that the first man to read the Quran loudly in Makka after the Apostle was Abdullah bin Masood.

(The Life of the Messenger of God)

M. Shibli, the Indian historian, says in his Seera that Abu Bakr was the equal of the other chiefs of Quraysh in rank and wealth yet he "could not read Quran out aloud" (in the Kaaba).

One of the earliest companions of Muhammad Mustafa was Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari. He belonged to the tribe of Ghiffar which made its living by brigandage. From travellers he heard that a prophet had appeared in Makka who preached a new creed called Islam, and exhorted people to abandon idolatry, to worship only One God, to speak only the truth, to look after the poor, to feed the hungry, not to defame women, and not to bury their daughters alive. Idolatry had repelled Abu Dharr even before he heard about the message of Islam and the work of Muhammad. In fact, he lived like an ascetic, and did not take any part in his tribe's forays upon caravans of traders and pilgrims. He made his living as a shepherd.

Abu Dharr sent his brother to Makka to verify the reports he had heard about Muhammad. The latter went to Makka, met Muhammad, talked with him, posed many questions to him, heard him read Quran, and then returned home to report to Abu Dharr what he had seen and heard. Among other things, he said to Abu Dharr: "You are already doing many of the things that Muhammad is doing and preaching."

Abu Dharr, thenceforth, was attracted like a moth by the Light of Faith burning in Makka. In his eagerness to see the Prophet with his own eyes, and to hear Quran from his own lips, he decided to visit Makka.

In Makka, Abu Dharr was a stranger. His brother had told him that Makka was seething with hostility toward the new Prophet. Not knowing, therefore, who might be a friend and who a foe of the Prophet, he hesitated to ask anyone about him. He spent a whole day in the shade of the Kaaba watching passersby. In the evening, Ali ibn Abi Talib chanced to walk past him, and noticing that he was a stranger in town, invited him to his home for supper. Abu Dharr accepted the invitation, and later, apprised Ali of the purpose of his visit to Makka which was to see the Prophet of Islam. Ali, of course, was only too glad to conduct his new friend into the presence of his master, Muhammad Mustafa.

Abu Dharr and the Prophet exchanged greetings. Within a few moments of his meeting with the Prophet, Abu Dharr was convinced that he was in the presence of a true messenger of God. From the messenger of God, he heard the message of God (Quran), and learned the meaning of Islam. He found both the messenger and the message irresistible. He was carried away by the appeal of Islam. In fact, he wondered, how could he ever live without Islam. He buried the past in which he had lived without Islam.

The first act of Abu Dharr, after his induction into Islam, was one of defiance to the infidels in Makka. He went into the precincts of the Kaaba, and shouted:

There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger

As expected, the infidels fell upon him, and started raining blows upon him. From this brawl he was rescued by Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, an uncle of the Prophet. He told the Quraysh that Abu Dharr belonged to the tribe of Ghiffar whose territory lay astride the caravan routes to the north, and if they did any harm to him, his tribesmen would bar access of their caravans to Syria.

Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari is one of the most remarkable men in the history of Islam. He publicly showed his contempt for the Quraysh and their presumption of power – not only in Makka when they were idolaters but also in later times in Medina when they had accepted Islam but had revived pre-Islamic capitalism. He was the most outspoken, and one of the most fearless men among all the companions of Muhammad Mustafa who once said that "the sky did not spread its canopy on any man who was more truthful than Abu Dharr."

Abu Dharr was like an elemental force looking for a purpose in life, and he found it in Islam. He was the Voice of the Conscience of Islam.

Fear of violence by the Quraysh did not deter these heroic and noble souls from accepting Islam, and each of them left a mark upon it by his or her sacrifices.

Also notable among early Muslims, was Mas'ab ibn Umayr, a cousin of the father of Muhammad Mustafa. Many years later, at the First Pledge of Aqaba, the citizens of Yathrib (Medina) requested the Prophet to send with them a teacher of Quran, and the choice fell upon him. This made him the first "official" in Islam. He was also the standard-bearer of the army of Islam in the battle of Uhud but was killed in action.

If a member of a pagan family accepted Islam, he was ostracized by it for all time, without any hope for him of rapprochement. Many Makkans saw Islam as a "divisive force" which was breaking up their families, and some among them thought that they ought to check this "divisiveness" from spreading. But beyond the threat of using force to suppress the new movement, they could not think of anything else that would prove more efficacious in halting its progress. They also thought that if they did not act swiftly and resolutely enough, it was not unlikely that every house in Makka would become a battle-ground in which the protagonists of the old and the new faiths would be locked up in a sanguinary struggle against each other. There were some others among them who imagined that Muhammad was prompted by ambition to denounce their ancestral mode of worship and their idols. All of them put their heads together and tried to think of some unconventional solution of the problem. After long deliberation, they decided to send Utba, one of the chiefs of Quraysh, to meet Muhammad, and to try to "talk him out" of his mission. Utba was noted for his persuasive ability.

Utba called on Muhammad Mustafa, and said: "O Muhammad! Do not plant seeds of dissension and discord among the Arabs, and do not curse the gods and goddesses our ancestors have worshipped for centuries, and we are worshipping today. If your aim in doing so is to become a political leader, we are willing to acknowledge you as the sovereign of Makka. If you want wealth, you just have to say so, and we shall provide you with all that we can. And if you are desirous of marriage in some noble family, you name it, and we shall arrange it for you."

Utba concluded his speech and hoped that he would get from Muhammad a favorable and a positive response. But to his surprise, Muhammad didn't show any interest in rank or wealth or beauty. Instead, he read out to him the Sura Sajda, (Chapter 32 of Quran Majid), the newest revelation from Heaven.

Muhammad never allowed a compromise on principle to weaken his moral authority.

Utba heard in silence, and then returned to the Quraysh to report on the outcome of his embassy. He advised the Quraysh to leave Muhammad alone, and not to meddle with him any more.

He is also reported to have told them that if Muhammad failed in his mission, then they (i.e. the Quraysh) would lose nothing; but if he was successful, then they would share all his glory and power.

But the Quraysh did not accept Utba's advice for moderation and restraint in dealing with Muhammad and his followers.

The Quraysh continued to harass the Prophet and to persecute the Muslims. But they also kept trying to think of some new wrinkle in their campaign against Islam that might yield better results than all their violence had done until then.

Muhammad Mustafa was protected by his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib. As long as Abu Talib was alive, the infidels could not molest his nephew. Some of them came forward with the new idea that they ought perhaps to try to persuade Abu Talib himself to waive his protection of Muhammad in the name of tribal solidarity. Tribal solidarity is basic for survival in desert life. This was a truly bright idea, and was applauded by all the tribal leaders. After all, tribal solidarity was something much too important to be treated with levity even by Abu Talib, notwithstanding all his love for his nephew.

The Quraysh decided to send an embassy to Abu Talib. They carefully selected the members of a delegation which called on him, and appealed to him in the name of the "tribal solidarity" of the Quraysh to waive his protection of Muhammad who was "disrupting" that solidarity.

Abu Talib, of course, had no intention of waiving his protection of, or of withdrawing his support to, Muhammad. But he mollified the delegates of the Quraysh with pious platitudes and placatory words, and sent them back.

The delegates also realized that they had come home from a "phantom-chase." But they were unfazed by their failure, and a little later, they made another attempt to inveigle Abu Talib into deserting

Muhammad. A new delegation went to see him and this time, its members took with them a handsome young man, one Ammarra ibn Waleed, whom they offered to Abu Talib for a "son" if he would surrender Muhammad to them.

Abu Talib must have laughed at the naivete of the infidels. Did they seriously believe that he would give them his own son for them to kill him, and would rear one of their sons as his own? The idea was most ludicrous but once again Abu Talib handled the delicate situation with his customary finesse, and they went away.

The second attempt of the leaders of Quraysh to coax Abu Talib into giving up Muhammad, had also failed. When the meaning of this failure sank into their minds, they argued that peaceful attempts to solve the problem had all been unsuccessful, and now they ought to try something really drastic.

In sheer exasperation and frustration, the policy-makers of the Quraysh adopted a "hard-line" and sent their third and the last delegation to see Abu Talib. Its purpose was to compel him to surrender Muhammad to them. The leaders of the delegation presented an ultimatum to Abu Talib; either he had to surrender Muhammad to them or else he would have to face the consequences of his refusal to do so.

Abu Talib was a man of cheerful temperament and a sunny disposition but it was a somber day in his life. The Quraysh, he knew, were not bluffing. He, therefore, called Muhammad, and apprised him of the purport of the Qurayshi representation, and then added: "O life of your uncle! Do not place a burden upon me that I may find beyond my strength to carry."

Muhammad answered: "O my uncle! If the Quraysh place the sun on my right hand and the moon on my left, I shall not refrain from proclaiming the Oneness of God. In the execution of this duty, either I shall succeed and Islam will spread, or, if I fail, I shall perish in the attempt."

Abu Talib, of course, had no intention of dissuading his nephew from preaching Islam. He was only testing his resolution. Now convinced and satisfied that he (Muhammad) would not falter, he said: "Go my son, and do whatever you like. No one will dare to do any harm to you."

Sir William Muir

"...but the thought of desertion by his kind protector (Abu Talib) overcame him (Mohammed). He burst into tears, and turned to depart. Then Abu Talib called aloud: 'Son of my brother! Come back.' So he returned. And Abu Talib said, 'Depart in peace, my nephew, and say whatever thou desirest. For by the Lord, I will not, in any wise, give thee up ever.'"

(The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Abu Talib said: 'Go forth, my nephew, and say what you will. By the same God I swear I shall never

betray you to your enemies.'

Abu Talib communicated his resolution to Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib and spoke to them about his nephew with great admiration and deep appreciation of the sublimity of Muhammad's position. He asked them all to protect Muhammad against the Quraysh. All of them pledged to do so except Abu Lahab who declared openly his enmity to him and his withdrawal to the opposite camp.

Quraysh inflicted upon Muhammad's companions all sorts of injuries from which he was saved only through the protection of Abu Talib, Banu Hashim, and Banu al-Muttalib.

(The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Foiled and checkmated repeatedly in this manner by Abu Talib, the patience of the polytheists reached the breaking point. Their virulence had been building up for years. After the failure of their third embassy to Abu Talib, they became desperate and reckless, and much more insolent and menacing toward the Muslims. They resolved to let loose all their frustrations and pent-up fury upon them – upon the unprotected Muslims, and to crush the new faith with terror and brutality.

The Quraysh, it appeared, were going berserk!

The first victims of pagan attrition and aggression were those Muslims who had no tribal affiliation in Makka. Yasar and his wife, Sumayya, and their son, Ammar, had no tribal affiliation. Therefore they were "foreigners," in Makka, and there was no one to protect them. All three were savagely tortured by Abu Jahl and the other infidels. Sumayya, Yasar's wife, died while she was being tortured. She thus became the First Martyr in Islam. A little later, her husband, Yasar, was also tortured to death, and he became the Second Martyr in Islam.

In this manner the wife and the husband made their choice in the eternal conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and Islam and paganism. The choice was difficult but they had no hang ups in the matter, and gladly paid for it with their lives! They made their lives an oblation for Islam.

Quraysh had stained its hands with innocent blood!

In the honor-roll of martyrs, Sumayya and her husband, Yasar, rank among the highest. They were killed for no reason other than their devotion to Allah and their love for Islam and Muhammad Mustafa. Those Muslims who were killed in the battles of Badr and Uhud, had an army to defend and to support them. But Sumayya and her husband, Yasar, had no one to defend them. They bore no arms, and they were the most defenseless of all martyrs of Islam. By sacrificing their lives, they highlighted the truth of Islam and they built strength into its structure.

Their martyrdom was a triumph of Faith over materialism. Friend and foe were flabbergasted to see them defy death. They made the "tradition" of sacrifice and martyrdom an integral part of the ethos of

Islam.

Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah: of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some (still) wait: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least. (Quran Majid. Chapter 33, verse 23)

Translator's Note

In the fight for Truth were (and are) many who sacrificed their all – resources, knowledge, influence, life itself – in the Cause, and never wavered. If they won the crown of martyrdom, they were blessed. (A. Yusuf Ali)

Earlier, Sumayya, Yasar and Ammar had won the distinction of being the First Muslim Family in the umma. Now they won another distinction: Sumayya and Yasar became the First Two Martyrs in Islam. Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, who knew how and why they were being tortured, had comforted them; he had advised patience (sabr) of a true believer upon them, and had told them that Allah had built for them a palace in Paradise. Their son, Ammar, was also destined to wear the Crown of Martyrdom – though in later times.

If the Yasars were the First Family of Muslims, they were also the First Family of Martyrs. Each member of this blessed family died vindicating the principles of Justice and Truth enshrined in Islam. God was pleased to bestow upon them two of the greatest honors – Primacy in Faith and Primacy in Martyrdom.

As noted before, Bilal, IChabab ibn el-Arat, Suhaib Rumi and other poor and unprotected Muslims were made to stand on the torrid sand, and were flogged by the infidels. Food and water were denied to them in the vain hope that hunger and thirst would compel them to abandon Muhammad and Islam. In persecuting the Muslims, the infidels were consistent, persistent and innovative.

If the Quraysh found Muhammad alone, they seized the opportunity to molest him. They of course wished to kill him but they had to curb this urge. If they had killed him, they would have touched off vendetta or even civil war.

One afternoon, Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, went into the Kaaba to read Quran. He was in the act of reading when suddenly he was surrounded by the polytheists. They mobbed him, and they might have done him some great harm but for the intervention of Harith ibn Abi Hala, the nephew and adopted son of Khadija, who arrived on the scene just then. He entered the melee to defend the Messenger of Allah from the violence of the idolaters and polytheists of Makka.

Harith ibn Abi Hala kicked the pagans and fought with his fists. Most probably he too was carrying a sword or a dagger as all Arabs did but he did not wish to draw it and shed blood in the Kaaba. But in the fracas, one of the idolaters drew his dagger, and stabbed him repeatedly. He fell in a pool of his own blood, and died from multiple wounds in his chest, shoulders and temple. He was the first Muslim to be

killed in the precincts of the Kaaba.

Harith was a young man of seventeen, and he gave his own life to save the life of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah. By doing so, he won the aureole of martyrdom. He was the Third Martyr in Islam. His death, so early in life, made the Prophet extremely sad. For Khadija, Harith's death was a personal loss. She had brought him up as her own child. But she forgot her own sorrow so she could provide emotional support to her spouse in his sorrow.

Although the Arab historians are silent on this subject, much bitter fighting must have taken place in Makka between the Muslims and the infidels during the years before the migration of the Prophet of Islam to Medina. Abu Talib protected his nephew as long as he lived, and after his death, his son, Ali, took charge of this duty.

Ali was still a teenager when he appointed himself the body-guard of Muhammad Mustafa. After the murder, in Kaaba, of Harith ibn Abi Hala, by the pagans, Ali accompanied his master whenever the latter went out of his house, and stood between him and his enemies. If a ruffian approached Muhammad menacingly, Ali at once challenged him, and came to grips with him. Writing about this period of the history of Islam, the British historian, D. S. Margoliouth, says:

"The persons whose admission to Islam was most welcomed were men of physical strength, and much actual fighting must have taken place at Mecca before the Flight; else the readiness with which the Moslems after the Flight could produce from their number tried champions, would be inexplicable. A tried champion must have been tried somewhere; and no external fights are recorded or are even the subject of an allusion for this period."

(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

There were no external fights in Makka before the Hijra (=Migration of the Prophet from Makka to Medina); but there were many in the streets and open spaces of the city. The young hoods of Makka threw rocks or date stones at the Prophet when he walked past them, and Ali bloodied their noses, battered their teeth, and broke their limbs. It was in these "battlefields" that Ali, the young lion, acquired all his martial skills. These "battles" in Makka were a "dress rehearsal" of the role he was destined to play a few years later in Medina in the armed struggle of Islam and polytheism. It was also in these early days, before the Hijra (=Migration) that Ali became "the first line of the defence of Islam." In fact, he also became, at the same time, the second line and the last line of the defence of Islam. This, he and he alone, was to remain for the rest of his life.

Quraysh tortured the bodies of the unprotected Muslims in Makka in the hope that they would compel them to forswear Islam but they failed. No one from these "poor and weak" Muslims ever abjured Islam. Adverse circumstances can collaborate to break even the strongest of men, and for the Muslims, the circumstances could not have been more adverse.

But those circumstances could not break them. Islam held them together.

For these "poor and weak" Muslims, Islam was a "heady" experience. It had pulled life together for them; had put meaning into it; had run purpose through it; and had put horizons around it. They, therefore, spurned security, comforts and luxuries of life; and some among them like Sumayya and her husband, Yasar, spurned life itself; but they upheld their Faith. They died in the macabre violence against them of the enemies of Islam but they did not compromise with falsehood.

May Allah be pleased with these heroic and noble souls and may He bless them. Their faith and morale were, as the Quraysh discovered, just as unconquerable as the faith and morale of their master and leader, Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah. They were the diamonds that he found in the rocks of the world. They were few in number but priceless in value; to be expressed, not by quantity but only by quality, and that quality was sublime.

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