

## **Nuaym ibn Masud**

Nuaym ibn Masud was from Najd in the northern highlands of Arabia. He belonged to the powerful Ghatafan tribe. As a young man, he was clever and alert. He was full of enterprise and travelled widely. He was resourceful, every ready to take up a challenge and not prepared to allow any problem to get the better of him.

This son of the desert was endowed with extraordinary presence of mind and unusual subtlety. He was however someone who liked to enjoy himself and gave himself over to the pursuit of youthful passions. He loved music and took delight in the company of songstresses. Often when he felt the urge to listen to the strings of a musical instrument or to enjoy the company of a singer, he would leave the hearths of his people in the Najd and make his way to Yathrib and in particular to the Jewish community which was widely known for its song and music.

While in Yathrib, Nuaym was known to spend generously and he in turn would be lavishly entertained. In this way Nuaym came to develop strong links among the Jews of the city and in particular with the Banu Qurayzah.

At the time when God favored mankind by sending His Prophet with the religion of guidance and truth and the valleys of Makkah glowed with the light of Islam, Nuaym ibn Masud was still given over to the pursuit of sensual satisfaction. He stopped firmly opposed to the religion partly out of fear that he would be obliged to change and give up his pursuit of pleasure. And it was not long before he found himself being drawn into joining the fierce opposition to Islam and waging war against the Prophet and his companions.

The moment of truth for Nuaym came during the great siege of Madinah which took place in the fifth year of the Prophet's stay in the city. We need to go back a little to pick up the threads of the story.

Two years before the siege, the Prophet was compelled to banish a group of Jews belonging to the tribe of Banu an-Nadir from Madinah because of their collaboration with the Quraysh enemy. The Banu Nadir migrated to the north and settled in Khaybar and other oases along the trade route to Syria. They at once began to incite the tribes both near and far against the Muslims. Caravans going to Madinah were harassed partly to put economic pressure on the city.

But this was not enough. Leaders of the Banu an-Nadir got together and decided to form a mighty alliance or confederacy of as many tribes as possible to wage war on the Prophet, and to put an end once and for all to his mission. The Nadirites went to the Quraysh in Makkah and urged them to continue the fight against the Muslims. They made a pact with the Quraysh to attack Madinah at a specified time.

After Makkah, the Nadirite leaders set out northwards on a journey of some one thousand kilometers to meet the Ghatafan. They promised the Ghatafan the entire annual date harvest of Khaybar for waging war against Islam and its Prophet. They informed the Ghatafan of the pact they had concluded with the Quraysh and persuaded them to make a similar agreement.

Other tribes were also persuaded to join the mighty alliance. From the north came the Banu Asad and the Fazar. From the south the Ahabish, allies of the Quraysh, the Banu Sulaym and others. At the appointed time, the Quraysh set out from Makkah in large numbers on cavalry and on foot under the Leadership of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb. The Ghatafan too set out from Najd in large numbers under the leadership of Ubaynah ibn Hisn. In the vanguard of the Ghatafan army was Nuaym ibn Masud.

News of the impending attack on Madinah reached the Prophet while he was half-way on a long expedition to Dumat al-Jandal on the Syrian border some fifteen days journey from Madinah. The tribe at

Dumat al-Jandal was molesting caravans bound for Madinah and their action was probably prompted by the Banu an-Nadir to entice the Prophet away from Madinah. With the Prophet away, they reasoned, it would be easier for the combined tribal forces from the north and the south to attack Madinah and deal a mortal blow to the Muslim community with the help of disaffected persons from within the city itself.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, hurried back to Madinah and conferred with the Muslims. The forces of the Ahzab or the confederate enemy tribes amounted to over ten thousand men while the Muslims fighting were just three thousand men. It was unanimously decided to defend the city from within and to prepare for a siege rather than fight in the open. The Muslims were in dire straits.

"When they came upon you from above and from below you, and when eyes grew wild and hearts reached to the throats. and you were imagining vain thoughts concerning God. Then were the believers sorely tried and shaken with a mighty shock." (The Quran, Surah al-Ahzab, 33:10)

To protect the city, the Muslims decided to dig a ditch or khandaq. It is said that the ditch was about three and a half miles long and some ten yards wide and five yards deep. The three thousand Muslims were divided into groups of ten and each group was given a fixed number of cubits to dig. The digging of the ditch took several weeks to complete.

The ditch was just completed when the mighty enemy forces from the north and the south converged on Madinah. While they were within a short distance from the city the Nadirite conspirators approached their fellow Jews of the Banu Qurayzah who lived in Madinah and tried to persuade them to join the war against the Prophet by helping the two armies approaching from Makkah and the north. The response of the Qurayzah Jews to the Nadirite leaders was: "You have indeed called us to participate in something which we like and desire to have accomplished. But you know there is a treaty between us and Muhammad binding us to keep the peace with him so long as we live secure and content in Madinah. You do realize that our pact with him is still valid. We are afraid that if Muhammad is victorious in this war he would then punish us severely and that he would expel us from Madinah as a result of our treachery towards him."

The Nadirite leaders however continued to pressurize the Banu Qurayzah to renege on their treaty. Treachery to Muhammad, they affirmed, was a good and necessary act. They assured the Banu Qurayzah that there was no doubt this time that the Muslims would be completely routed and Muhammad would be finished once and for all.

The approach of the two mighty armies strengthened the resolve of the Banu Qurayzah to disavow their treaty with Muhammad. They tore up the pact and declared their support for the confederates. The news fell on the Muslims ears with the force of a thunderbolt.

The confederate armies were now pressing against Madinah. They effectively cut off the city and prevented food and provisions and any form of outside help or reinforcement from reaching the inhabitants of the city. After the terrible exhaustions of the past months the Prophet now felt as if they had fallen between the jaws of the enemy. The Quraysh and the Ghatafan were besieging the city from without. The Banu Qurayzah were laying in wait behind the Muslims, ready to pounce from within the city. Added to this. the hypocrites of Madinah, those who had openly professed Islam but remained secretly opposed to the Prophet and his mission, began to come out openly and cast doubt and ridicule on the Prophet.

"Muhammad promised us." they said, "that we would gain possession of the treasures of Chosroes and Caesar and here we are today with not a single one of us being able to guarantee that he could go to the toilet safely to relieve himself!"

Thereafter, group after group of the inhabitants of Madinah began to disassociate themselves from the Prophet expressing fear for their women and children and for their homes should the Banu Qurayzah attack once the fighting began. The enemy forces though vastly superior in numbers were confounded by the enormous ditch. They had never seen or heard of such a military stratagem among the Arabs. Nonetheless they tightened their siege of the city. At the same time they attempted to breach the ditch at

some narrow points but were repulsed by the vigilant Muslims. So hard-pressed were the Muslims that the Prophet Muhammad and his companions once did not even have time for Salat and the Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha prayers had to be performed during the night.

As the siege wore on and the situation became more critical for the Muslims. Muhammad turned fervently to his Lord for succour and support.

"O Allah," he prayed, "I beseech you to grant Your promise of victory. O Allah I beseech You to grant your promise of victory."

On that night, as the Prophet prayed, Nuaym lay tossing in his bivouac. He could not sleep. He kept gazing at the stars in the vast firmament above. He thought hard and long and suddenly he found himself exclaiming and asking: "Woe to you, Nuaym! What is it really that has brought you from those far off places in Najd to fight this man and those with him? Certainly you are not fighting him for the triumph of right or for the protection of some honor violated. Really you have only come here to fight for some unknown reason. Is it reasonable that someone with a mind such as yours should fight and kill or be killed for no cause whatsoever? Woe to you, Nuaym. What is it that has caused you to draw your sword against this righteous man who exhorts his followers to justice, good deeds and helping relatives? And what is it that has driven you to sink your spear into the bodies of his followers who follow the message of guidance and truth that he brought?"

Nuaym thus struggled with his conscience and debated with himself. Then he came to a decision. Suddenly he stood upright, determined. The doubts were gone. Under the cover of darkness, he slipped away from the camp of his tribe and made his way to the Prophet of God, peace and blessings of Allah be on him.

When the Prophet beheld him, standing erect in his presence, he exclaimed, "Nuaym ibn Masud?"

"Yes, O Messenger of God," declared Nuaym. "What has brought you here at this hour?"

"I came", said Nuaym, "to declare that there is no god but Allah and that you are the servant of God and His Messenger and that the message you have brought is

He went on: "I have declared my submission to God, O Messenger of God, but my people do not know of my submission. Command me therefore to do whatever you desire."

"You are only one person among us," observed the Prophet. "So go to your people and act as if you have nothing to do with us for indeed war is treachery."

"Yes, O Messenger of God," replied Nuaym. And if God wills, you shall witness what pleases you." Without losing any time, Nuaym went to the Banu Qurayzah. He was, as was mentioned earlier, a close friend of the tribe. "O Bani Qurayzah," he said. "You have known my love for you and my sincerity in advising you."

"Yes , " they agreed, "but what are you suspicious of so

far as we are concerned?" Nuaym continued: "The Quraysh and the Ghatafan have their own interests in this war which are different from your interests." "How so?" they queried.

"This is your city," Nuaym asserted. "You have your wealth, your children and your womenfolk here and it is not in your power to flee and take refuge in another city. On the other hand, the Quraysh and the Ghatafan have their land, their wealth, their children and their womenfolk away from this city. They came to fight Muhammad. They urged you to break the treaty you had with him and to help them against him. So you responded positively to them. If they were to be victorious in their encounter with him, they would reap the booty. But if they fail to subdue him, they would return to their country safe and sound and they would

leave you to him and he would be in a position to exact the most bitter revenge on you. You know very well that you would have no power to confront him."

"You are right," they said. "But what suggestion do you have?" "My opinion," Nuaym suggested, "is that you should not join forces with them until you take a group of their prominent men as hostages. In that way you could carry on the fight against Muhammad either till victory or till the last of your men or theirs perish. (They would not be able to leave you in the lurch)." "You have advised well," they responded and agreed to take up his suggestion.

Nuaym then left and went to Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, the Quraysh leader and spoke to him and other Quraysh leaders. "O Quraysh," said Nuaym, "You know my affection for you and my enmity towards Muhammad. I have heard some news and I thought it my duty to disclose it to you but you should keep it confidential and do not attribute it to me"

"You must inform us of this matter," insisted the Quraysh.

Nuaym continued: "The Banu Qurayzah now regret that they have agreed to participate in the hostilities against Muhammad. They fear that you would turn back and abandon them to him. So they have sent a message to Muhammad saying: 'We are sorry for what we have done and we are determined to return to the treaty and a state of peace with you. Would it please you then if we take several Quraysh and Ghatafan nobles and surrender them to you? We will then join you in fighting them - the Quraysh and the Ghatafan - until you finish them off.' The Prophet has sent back a reply to them saying he agrees. If therefore the Jews send a delegation to you demanding hostages from among your men do not hand over a single person to them. And do not mention a word of what I said to you."

"What a good ally you are. May you be rewarded well ," said Abu Sufyan gratefully.

Nuaym then went to his own people the Ghatafan, and spoke to them in a similar vein. He gave them the same warning against expected treachery from the Banu Qurayzah.

Abu Sufyan wanted to test the Banu Qurayzah so he sent his son to them. "My father sends greetings of peace to you," began Abu Sufyan's son. "He says that our siege of Muhammad and his companions has been a protracted affair and we have become weary...We are now determined to fight Muhammad and finish him off. My father has sent me to you to ask you to join battle with Muhammad tomorrow."

"But tomorrow is Saturday," said the Jews of Banu Qurayzah, "and we do not work at all on Saturdays. Moreover, we would not fight with you until you hand over to us seventy of your nobles and nobles from the Ghatafan as hostages. We fear that if the fighting becomes too intense for you would hasten back home and leave us alone to Muhammad. You know that we have no power to resist him..."

When Abu Sufyan's son returned to his people and told them what he had heard from the Banu Qurayzah, they shouted in unison!

"Damned be the sons of monkeys and swine! By God, if they were to demand from us a single sheep as a hostage, we would not give them".

And so it was that Nuaym was successful in causing disharmony among the confederates and splitting their ranks.

While the mighty alliance was in this state of disarray, God sent down on the Quraysh and their allies a fierce and bitterly cold wind which swept their tents and their vessels away, extinguished their fires, buffeted their faces and cast sand in their eyes. In this terrible state of confusion the allies fled under cover of darkness.

That very night the Prophet had sent one his companions, Hudayfah ibn al-Yaman, to get information on

the enemy's morale and intentions. He brought back the news that on the advice and initiative of Abu Sufyan, the enemy had turned on their heels and fled... The news quickly spread through the Muslims ranks and they shouted in joy and relief!

La ilaha ilia Allahu wahdah

Sadaqa wadah

Wa nasara abdah

Wa a azza jundah

Wa hazama-l ahzaba wahdah.

There is no god but Allah alone

To His promise He has been true

His servant He has helped

His forces He has strengthened

And Alone the confederates He has destroyed.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, praised and gave thanks to his Lord for His deliverance from the threat posed by the mighty alliance. Nuaym, as a result of his subtle but major role in the blasting of the alliance, gained the confidence of the Prophet who entrusted him thereafter with many a difficult task. He became the standard-bearer of the Prophet on several occasions.

Three years after the Battle of the Ditch, on the day the Muslims marched victoriously into Makkah, Abu Sufyan ibn Harb stood surveying the Muslim armies. He beheld

a man carrying the Ghatafan flag and asked: "Who is this?" "Nuaym ibn Masud," came the reply.

"He did a terrible thing to us at al-Khandaq," Abu Sufyan confessed. "By God, he was certainly one of the fiercest enemies of Muhammad and here he is now carrying his people's flag in the ranks of Muhammad and coming to wage war on us under his leadership."

Through the grace of God and the magnanimity of the noble Prophet, Abu Sufyan himself was soon to join the same ranks.

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