

## **Habib ibn Zayd al-Ansari**

He grew up in a home filled with the fragrance of iman, and in a family where everyone was imbued with the spirit of sacrifice. Habib's father, Zayd ibn Asim, was one of the first persons in Yathrib to accept Islam and his mother, the celebrated Nusaybah bint Kab known as Umm Ammarah, was the first woman to bear arms in defence of Islam and in support of the blessed Prophet.

Habib, still at a tender age, was privileged to go with his mother, father, maternal aunt and brother to Makkah with the pioneering group of seventy five who pledged fealty to the Prophet at Aqabah and played a decisive role in shaping the early history of Islam.

At Aqabah, in the darkness of the night, the young Habib stretched out his small hand and pledged loyalty to the Prophet. From that day, the Prophet, peace and blessings of God on him, became dearer to Habib than his own mother or father and Islam became more important to him than any care for his personal safety.

Habib did not participate in the Battle of Badr because he was too young. Neither did he have the opportunity to take part in the battle of Uhud because he was still considered too young to bear arms. Thereafter, however, he took part in all the engagements which the Prophet fought and in all he distinguished himself by his bravery and willingness to sacrifice. Although each of these battles had its own importance and was demanding in its own way, they served to prepare Habib for what was to prove the most terrible encounter of his life, the violence of which is profoundly soul-shaking.

Let us follow this awesome story from the beginning. By the ninth year after the Hijrah, Islam had spread widely and had become the dominant force in the Arabian peninsula. Delegations of tribes from all over the land converged on Makkah to meet the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and announce before him, their acceptance of Islam.

Among these delegations was one from the highlands of Najd, from the Banu Hanilab. At the outskirts of Makkah, the members of the delegation tethered their mounts and appointed Musaylamah ibn Habib as their spokesman and representative. Musaylamah went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and announced his people's acceptance of Islam. The Prophet welcomed them and treated them most generously. Each, including Musaylamah, was presented with a gift.

On his return to Najd the ambitious and self-seeking Musaylamah recanted and gave up his allegiance to the Prophet. He stood among the people and proclaimed that a prophet had been sent by God to the Banu Hanifah just as God had sent Muhammad ibn Abdullah to the Quraysh.

For various reasons and under a variety of pressures, the Banu Hanilab began to rally around him. Most followed him out of tribal loyalty or asabiyyah. Indeed one member of the tribe declared: "I testify that Muhammad is indeed truthful and that Musaylamah is indeed an imposter. But the imposter of Rabiah (the tribal confederation to which the Banu Hanilab belonged) is dearer to me than the genuine and truthful person from Mudar (the tribal confederation to which the Quraysh belonged)."

Before long, the number of Musaylamah's followers increased and he felt powerful, powerful enough to write the following letter to the Prophet, peace be upon him: "From Musaylamah, the messenger of God to Muhammad, the messenger of God. Peace be on you. I am prepared to share this mission with you. I shall have (control over) half the land and you shall have the other half. But the Quraysh are an aggressive people."

Musaylamah despatched two of his men with the letter to the Prophet. When the letter was read to the

Prophet, he asked the two men: "And what do you yourselves say about this matter?" "We affirm what the letter says," they replied. "By God," said the Prophet, "were it not for the fact that emissaries are not killed I would have smitten both your necks." He then wrote to Musaylamah: "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Compassionate. From Muhammad the Messenger of God, to Musaylamah the imposter.

Peace be upon whoever follows the guidance. God will bequeath the earth to whosoever of His servants He wishes and the final triumph will be for those who are careful of their duty to God." He sent the letter with the two men.

Musaylamah's evil and corrupting influence continued to spread and the Prophet considered it necessary to send another letter to him inviting him to abandon his misguided ways. The Prophet chose Habib ibn Zayd to take this letter to Musaylamah. Habib was by this time in the prime of his youth and a firm believer in the truth of Islam with every fibre of his being.

Habib undertook his mission eagerly and proceeded as quickly as he could to the highlands of the Najd, the territory of the Banu Hanilab. He presented the letter to Musaylamah.

Musaylamah was convulsed with bitter rage. His face was terrible to behold. He ordered Habib to be put in chains and to be brought back before him the following day.

On the following day, Musaylamah presided over his assembly. On his right and on his left were his senior advisers, there to further his evil cause. The common people were allowed to enter. He then ordered Habib, shackled in his chains, to be brought before him.

Habib stood in the midst of this crowded, hate-filled gathering. He remained upright, dignified and proud like a sturdy spear firmly implanted in the ground, unyielding.

Musaylamah turned to him and asked: "Do you testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God?" "Yes," Habib replied. "I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Musaylamah was visibly angry. "And do you testify that I am the Messenger of God?" He was almost insisting, rather than questioning. "My ears have been blocked against hearing what you claim," replied Habib.

Musaylamah's face changed color, his lips trembled in anger and he shouted to his executioner, "Cut off a piece of his body."

With sword in hand, the menacing executioner advanced towards Habib and severed one of his limbs.

Musaylamah then put the same question to him once more and Habib's answers were the same. He affirmed his belief in Muhammad as the Messenger of God and at the expense of his own life he refused to acknowledge the messengership of any other. Musaylamah thereupon ordered his henchman to cut off another part of Habib's body. This fell to the ground beside the other severed limb. The people looked on in amazement at Habib's composure and steadfastness.

Faced with Musaylamah's persistent questioning and the terrible blows of his henchman, Habib kept on repeating:

"I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Habib could not survive this torture and these inhuman atrocities much longer and he soon passed away. On his pure lips, as his life-blood ebbed away, was the name of the blessed Prophet to whom he had pledged loyalty on the night of Aqabah, the name of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

News of Habib's fate reached his mother and her reaction was simply to say: "It was for such a situation that I prepared him... He pledged allegiance to the Prophet on the night of Aqabah as a small child and

today as an adult he has given his life for the Prophet. If God were to allow me to get near to Musaylamah, I would certainly make his daughters smite their cheeks and lament over him."

The day that she wished for was not long in coming. After the death of the Prophet, peace be on him, Abu Bakr declared war on the imposter. With the Muslim army that went out to confront the forces of Musaylamah were Habib's mother, Nusaybah, and another of her courageous sons, Abdullah ibn Zayd.

At the Battle of Yamamah which ensued, Nusaybah was seen cutting through the ranks of fighting men like a lioness and calling out: "Where is the enemy of God? Show me the enemy of God?" When she eventually reached Musaylamah, he had already perished. She looked at the body of the vain imposter and cruel tyrant and felt serene. A grave threat to the Muslims had been removed and the death of her beloved son, Habib, had been avenged.

At Habib's death, the noble Prophet had commended him and his entire family and had prayed: "May God bless this household. May God have mercy on this household."

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